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Tertius Gaudens vs. Tertius lungens: the Dynamics of market changes

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Abstract

This paper studies how the introduction of a new role in a labour-market reshapes that market. The context of the study is the labour-market for cinematographers in France. In this market, talent-agents appeared in the mid-1990s and thoroughly transformed the way cinematographers and production companies interact on the market. Through interviews with cinematographers and agents, observation at one agency and archival documents, we show that agents take on a dual role that allow them to effectively broker the relationship between cinematographers and agents. This influences which companies cinematographers work with and also increases the prevalence of long-lasting relationships in an industry devoid of long-term employment. By acting as a centralizing agent, they help cinematographers get better deal on projects; on the other end, they insure production companies that the search costs for a technician are kept to a minimum. We discuss the implication of the emergence of new roles for market change.

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies how the introduction of a new role in a labour-market reshapes that market. The context of the study is the labour-market for cinematographers in France. In this market, talent-agents appeared in the mid-1990s and thoroughly transformed the way cinematographers and production companies interact on the market. Through interviews with cinematographers and agents, observation at one agency and archival documents, we show that agents take on a dual role that allow them to effectively broker the relationship between cinematographers and agents. This influences which companies cinematographers work with and also increases the prevalence of long-lasting relationships in an industry devoid of long-term employment. By acting as a centralizing agent, they help cinematographers get better deal on projects; on the other end, they insure production companies that the search costs for a technician are kept to a minimum. We discuss the implication of the emergence of new roles for market change.

Keywords:

Social network; tertius iungens; tertius gaudens; brokerage; social capital

INTRODUCTION

Recent literature on brokerage (Kilduff & Brass, 2010; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010) highlights how brokers have to reconcile two apparently opposing strategies : keeping their contacts apart to benefit from better information or bring them together to help foster new collaboration and ease coordination and consensus (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010). We will show that in a dynamic labour-market, such as the market for technicians in the french movie-industry, being able to use both strategies is a critical skill for an intermediary to survive.

The literature on brokerage has often overlooked the way in which an intermediary transforms a market to focus solely on individual benefits accruing to the broker (Burt, 1992; Reagans & Zuckerman, 2008). Starting from the microlevel of the agent activity, we show how they change the dynamic of the labour market. We argue that talent agents for technicians have to go back and forth between two roles: bringing people together and keeping them apart. Their ability to switch between those roles profoundly transforms the market dynamic and is also one of the main reason they became an indispensable feature of the market.

We describe how the two stage process takes place and how the two roles of the agent, despite the apparent tension between them, are complementary. The ability of the agent to play those roles reshapes relationships between other players in that market. This in turn influences how that market evolves over time.

The study was conducted between 2005 and 2009 through interviews with cinematographers (both represented and unrepresented) and agents. 17 interviews with cinematographers and 4 with agents were realized. To complete the data gathered in interviews, non-participant observation was realized at one of the agencies. In addition, professional publications and archives were explored to help reconstruct the story of the appearance of the

agents. This data is a sample of a larger data collection effort realized for a comparative study of the “image department” (cinematographers and their assistants, gaffers and their assistants and key grips and their assistant) in the French and the US motion-picture industry.

By playing both the role of *tertius gaudens* and *tertius iungens* (Obstfeld, 2005), agents are able to match cinematographers to projects while maximising the number of their cinematographers active at a given point in time ; and to get the best deal for cinematographers on each project without damaging their long term relationship with the production company.

Our work highlights that the literature has given an oversimplified view of brokerage. Actual brokers, when observed at the micro level, have a much more complicated role than is usually described, this is in line with the latest research on brokerage (Lingo and O’Mahony, 2010). However, we extend that literature by linking the micro level picture to the level of the market for cinematographers and showing that their roles make agents drivers of change in the market, making them an important feature in the eye of the other actors. This role for intermediaries that sometimes divide, sometimes reconcile, have implications for other situations in which teams gather to collaborate on a project, such as R&D or creative teams as well as implications at the meso-level of the population of teams. It also highlights that, in order to perform their task well, people in management positions have to switch between fostering coordination by bringing people together and buffering information between team members to alleviate conflicts.

Talent-agents perform an important task in creative industries by helping to match the supply of skilled people to the demand for their skills in specific jobs. This is especially the case in the motion-picture industry, where empirical evidence suggests that talent-agents have become an essential feature of the market for actors, directors, screenwriters in the United-States (Bielby and

Bielby, 1999) and anecdotal evidence suggests similar patterns of organization in other major movie producing countries (i.e. India, France, etc.). An interesting development in the context of the film industry has been the gradual diffusion of this institutional form (i.e. intermediation process) to the respective markets for other core members of the movie team, especially to those situated “below-the-line”¹. Technicians such as cinematographers, production designers and editors are now represented. This diffusion has the potential to generate a huge change in the market for technicians, most obviously in regard to how technicians search for jobs, how production companies search for technicians and the process of prioritization that occurs between specific projects and technicians. Talent-agents help with finding jobs but also with negotiating the duration of employment and wages. They play a crucial role in a market devoid of long term employment where teams have to be built anew for each project (Ferriani, Corrado and Boschetti, 2005). Scholarship on intermediation in creative industries has mainly focused on agents of artists (Bielby and Bielby, 1999) or on management roles (Cattani, Ferriani, Negro and Perretti, 2008; Lingo and O’Mahony, 2010). But, (successful) artists have different rhythms than technical personnel and can afford to wait longer for a new project (due to higher salaries, but mainly to benefits from royalties), whereas technicians have to maintain a higher level of activity if they want to be able to stay on the market. Producers and other management staff are full-time employees of companies and although their job might have to be renewed with each project, they do not face the same uncertainty as freelancers looking for their next job. Therefore, agents for technicians are not a simple duplication of agents for artists. Because of the need of their client for a high level of activity, they have different imperatives and also they also have a greater impact on a market that sees a lot of deals being closed. The potential for brokerage action and

¹ In the United-States, people who are considered « artists » are usually referred to as talents, whereas technicians are referred to as below-the-line personnel.

long-term relationship is far greater on the technicians than on the artists labour-markets. Therefore, technicians intermediaries are a relevant object to study to uncover how they influence long-term relationships on the market.

Our contribution is structured the following way: the first section expose the theoretical grounds we are building upon on how our contribution helps explain market change when new roles appears. The following section describes our research setting and the research context. The third section describes our findings and shows how the dual role played by the agents representing cinematographers changes the rules of the game. Finally, we discuss our findings and show their implications for theory and for future research.

BROKERAGE AND INTERMEDIATION

In this section we introduce concept of ‘brokerage’ from social network theory. There are two different approaches to brokerage found in the literature: the traditional *tertius gaudens* approach (Burt, 2005, 1992), and the recent reintroduction of the *tertius iungens* perspective (Lingo and O’Mahony, 2010; Obstfeld, 2005). We combine both these approaches and use them as a theoretical lense in our field study of how the specific brokerage position and actions of the talent agent worked to endogenously transform the market for technicians.

