

The Star's Script: Delon as Director, Producer, and Screenwriter

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Alain Delon's face and his looks have largely contributed to the construction of his status as a screen icon and to his branding as a cinema commodity. Ginette Vincendeau (2000) and Guy Austin (2003) have founded their critical analyses of his stardom on this premise. Vincendeau defines a star as "a celebrated performer who develop[s] a 'persona' or 'myth' composed of an amalgam of [his] screen image and private identity, which the audience recognizes and expects from film to film, and which in turn determines the parts [he] play[s]" (2000, vii). Comparing and contrasting Delon's "persona" with that of his contemporary rival and occasional co-star, Jean-Paul Belmondo, Vincendeau and Austin have provided illuminating assessments of Delon's screen image as a determined tough guy and remote outsider. They have also highlighted other features, such as his macho masculinity and/or the inherent duality of his characters.

Delon holds a special place shared by a select few in French cinema: the ultimate star, unique and inimitable (Rauger 1996, 33). As a larger than life public figure known in France and internationally, he has demonstrated over the years his business flair for developing commercial projects and brands around his name. In the 1970s, as his box-office pull was questioned, he extended his mastery of his image by producing his films, then by contributing to the screenplays and taking on directing. These shifts in the function of the star were amply discussed by film critics at the time, who speculated about his motivations, and the impact that such moves might have had on his image and brand. As film scholars have shown, in the 1970s, French cinema moved toward a star system in which the "ambition and financial power" of French stars changed (Austin 2003, 6), as some acquired more control over the films they appeared in by financing them (Prédal 1991, 334–7).

In a short essay published in *Positif*, Michel Cieutat presents Delon's complex star persona, identifying three different facets (*trois visages*) to the star's image with corresponding motifs: *le battant* (the fighter, gangster, or cop); *le battu* (beaten, often with dual personality); and *le bateleur* (buffoon), integrating elements of comedy and intertextuality through explicit cinephilic borrowings and self-parody (Cieutat 2012, 43–4). Cieutat's analysis confirms that, in the twenty-first century, despite a less marked on-screen presence, Delon retains a clearly identifiable star persona and an unmatched presence.

This chapter investigates an overlooked period in Delon's career, broadly 1976–1983, coinciding with changes in French politics and society, namely the end of the period of economic prosperity known as *les trente glorieuses*. It briefly investigates the star's input into film production, then more specifically into screenwriting and directing.¹ The main aim is to assess whether these increased responsibilities led to a change of persona or just served to reinforce and maintain the star image developed from the 1960s. The discussion addresses the consolidation of Delon's brand, considering look, performance style, parts, and character types. It also questions the possible strategic motivations behind these developments, such as his desire to be recognized as a complete “*homme de cinéma*” (Delon in Jousse and Toubiana 1996, 30) and to curb the decline of his stardom. Adopting Vincendeau's distinction between stars appearing in mainstream films versus stars of auteur films (2000, 24), I focus here on Delon's image through a commercial perspective based on the specific production processes and public reception of his late 1970s films. Delon's intentional repositioning as increasingly remote and inaccessible (Chiesi 2003, 80) may be explained by his anticipating—or refusing to accept—changes in popular French cinema in the early 1980s, namely the renewal of the *policier/polar* (crime thriller) genre² with more ordinary heroes and the disaffection of French audiences for some of its popular stars.

The three main films under consideration—*Trois hommes à abattre/Three Men to Destroy* (Jacques Deray, 1980), *Pour la peau d'un flic/For a Cop's Hide* (Delon, 1981), and *Le Battant/The Fighter* (Delon, 1983)—are *polars* designed as star vehicles. Delon's role as screenwriter can be clarified using Jill Nelmes's distinction which associates craft in screenwriting to a trade and an industry, as opposed to creativity, which is tied to the inspiration of an author (2007, 107). He did not propose original stories, choosing rather to collaborate on adaptations of stories from the established authors of the prestigious *Série noire* collection, which had already provided him his previous key-roles (see Durant

2004, 100–2). He started not so much from a story idea as from a possible representation of his screen image that he could appropriate. He financed the three films, thus ensuring maximum control over the production stage and increased his hold on the films even further for *Pour la peau d'un flic* and *Le Battant* by taking on the director's role.