Brokerage

Literature on brokerage has a long tradition of focusing on benefits that brokers can reap by exploiting the gaps found in most networks (Burt, 1995, 2007, 2008). Recent contributors to this literature have however worked to shift this image of brokerage, bringing to light the gains that can be derived from social action aimed at closing the gaps that proliferate across most

organizations and markets (Kilduff & Brass, 2010; Sasovova, Mehra, Borgatti, & Schippers, 2010). This stream of research has helped produce a more comprehensive picture of brokerage (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010; Obstfeld, 2005). Obstfeld (2005) focuses his study on the social actions performed by individuals involved in the innovation process and finds that the individual who play a coordinating role, bringing people together to close gaps in social structure, are more likely to be involved in innovation. But his account is static and focused at the individual level of analysis. Lingo and O'Mahony (2010) focus on the production of a specific creative product, music, and study how music producers broker the integration of distinct creative contributions involved in making a hit song. Interestingly, they find that successful brokers deploy both the "tertius gaudens" and the "tertius iungens" approaches to brokerage (Simmel, 1902a, 1902b), an act that had received little attention in the literature up to this point. Although Lingo and O'Mahony (2010) develop a process model of intermediation and study in detail the different ways individuals make use of their brokerage position, they do not consider how the different actions of these brokers might transform the properties of the larger network of music production in which they are embedded. This contribution is a forking extension of the literature on self-monitoring (Kilduff & Day, 1994; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001) in that sense that successful "switchers" (between the iungens and the gaudens strategies) have to be high self-monitors attuned to signs displayed by individuals they interact with and the environment in order to successfully adapt their input into that situation (Sasovova et al., 2010). Both perspectives offer important insights for understanding how a labour-market intermediary must switch between different strategies depending on the interaction required. Our argument is different from the traditional opposition of brokerage and closure (Burt, 2001; Podolny and Baron, 1997). This argument relies too often on a snapshot of the network (Kilduff & Brass, 2010; Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). Our

empirical focus on the longitudinal micro-level process of intermediation enables us to avoid these traditional limitations.

Tertius Gaudens. If we go back to Simmel (1902b) and the way it has been interpreted by Burt (1992, 2005), the tertius gaudens is the «third who laughs», meaning that he/she is in a position to take advantage of the opportunities generated by having two alters who, without the involvement of the tertius gaudens, would be otherwise unconnected. The opportunities available to the tertius gaudens stem from the information and control advantages offered by having two alters who can only access part of the information available in the network and have no direct link to share it, and therefore cannot bypass the tertius gaudens, who in effect controls what goes through. In that role, brokers can play their contacts against one another and, for example, get a better price for what they are buying without the two sellers being in a position to coordinate themselves to call a truce on price competition. Additionally, the broker is in a favourable position to extract knowledge from the two unlinked individuals and recombine it locally to come up with a new innovation. For example, Burt (2004) notes that the broker will be in a better position as a link between two groups to see how “belief or practice in one group could create value in the other” (p.355). But, as he also notes elsewhere (Burt, 2000), the informational benefits associated to brokerage obtain from the entrepreneurs that synthesize information over the structural hole, if that strategy is successful, others are starting to build bridges over the structural hole leading to its disparition.

Tertius Iungens. The tertius iungens approach is a reinterpretation of Simmel (1902b) by Obstfeld (2005): his contribution is to emphasize that the attention of researchers has been too focused on the broker’s ability to use information strategically as a tertius gaudens and that as a result other crucial benefits that flow from any intermediation role have been overlooked.

Especially the ability of the broker to facilitate cooperation and coordination by emphasizing what people have in common when introducing them, or the ability to be a team-builder by selecting the right people for a specific task. Obstfeld argues that although actors oriented towards *tertius iungens* action are more likely to use their position as a broker to close structural holes and therefore lose his advantageous structural position, each closed hole creates opportunities for new holes in the network of the newly linked alters to be discovered. This might lead to reciprocation from individuals that were brought together by the broker in the first place.

Reconciling the two perspectives. Lingo and O'Mahony (2010) have showed how brokers need to switch between those two orientations in order to accomplish their tasks. In the context of producers of country music, they show how, depending on the context, the producers have to adapt their strategy and sometimes act as knowledge broker by preventing information from traversing the structural hole (in the *gaudens* tradition) and sometime as a bridge, for example by organizing meetings between studio executives and artists, to get the two parties to agree on the road the record is taking. This highlight one of the important thing in their conception of brokerage which is the switching ability of individuals that they label *nexus* work. Building on *nexus* work, we show how that switching ability of brokers in creative industry benefits both parties on the labour market for movie technicians and how this allowed a new profession to establish itself as a legitimate intermediary on this market.

METHODS

Research Setting

Because of the specific tasks performed and the rhythms that characterize the activities of cinematographers, they spend a lot of time looking for jobs. Their ability to convince a producer and a director that they are the best match for the project at hand is a critical skill. However, those cinematographers also need to be technical experts, have a creative input on the image of the movie and be efficient managers of a fair sized team of technicians (on a small feature, it can be as little as 10-15 people, but run into the 50 and more on a large project). This requires them to have very diverse capabilities and is a first hint at why some cinematographers first saw an advantage in having representation. Therefore, studying agents that specialize in representing cinematographer is relevant to the study of fluid labour markets in which people are employed on a project basis, because in those markets, both job seeking and contracts negotiation will be recurrent, leading to potential benefits from having a dedicated person to take care of both activities over time. The relatively recent emergence of agents on the French labour-market for cinematographers makes it a very interesting setting in which represented and unrepresented cinematographers coexist.

Data collection. The data was collected through intensive fieldwork starting in 2006 and concluded in 2009. The data used for this study is a subsample of a data collection effort that focused on the image department of the movie crew (cinematographers, gaffers, key grips, and their assistants) in France and the United States. The data used here is limited to data gathered about cinematographers and their agents in France.

Interviews. Interviews were conducted with 17 cinematographers working in France, 8 of which had representation. Those interviews were biographical and lasted between two and a little over five hours². The informant were asked to recall their professional life beginning with when they decided to work in movies and why. In addition, we would orient the interviews to specific subjects including their education, relationships on set, negotiations with the production companies and, if they had one, their relationship with their agent. Agents were also frequently mentioned in interviews with unrepresented technicians. People analyzing why they did not want an agent or, even though they wanted one, why they could not get one. In addition to the interviews with cinematographers, we interviewed four agents (of a total of seven active agents in Paris). The interviews were semi-structured with questions designed to encourage them to describe their activity. More specifically, we would ask questions about how they choose cinematographers, what relationships they had with clients, and production companies, how they were looking for work for their clients, and how they negotiated contracts.

Observation. Interviews were complimented by a series of participant and non-participant observations. Participant observation was conducted on-set to observe how technicians were performing their work. I worked as an electrician on short movies and television productions. The observation was conducted in France and consisted of ten days of work across six different productions. Non-participant observation was conducted in the one agency where two agents agreed to allow me to observe their work. Other agents were somewhat reluctant to let us observe their work, the rationale behind their refusal was that their work consists mainly of conversations with production companies and with clients that are of a somewhat private nature and they did not felt licenced into giving us access without cinematographers and production companies being

² For a similar approach, see Elsbach & Kramer (2003) and Jones (1996), for a more methodological approach see Becker (1998).

aware of it. Each of the two agents were observed multiple times over the course of a year, yielding five days of observation (mostly split into half days).

Archival work. Finally we also gathered data on cinematographers' agency affiliations over time through the consultation of professional directories. We also retrieved and analyzed cinematographers CVs where possible (114 CVs were collected, the CVs of 2 cinematographers could not be retrieved).

Cinematographers, labour-market and agents

In France, movie technicians are employed on short-term contracts called *CDD d'usage* (customary short-term contract) which is an exception to French labor law allowing them to have contracts of any duration (from a day to several months) and to contract with the same employer without limitation³. Cinematographers usually work on a small number of different productions : features, short-films, commercials, documentaries, music videos and TV movies (including TV series). Most technicians are active in more than one type of production and most of them have worked on every type of production over the course of their career. The most active ones are often those whose careers are focused on one or two types of production, and often those are features and commercials. Project organization and the temporary nature of contracts sees cinematographers regularly entering and exiting the labour market. Agencies insert themselves into the relation between cinematographers and production companies in a similar way to talent-agencies. This means that the clients of the agent are the technicians. Agencies are S.A.R.L. (limited responsibility societies, which is the standard juridical form for most French SMEs). In addition, they are very small ventures, at the time of the interviews, visited agencies employed

³ French labor law otherwise makes it mandatory to offer a long-term contract to an employee after two short-term contracts if they want to keep them in the same position, usually short-term contracts can be of any duration between 3 and 24 months.

only one or two agents, and sometimes, one or more assistants. Through the interview, we know that the agencies at which we did not interview are of similar size.

In June 2009, 6 agencies (totalling 7 agents) specialized in the representation of technicians in France (see table 1). The number of dedicated agencies increased from one to four between 1992 and 1996, then stabilized for 10 years. Recently, two new agencies appeared (in 2006 and 2008), both founded by agents that were working in two of the four previously existing agencies (A1 and A4, see table 1). All the agents are women (among the 116 represented cinematographers, only 6 are women⁴).

As of January 2011, the agent profession is unregulated in France. Artistic agents are licensed professionals, but those licenses are not accessible to technical agents unless they are also representing “artists” (e.g. directors, scriptwriters, actors).

Table 1 shows that agencies represent 12 different crafts in total. One of them represents 7, the others representing between 2 or 4. Cinematographers are, by far, the most represented profession.

Insert Table 1 about here

In 2003 (the most recent year for which the data has been published), 1555 cinematographers are counted by the *caisse des congés spectacle* and 77 of them had representation (under 5% of the population). Represented cinematographers are clearly a minority according to the *caisse des congés spectacle*. However, their definition of what a cinematographer is is very broad. Particularly, it includes people working on flow productions (TV shows, news, or any other

⁴ Cinematography is a rather male profession with 90% of the cinematographers being male according to the *caisse des congés spectacles* (the organism who handles benefits for people who are *intermittents* which is the name of the set of special rules regarding labor law in the French creative industries) (Rannou and Roharik, 2006).

production which has no long-term commercial value) on which the work is very different. Therefore the number of cinematographers competing on the same market as the represented cinematographers is largely over-estimated (Rannou and Roharik, 2006). A better proxy for the number of cinematographers can be obtained from professional listings. The *Guide Bellefaye* is the more comprehensive and the more widely distributed industry directory. It is released annually and has an online version updated throughout the year. The number of cinematographers in the different lists (the *Bellefaye* has one for feature cinematographers and another for commercials ones) gives a much smaller estimate of the number of cinematographers. According to this list, the number of cinematographers listed in 2000 is still much larger than the number of represented cinematographers, but only by a factor of 5⁵. Figure 1 presents the comparative evolution of the number of cinematographers listed in both lists of the *Bellefaye* and of the number of represented cinematographers.

Insert figure 2 about here

Activity. The cinematographers can only be described by their activity, because their CVs often do not list their education or even their date of birth, but just a list of projects they have been involved in⁶. For every represented cinematographer, we know the nature and number of projects they have been involved in and sometimes their date. Unfortunately the list of commercials one has been involved in is often abridged or lists only the last few years. This limits the quantitative treatment of this data. Nonetheless, the study of cinematographers resumé reveals that their activity is varied: features, commercials, music videos, TV movies,

⁵ It is very common for cinematographers to be in both lists because the publication allowed you to pick up to five positions in which you wanted to be listed.

⁶ One reason for the incompleteness of CVs is that they are not central in the prospective employers decision process when they have to choose a technician. They rely more heavily on demo-reel presenting images made by the cinematographers.

documentaries, short movies, institutional movies, and very occasionally, theater, photographic work and flow productions.

It is possible to go a little further in the description of the population with the information given by the CVs : 33 cinematographers (29% of the 114 CVs studied⁷) are young professionals and the projects they participated in as camera assistants are still listed. Some cinematographers (sometimes among the young cinematographers) have a steady activity in commercials (more than 50 commercials made in the past 10 years, or more than 100 in total) : 41 cinematographers are in that case (36%). 35 cinematographers (31%) are very active in features (participation in more than 10 features). For the cinematographers active both in features and in commercials, it seems that at each point of their career, one of the two activities is clearly dominant. This is consistent with what cinematographers told us in interviews. Features especially imply a long preparation time before actual shooting, keeping the cinematographer from participating in commercials projects (only 6 cinematographers have made both more that 10 features and more than 50 commercials, and all of them have careers as cinematographers that are already longer than 15 years).

Often a cinematographer first has engagements in commercials, then after a few years, he receives offers for features. Unlike directors, it is fairly rare that a cinematographer would be hired for a first feature project if he did not have extensive experience in other types of production.

Agents and cinematographers over time. We have collected data on the affiliation of agents and cinematographers over time between 1995 and 2009. In the first few years of the agents' appearance, most new clients were previously unrepresented, but since 2000, movement

⁷ Two CVs could not be retrieved.

of a cinematographer from one agent to another became more frequent. Table 2 shows that even if 21% of cinematographers changed agents since 1995, they only did so once (and in two cases twice).

Insert Table 2 about here

Two reasons might explain this change. First the increase in the number of represented cinematographers increases the chance that a cinematographer will switch agents. In addition, in 2006 and 2009, two agents previously employed by two of the four existing agencies left to create their own agencies. Another conclusion can be drawn from the data on cinematographers affiliations: inter-agent competition to represent cinematographers is weak, since, every year, agents take on new, previously unrepresented cinematographers. The competition between cinematographers to be represented is probably higher. Figure 2 offers some insight into this claim: The mean number of cinematographers by agent has increased over the period, even if this increase slowed during the past few years. If agents were competing for cinematographers to represent, the mean number of cinematographers by agency should have decreased with the increase in the number of agencies (or at least stayed somewhat constant). The competition between agents has increased over the years but is still fairly weak.

Insert figure 2 about here

Growing centralization in the cinematographers' labor-market

Until agencies appeared, the cinematographers' labor market was very decentralized with individuals contracting with production companies independent of each other. The emergence of agents reshaped the labor-market's institutional structure by driving centralization in the way

projects and contracts are negotiated. Agents become the nexus at which projects and contracts meet. Even if the agents were not involved in finding a specific project, they become involved in its negotiation and administration. Over time, the increasing number of agents and of represented cinematographers lead the market toward more centralization with a few agents acting as intermediaries for an increasing proportion of total projects within the market.

This change *augments* instead of *abolishes* the links between cinematographers and production companies and between cinematographers and directors. The agent is present in the negotiation of the contracts of all of his clients, therefore he has more information on wages and work conditions than individual cinematographers, as a consequence he is able to decrease the number of transactions which happen at a “false price” (Edgeworth, 2003) and standardize the wages of his clients⁸. Here, price can be also be understood as something with a wider meaning including everything in the contract that is negotiable : it is not only the wage but also work conditions (e.g. how many days of preparation there will be, how the individual will be housed if the shoot happens on location). Therefore, the agent has bargaining power to “construct” the price, as Mitchel Abolafia’s *market makers* (1996, 6-7) do, concentrating enough information about the transactions happening on the market to be able to shape further transactions to a certain extent.

FINDINGS

Agents perform two essential tasks, they match technicians and projects and they negotiate the contracts required to make the match legally binding. The introduction of the agent brings about a

⁸ This might have negative externalities by decoupling the wage of the cinematographer from the wages of his team (in relation of the negotiated wages that are the baseline of the negotiation) as one interviewed cinematographer explained: “You fall into a paradox where the cinematographer is 20% above negotiated wage and the rest of the team is 20% below.” (All quotations from interviews are translated from French by the author).

change in the pattern of interaction between the production company and the cinematographer as shown in figures 3 and 4. Without an agent, the different parts of the relationship between the cinematographer and the production company (technical artistic discussions, contract negotiation) are directly negotiated in an interaction between them. Once agents are introduced not only do they take care of the wage negotiations but they also add a new dimension to the relationship by maintaining enduring ties to production companies (giving rise to what is called search in figure 3). The information advantage created by these enduring ties meant that cinematographers increasingly came to depend on the agent for new jobs, as did the production companies for finding technicians.

Insert figure 3 about here

Insert figure 4 about here

The unique position of agents allows them to take up the dual task of matching and negotiating. First, satisfied production companies are more likely to want to work with them again, agents are able to build up a stream of job offers coming directly to them over time. Second, their ties to multiple production give them an information advantage on how to price their cinematographers. In each of these tasks, they have to switch between the two roles of the broker : bringing together people or keeping them apart, when need be. For example, when a production calls in for a shampoo commercial, they usually want someone that already have experience in that type of commercials. By playing the role of the tertius gaudens, the agent can taylor a demo reel that assemble all the images of hair shot by a cinematographer that has never done any hair commercial and try to sell it based on those images.

Matching

The agent matches cinematographers to projects. This task is in principle very simple because production companies usually have a technician in mind for their project when they begin to search. However, in practice, this task is far more complicated and often requires substantial creativity because the target technician might be otherwise engaged, unable or unwilling to do the job. Matching happens mainly through two type of interactions: strategic scheduling and internal redistribution that is a corollary to it.

Strategic scheduling. The entry of an agent into the market creates an opportunity for scheduling routines to be used more strategically. In commercials, when a production company asks for a cinematographer at a specific date, the agent checks the availability of the cinematographer. If he is available, the agent will tell the production company that they have a “first option” on the dates of their shoot. If the cinematographer has already received a proposition for those dates, the agent will still note the dates on the cinematographer’s agenda and tell production that they hold a “second option” (sometimes it can even be a third or fourth option). The reason agents offer multiple options is because, in commercials, projects are confirmed only shortly before they are shot. The reason being that multiple production companies are competing for projects undertaken by an advertising agency and they know whether the project is confirmed only slightly before the time they have to shoot it. Options are thus a way of preventing a cinematographer’s agenda being suddenly empty because the production company he was scheduled to work with loses the projects. When a company that holds an option on a cinematographer’s time confirms its project, the agent calls the other production companies with a prioritary option (e.g. if the company which confirms has a second option, the agent will call the company with the first option) and give them twenty-four hours to confirm their option and

get the cinematographer. After twenty-four hours, it is the production that confirmed first that gets the cinematographer. Access to this scheduling system provides a coordination advantage for represented cinematographers over unrepresented ones: a cinematographer cannot manage his planning as well as the agent because it requires them to be reachable (by phone mainly) at anytime (which is impossible for a working cinematographer, who works for long hours, often starting before production company personnel and finishing work after they have left).

This option system is specific to commercials. A feature is often considered priority over commercial projects (usually, they pay less, but make a cinematographer a lot more visible). This is how an agent explained it to us :

“So, a feature, of course, will have priority. Let me give you an example... I have a cinematographer, for August, I already have a few commercials, if I have a feature that comes in, I stop everything. And I take the feature. I cancel all the commercials. For example, I have the shooting of a feature that starts in September. For a feature, there is between two weeks and a month of preparation. It means, that for a month max before, my cinematographer is not going to work... he will work for the feature but I can't put him on commercials.”

As a consequence, production companies are less pressured to book technicians early so as to retain them. This further increases the uncertainty for production companies which book cinematographers on projects of commercials.

Internal redistribution and career building. Corollary to the option system is the opportunity of internal redistribution of jobs and through it, career building. By giving out options, the agent and the production company can evaluate how likely it is that this

cinematographer will be available for the project. The following quotation is the transcript of an interaction between an agent and a production company around a projected commercial:

A 3 and A 4 are the two agents in the office. They are talking about a commercial they have to find a cinematographer for.

A 4 : Do you know [Director 1]?

A 3 : Yes, he is very difficult. Very difficult with cinematographers...

A 4 : Could it work with [cinematographer 1]?

A 3 : No, I don't think so. It could work with [cinematographer 2].

A 4 : He is the one they want, but he won't be available. So I am looking for someone else to present.

A 3 : [Cinematographer 3], that's the one for [director 1]. Is it from [Producer 1], I'll call her back.

(...)

A 3 : (over the phone) So, we should talk about [cinematographer 4]... [cinematographer 4] and [cinematographer 3]. Ok. And [cinematographer 2] is a second option, but it is unlikely he will be available... And with [director 1], I would not put [cinematographer 1], I don't think it will work. [Cinematographer 2], well, it could work but [director 1] is very peculiar with lighting. And I think he worked with [cinematographer 3] already... well, he may well tell you no. So you should check with him. I would have put [cinematographer 5] with him, but, unfortunately, [cinematographer 5] will be doing a feature at that time. He would have been perfect... [Director 1] is so demanding...

So, you give him those two names, ok? And you get back to me. Thank you. Bye.

(Hang up the phone)

The position of broker enables the agent to suggest possible alternatives, which increases the apparent substitutability of technicians by drawing the attention of production companies to cinematographers who would not otherwise be considered. Repeated mention of a name, even to be discarded can be helpful on a subsequent project where the name will seem familiar to the company. Therefore, the presentation of many names for each project will serve as a way of preparing for the placement of junior cinematographers or of those whom production companies do not think of naturally for their projects. In performing this task, agents switch between their two orientations: to match the right people as a *tertius iungens*, they have to act as a *tertius gaudens*. By presenting many cinematographers, they try to orient the production company choice.

Overall, offer redistribution inside the agency increases the mean level of activity of the clients, which is in the best interests of the agent and the cinematographers, but it also begs the question of how and to whom a project is redistributed. In the exchange reported before, five cinematographers are mentioned as potential fit for one project. Each mention has a specific status: some cinematographers are evoked to be immediately discarded and they serve to emphasize that another cinematographer is more appropriate. The reasons why a cinematographer is discarded lies in a fine-grained knowledge on the part of the agent of the agenda but also of the personality of the director and the cinematographer which makes them suppose (rightly or not) that the pair will not work well together. For the agents, the risk associated with a non-working association is that the production company will avoid dealing with them in the future and will try to go to another agency.

The agent as insurance. When a cinematographer cannot accept a job offer, his agent tries to find a replacement for him as we saw in the previous section. When such a situation happens, an agent's preference is to make a substitutable match from among their clients in order to retain the commission. This means the agent is in a position to offer opportunities to younger, less experienced or less sought after cinematographers. This has implications for the way the agency chooses its client. Representing clients at different stages of their career, especially younger promising professionals, is a way of insuring that the agent will retain most of the projects the agency catches. They need a few flagship cinematographers to attract projects to the agency, and then younger professionals that are less visible but skilled and experienced enough to stand in place of the more senior technicians on the projects that senior technicians will be unable to do:

“What happens in a list of cinematographers is that we have technicians of a certain age and younger ones. And the more experienced ones bring projects that we can redistribute to others if they are not available. That is how things balance themselves out. The idea about taking younger cinematographers is to develop their career, so you don't take ten of them at once... because you need project for them to develop their skills and to get them visible.” (A 3)

One of the main features generated by market centralization is found in this process of redistribution. Cinematographers who would not have been considered by a production company previously (because of their age, or of their lack of experience) will be put forward by the agent and will sometime, after the production company (or the producer) watched their demo-reel, win the project. The agent can thus be a bridge over which younger cinematographers can access bigger projects more rapidly than possible in decentralised market. In doing so, the agent contributes to the introduction of new professionals, and to the introduction and diffusion of the

new techniques in which they are trained. For younger represented cinematographers, the agent buffers them from outside competition by redirecting the internal flow of projects toward them, creating a competitive advantage for those cinematographers over unrepresented ones. Agents have to strike that balance between experienced professionals and more junior ones if they want to develop strong relationships with production companies. So the agent not only needs active cinematographers to bring projects and money into the agency, but also inactive ones that act as a type of organizational slack by standing to work on any excess projects stemming from the senior technicians.

Negotiating

Once the matching is done, the agent negotiates. The negotiation focuses on wages and duration of preparation (and especially, which portion of that preparation will be paid and how).

Quality signal. The appearance of the first agency is a market innovation. At this point, for a cinematographer, taking an agent is betting that the innovation will take off and he will, therefore, have a premium for being among the first movers (Lieberman and Montgomery, 1998, 1988). In a market where individuals need to be highly visible to get jobs, having an agent, as artistic professions do, may bring significant signaling benefits (Spence, 1973).

In the early days of the existence of the agency, production companies kept calling the cinematographer first, so the workload was not perfectly transferred to the agent. Then, as more and more cinematographers took agents, the production companies grew more accustomed to dealing with them and the administrative workload of the cinematographers decreased further. In the meantime, the impact of the agent increased as production companies grew accustomed to dealing with agents for agenda-setting and wage negotiation. But, the signalling benefits of

having an agent decreased, because the represented cinematographers became less of an exclusive group.

Benefits associated with having an agent come from a different source depending on the novelty of the agent as a market feature. Cinematographers want to be recognized as artistic collaborators of the movie. For example, in the AFC Image Charter⁹, the cinematographer is described as follow : “He is chosen in principle by the director, though sometimes by the producer, for his competence and know-how, his artistic sense and his aptitude to conceive and create images that suit the script and direction, as well as for his people skills and team leadership”. In this context, the fact that agents for cinematographers use the same model as artistic agents is not a coincidence: agents seek to bring to their clients is a form of symbolic gratification, arising from using the same type of labor-market intermediary as artistic professions.

Further support for the claim that the triggers for change (getting an agent) comes from an attempt to obtain a competitive advantage over other cinematographers through signals of quality, occurs because when specialized agents appeared, the most successful cinematographers tended to be represented by talent agents¹⁰. For the first two agencies having few cinematographers is a way of ensuring that they appear as part of an elite that could be represented by a talent agency. They appear similar enough to an existing signal to be associated with it, and accrue benefits from that association. At first, the agent is primarily a signal of professional quality (Spence, 1973) making it legitimate for them to claim jobs on the biggest projects (Podolny, 2005). The need for distinction was particularly acute at the time agents appeared on the market. Figure 5

⁹ The AFC Image Charter is an initiative of the French cinematographers association (AFC) to define the role of the cinematographer in the « digital era ».

¹⁰ One reason is that successful cinematographers are expected to transition to direction, which some do.

shows that when the first two agents appeared (1992, 1993), the French production system had been through ten years of contraction, making it crucial for cinematographers to find new ways of differentiating themselves. In addition to being in a somewhat contracting market, the number of technicians grew, following an increase in the number of technical schools, that was multiplied by two between 1988 and 1992 and again between 1992 and 1999 (figure 6).

Insert figure 5 about here

Insert figure 6 about here

However, the signal is only part of the input of the agent. In addition, it mainly occurs in the first phase of the relationship : the matching.

Transaction costs reduction. The agent provides services above and beyond quality signalling to cinematographers. The range of services an agent provides has grown over the years as agents were becoming a more common feature of the labour market.

First, they take charge of negotiations with the production company for salary and agendas. Agents have more freedom than cinematographers to negotiate wages because they are not present on set afterwards, so cinematographers, directors and production companies can pretend to ignore the ferocity of the negotiation that took place beforehand. The agent is a market feature that allows for fierce negotiation without resulting in the party which conceded to lose face (Goffman, 1956, 1959). Thus, the relationship between the cinematographer and the director is one that is purely concerned with technico-artistic matters. Acting like a buffer between the production company and the cinematographer, the agent can ask for a higher wage or more paid days of preparation without damaging the relationship between cinematographer and production

company (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010). The agent is also in a privileged position to extract information from the production company. As a cinematographer explained :

“The agent plays that role, of a mediator, to know what the production wants to do, what they have in mind. Because they can say whatever they want to a technician, they don't care. To an agent, it's different, because you know that you might deal with him again. So you have to be more careful. So the agent tries to be an interface to know who's been casted, the budget, where the movie is going...”

A cinematographer that negotiates for himself is always at risk of damaging his relationship with the producer and probably the director by asking too much and appearing overly motivated by the financial side of the project than by the artistic one. The use of the agent makes it possible to ask for more and concede if it seems that asking for too much money will prevent the cinematographer from being hired. The benefit for the cinematographer and the agent in the long-term is to make clear that they are accepting a lower price stressing that it is an exception and therefore not reducing the perceived reservation price for cinematographers. This is a net benefit of having an agent over the dyadic market, because in the later case, production companies can play different cinematographers against one another to lower the price.

The agent helps a cinematographer get a price premium on the work he is doing, without putting at risk the perception of his intrinsic motivation toward the project. And for small budget projects they helps stress the benefit of having an experienced cinematographer at reduced rates, helping to strengthened the relationship between the cinematographer, the production company and the director, because the later two will be in "debt" to the cinematographer, increasing the probability of a future collaboration (Mauss, 1950).

The agent is also in a position to provide advice on projects with a more detached view and with a longer-term perspective. The agent can also turn down offers that the cinematographer is not interested in, without the cinematographer being seen as the one rejecting the offer, thus lowering the risk that the producer or the director avoid that cinematographer in the future. It also lowers the cognitive load on the cinematographer, as one explained :

“I took an agent... not for financial reasons, I was doing quite well. But it was more the will to share projects with someone. For example, I did not want to do [movie one¹¹] again, but I didn't know how to say no to people. Often, you get a call and the guy tells you "you'll see, it's a great project, it's a bit like [movie one]". It's always difficult to say to people "well, if it's like [movie one], I'm not interested". So I needed someone to tell me "this movie, even though it's a bit like what you've done before, it a good idea to do it because...". So I needed someone that could give me advice about projects.”

Now that represented cinematographers are less of a rarity, the signalling effect is weaker that it used to be, but the impact of the management of the agenda is stronger because production companies are accustomed to dealing with agents.

In summary, the agent acts as a signal and part of the financial benefit a technician gains from using an agent comes from the signal of quality and the possibility to ask for more money without damaging the perception the production and the director have of the technician's intrinsic motivation.

¹¹ This movie was an independent movie that turned out to have a lot of critical success and was also one of the highest-grossing movie in France the year of its release.

Centralization on transaction partners : decoupling ties and rent extraction

In a labour market without long-term employment relationships, one should not expect to see more reoccurring relationships than chance would predict. Ferriani et al. (2005) showed that between individuals that are interdependent, reoccurring relationships are much more common than chance would predict. Notably, this holds for the pairing of director and cinematographer. We argue the agent facilitates reoccurring relationships because it helps « purify» the relationship between the cinematographer and the director, by decoupling the financial part of the relationship from the techico-artistic one.

It is also likely that, for different reasons, the presence of the agent increases the number of reoccurring relationships between production companies and cinematographers. This is likely to be due to the way a job offer is circulated inside the agency. That circulation brings security to the production company. When a cinematographer is engaged on a feature and cancels his commitment to a commercial, or when one of the three options he had for a specific date is confirmed. In those cases, the interest of the agent is to keep the projects inside of the agency to retain 10% of the contract. In order to do that the agent will try to find a replacement for the production company. In that sense, the agent's remuneration system helps align the interests of the agent and production company: the production company is likely to pay more for the cinematographer, but also ensures that the agent will search dilligently for a replacement if needed :

“Their shooting is not going to be tomorrow, because, if it is, I will not cancel on them. But, for example, it is in a month. So, I can try to find someone else. First, I try

to find someone in the agency, but if I can't, there are other agents I can ask and there are also cinematographers without agents.” (A 2)

That aspect of agent's activity increases the overall attraction of represented cinematographers at the expense of unrepresented ones.

In addition, this effect increases the probability that a cinematographer will contract repeatedly with the same production company or director because previous collaboration is a strong predictor of future collaboration in numerous settings (Lawler and Yoon, 1993; Schaefer, 2009), as well as in the motion-picture industry (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Ferriani et al., 2005; Sorenson and Waguespack, 2006). In summary, if the privileged relationship is between the agent and the production company instead of being between the cinematographer and the production company, this increases the likelihood that all the cinematographers of this agency will contract repeatedly with the same production companies.

Two-tier competition

The appearance of agents separates the population of cinematographers into two. Represented cinematographers have a competitive advantage over unrepresented ones. Between represented cinematographers of different agencies, there may be some signalling premium for people at the most sought after agency, but this premium cannot be large because of the already small number of agencies and their very similar output. But what happens between cinematographers of the same agency? Obviously, they are competing for similar jobs. Is there an explicit or implicit 'pecking order' between cinematographers inside the agency? Are some cinematographers' level of activity improved or hurt by their affiliation? Senior cinematographers receive more offers than younger ones and they may be unable to accept them all, therefore the agent is in a position to redirect the flow of jobs from senior cinematographers toward junior ones. When the

production company calls agents without a precise idea of which cinematographers they want, agents can direct the job offer toward whichever cinematographer they choose.

One of the reasons for this two-tier competition is the circulation of job offers inside the agency. For a represented cinematographer, competition exterior to the agency is immaterial as long as the agency has enough projects circulating internally or that he receives a significant portion of the offers the agency gets.

DISCUSSION

At the outset, the first agent was an attempt at differentiation by a handful of cinematographers, but this changed as cinematographers and production companies realized the unexpected benefits of dealing through a new intermediary. The double role of the intermediary as buffer and facilitator provides both cinematographers and production companies with advantages that they were unable to harvest before the first agents entered the market.

Implications

An exterior actor. Agents can switch between the posture of *tertius iungens* and *tertius gaudens* because they are exterior actors. They are not involved in any part of the production process per se, but only in managing the matching of cinematographers to each project and then handling the contractual relationship between production company and cinematographer. Being formally paid by the cinematographer, agents are in a position to build strong relationships with production companies that will decouple the relationship with the production company from the cinematographer and turn it into a relationship that benefits all cinematographers in the agency. This insight extends the findings of Lingo and O'Mahony (2010) who show that producers often have to perform the two roles successively to bring and keep together a creative team. The

position of the agent is similar, but as they are less involved in the creative process and they represent a large number of technicians, they have a centralizing effect on the market that benefits both the cinematographers and the production companies. The presence of the agent in the negotiation transforms the tie between the cinematographer and the production company and in doing so, helps buffer the relationship between the cinematographer, the producers and the director. It avoids resentment, arising in negotiation, from being taken on set, as cordiality and face-saving are essential on set to allow for future collaboration on subsequent projects (Bechky, 2006; Goffman, 1959).

Network externalities. The centralization effect of agencies and the necessity they face of making money, leads agents to act strategically toward their client base. An agent can help introduce or reintroduce a cinematographer to certain types of projects, with the combined effect of demo-reel and suggestion to production companies in order to help select a replacement for another unavailable client. Being represented gives access to the address book of the agent and the benefits associated with redistribution of projects inside the agency. This competitive advantage explains the successful institutionalization of this new form within the market. The image of the agent as a broker is already present in Bielby and Bielby (1999), but we further their work by showing that the competitive advantage, at the root of the rapid growth of the number of agencies, is not only produced by a history of successful matching but is a combination of several features, the principal among those being their ability to switch and combine social actions described as *tertius gaudens* and *tertius iungens* strategies (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010).

Dynamic adaptation to change. Being among the first cinematographers with representation was a strong signal of quality (Spence, 1973), but as more and more

cinematographers are represented, that signal becomes weaker¹². If the signal was the only reason to have an agent, we would see the number of represented cinematographers stabilize and fluctuate around a given level corresponding to the level at which some cinematographers, realizing the strength of the signal is worth less than the price they are paying for it, would leave their agent. That would increase the strength of the signal, and therefore lead to a few new cinematographers getting representation, lowering the strength of the signal again. Sticking to your representation is not only triggered by signalling benefits, but by the effect of the agent on transaction costs in terms of managing the cinematographer's schedule and on the possibility of internal redistribution of job offers. But agents also lower the search costs incurred by production companies. Through the agent, they access a group of diverse cinematographers and advice about the suitability of a specific technician for a specific task. And the cost of that service is paid for by cinematographers, through the 10% commission they give to their agent.

At the individual level the same remark holds: agents offer a service that reinforces the position of their clients in the labor market. Their informational advantage on projects gives them a larger power to negotiate when confronted with production companies. The internal redistribution of job offers benefits cinematographers directly inside the agency as a whole by increasing their mean level of activity. It also benefits them indirectly as the redistribution provides the insurance to production companies that they will have a technician for their project even when their first choice is unavailable. In turn, that insurance is an incentive for the production company to deal again with the same agency. Therefore, by helping the agency to build its own relationships with production companies independent of the cinematographers, it makes agents progressively more efficient at creating opportunities for themselves, projects that

¹² There is no strong stratification between agencies, due to the young age and small size of the market, thus being in any agency give roughly the same signalling benefit.

they can then redistribute to their client how they see fit. While an individual cinematographer emphasizes how inimitable and non-substitutable his contribution to the project is, in order to increase its demand, agents emphasize the substitutability among their clients and the fact that they are able to provide a good fit for a project regardless of unavailability of specific technicians. Agents also have an effect on perceived rareness of a technician through the use of options that multiply the time of a cinematographer and give more production companies the opportunity to work with a high-profile individual (they might obtain another technician in the end, but they will have been able to book him for a while, maybe using his reputation to get other high-profile people on the project). It is probable that for other labor-market intermediaries, similar market transformations could be observed and that the theoretical framework here developed could help better assess the effect of those intermediaries on market dynamics. It also seems that periods characterized by uncertainty are more favourable to the rise of a new intermediary, because intermediaries draw their strength both from their role as a signal and on their ability to lower transaction costs. One candidate area is the context of labour market negotiations, where delegation of bargaining is given to a negotiator (Jones, 1989), and more generally, any situation in which there is a delegation of bargaining in a labour-market. Other project-based industries, where team building is critical and needs to be repeated probably see the advent of a similar form of brokerage.

Limitations

The study limitations are inherent to qualitative research: it is based on evidence gathered from few individuals and few situations. Quantitative data on agents and cinematographers are scarce preventing numerical measures of the impact of the agents. However, qualitative data collected on cinematographers and agents in the United States are concordant with what we found in the

context of the French movie-industry, improving our confidence in our results. Because of the nature of the study, it is difficult to predict if intermediaries in other markets develop that same ability to switch between the role of buffer and the role of matcher. But it is likely that this is the case, as studies on other industries have found similar patterns (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010).

Future research

Although the study of people switching roles to broker relationships between other people lends itself well to qualitative research, a more quantitative approach to brokers' strategies in the movie industry but also in other settings, would help us better understand the advantages and shortcomings of the different brokering strategies. It is likely that all brokers in project-based industries will exhibit some sort of role switching between *tertius gaudens* and *tertius iungens* roles.

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FIGURE 1

Evolution of the number of cinematographers

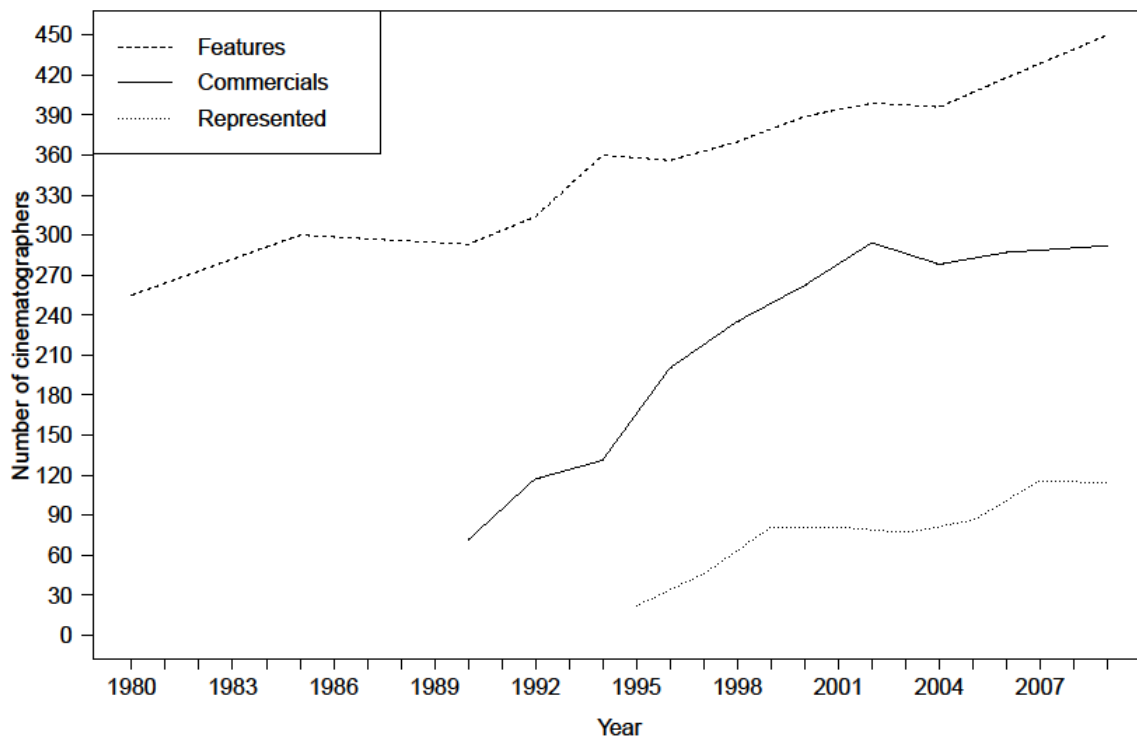
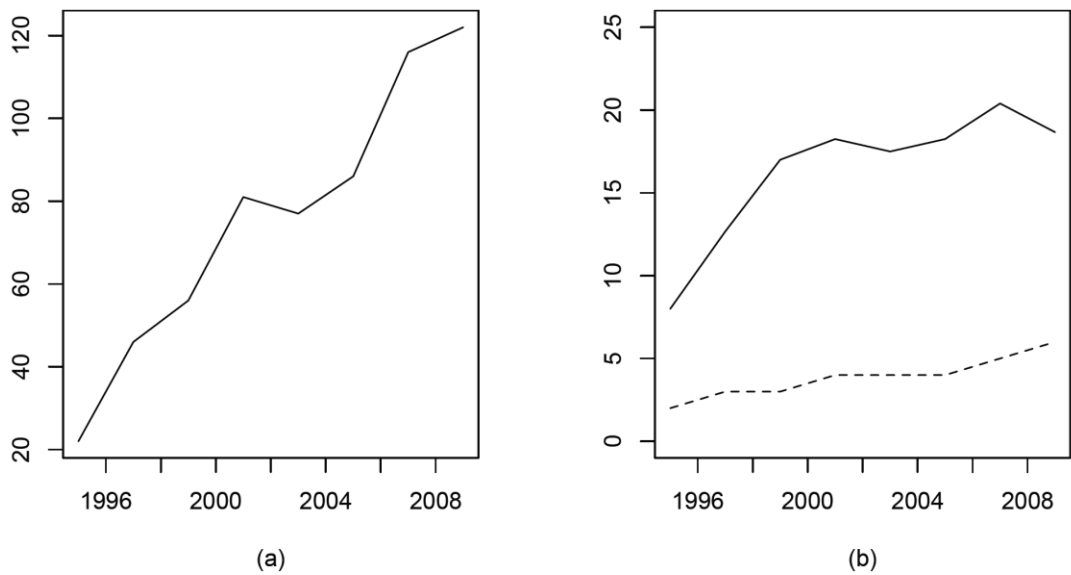


FIGURE 2
Evolution of the number of represented cinematographers and of the number of cinematographers by agency



(a) Number of cinematographers represented over time and (b) mean number of cinematographers by agency and (dotted line) number of agencies.

FIGURE 3

Relational pattern between cinematographer, director and producer

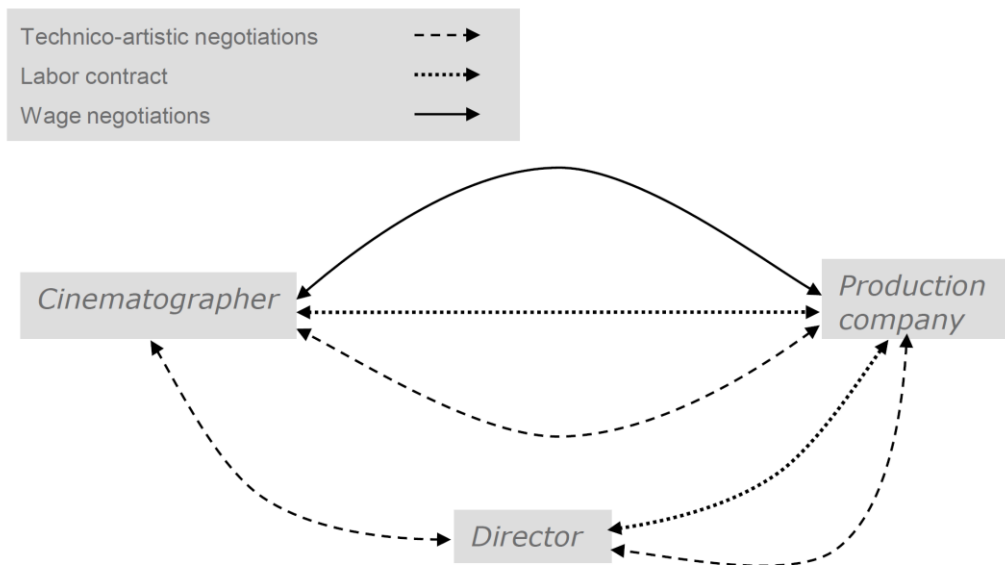


FIGURE 4

Relational pattern between cinematographer, director and producer after the introduction of the agent

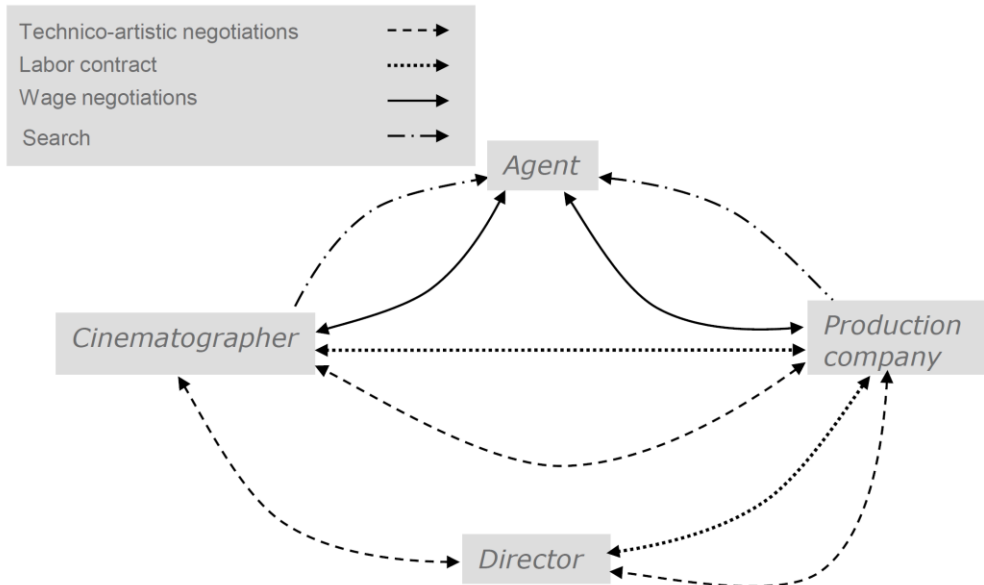


FIGURE 5

Number of movies produced in France (1980-2010). Source: CNC.

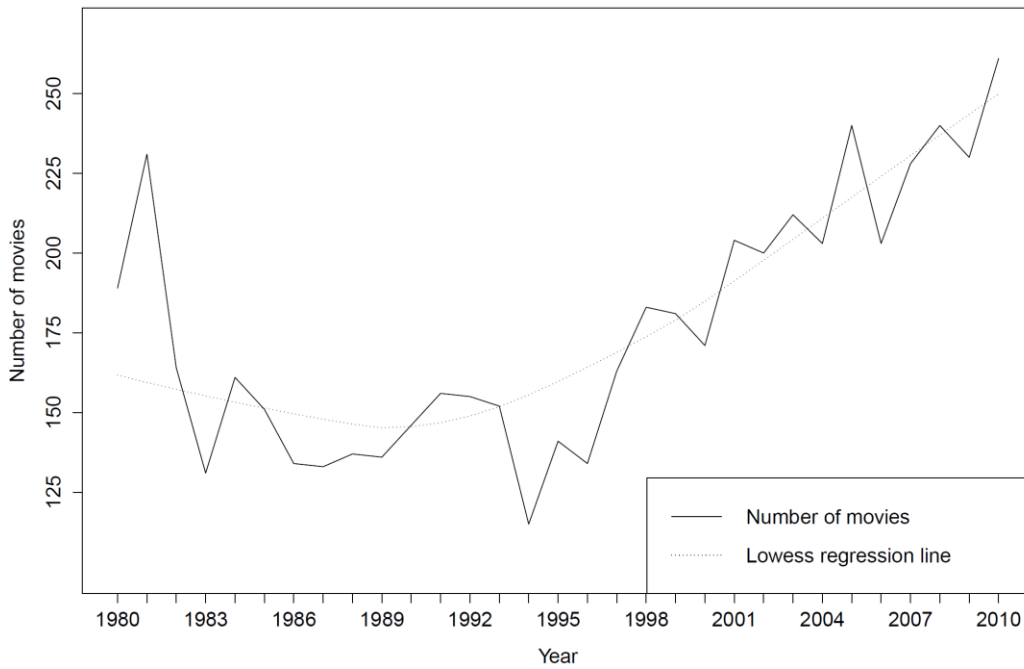


FIGURE 6
Number of technical schools. Source: Bellefaye

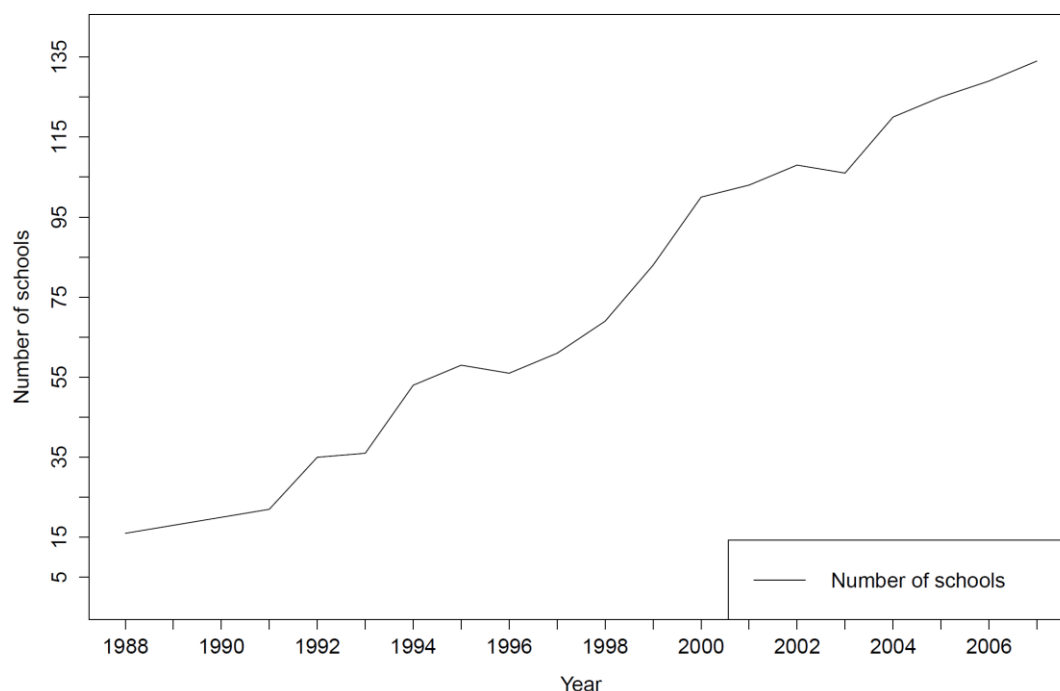


TABLE 1
Number of clients by profession in the 6 agencies, june 2009

Agency	A 1	A 2	A 3	A 4	A 5	A 6	Total
Year of creation	1992	1993	1996	1996	2006	2008	
Cinematographers	26	15	18	20	20	15	114
Production designers	1	4	-	7	-	4	16
Directors	-	9	1	-	-	-	10
Editors	-	-	-	5	-	3	8
Compositors	-	-	-	-	21	-	21
Assistant directors	-	-	-	-	3	-	3
Costume designers	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Make-up artists	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Scriptwriters	-	2	-	-	-	-	2
Sound engineers	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Choreographers	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Sound (miscellaneous)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Miscellaneous	-	-	-	-	3	-	3
Total	30	30	19	32	50	22	183

TABLE 2

Number of times cinematographers changes agents (1995-2009)

Number of changes	0	1	2
Number of cinematographers	164 (79%)	41 (20%)	2 (1%)