Trois hommes à abattre is freely adapted with Deray and Christopher Frank (for the dialogue) from Jean-Patrick Manchette's *Le Petit bleu de la côte ouest*. Delon plays Michel Gerfaut, a marginal solitary professional card player who becomes involved by chance in a spiral of violence relating to crime and corruption. The film attracted 2.91 million viewers in France.³ Delon worked with Frank again for *Pour la peau d'un flic* adapting another Manchette novel, *Que d'os*. His character, Choucas, a private investigator and former police officer dismissed for violence, is asked to find a young missing woman. This film repeated the commercial success of *Trois hommes à abattre* with 2.37 million viewers. For his last film as director, *Le Battant*, Delon co-adapted a noir novel by André Caroff; the film attracted 1.93 million viewers. He plays Jacques Darnay, a convict just out from prison, caught between the police and a criminal gang, who wants the stolen diamonds that he hid before his arrest.

These three plot outlines reveal parts made to measure to reinforce Delon's mainstream screen image. Reference will also be made to some earlier films, which announce Delon's transition, such as *Flic Story* (José Giovanni 1976), *Le Gang* (Jacques Deray, 1976), *L'Homme pressé/The Hurried Man* (Edouard Molinaro, 1976), and *Mort d'un pourri/Death of a Corrupt Man* (Georges Lautner 1977). Few critical studies of the star are available in French and even fewer discussions of the films of this corpus. As a result, the French secondary sources consist mainly of press articles and critical biographies by Bernard Violet (2000) and Philippe Durant (2004), as well as the French version of Roberto Chiesi's Italian portrait (2003).

Delon's brand evolution in the 1970s

By 1970, Delon was at the height of his international celebrity having established his stardom in the 1960s by working with important directors such as Jean-Pierre Melville, Luchino Visconti, and René Clément. He was noticed alongside stars of the previous generation such as Jean Gabin in *Mélodie en sous-sol/Any Number Can Win* (Henri Verneuil, 1963) and *Le Clan des Siciliens/The Sicilian*

Clan (Verneuil, 1969). He then paired up with major names of his own generation, such as Lino Ventura, Romy Schneider, and Belmondo (Frodon 1995, 181). Delon's iconic screen image as a solitary, tough hero was shaped through Melville's three films noirs, *Le Samouraï/The Samurai* (1967), *Le Cercle rouge/The Red Circle* (1970), and *Un flic/The Cop* (1972). The latter allowed him to extend his reach as a star beyond Europe, into China and Japan. From the late 1960s, this made him the "embodiment" of loner heroes of mainstream *polars* (Austin 2003, 4), his actor performance transforming into "a pure display of physical characteristics and metonymy objects such as the trench-coat and the hat" (Forbes 1992, 55).

Delon has been described as a "sacred monster"⁴ and the "only real star" of French cinema (Cieutat 2012, 42; Devarrieux 1983). As mentioned in the introduction, Vincendeau, Austin, and Durant all compare Delon with Belmondo, their analyses invariably leading to some connections within the *policier* genre but also to clear differentiation between the two stars' images. They emphasize how the two stars may have inspired one another but also competed in popularity surveys, leaving little screen space for other actors of their generation operating in the polar genre.

In 1964, Delon had created his first production company Delbeau, with his agent Georges Beaume (Durant 2004, 143). In 1968, he founded Adel productions for an ambitious film *Jeff* (Jean Herman, 1968), which did not meet the usual audiences expected by the star, with a million entries. The company remained functional until 1986,⁵ financing twenty-five films over this period. The contacts that Delon had established within Italian cinema working with Italian directors such as Visconti or Antonioni, naturally led to financial partnerships with Italian producers, hence the regular casting of Italian partners for Delon in the 1970s. Initially, he produced a series of mainstream films by experienced directors that he chose and which offered him roles of lonely cops and gangsters. Deray, for instance, sees Delon as the "detonator" of his career as director (Deray 2003, 95), starting with *Borsalino* (Jacques Deray, 1970), which paired Delon and Belmondo, attracting 4.7 million viewers in France alone. This success served as the stepping stone in the 1970s for a series of successful co-productions between Adel productions and Italian partners, Lira Films and Mondial Te-Fi.

Delon's production model was European but could also be compared to Hollywood production, where the producer is the initiator and supervisor of a film, while the director is viewed as an experienced technician. Deray, for instance, confirmed that Delon held overt control at every level, from buying

the rights of a novel through casting the actors, and to making distribution and marketing decisions (Deray 2003, 111; 192). Other testimonies refer to Delon the producer as extremely professional and efficient, although there may have been occasional friction between the star and the directors with whom he worked.⁶

If Delon's screen image in the 1970s was authoritative, some films failed to meet their public, especially when he tried to experiment with character types that moved away from the outsider gangsters and tough police officers constituting his brand, as he did with *Mr. Klein* (Joseph Losey, 1976) and *Le Gitan/The Gypsy* (José Giovanni, 1975).⁷ This failure was attributed to changes in audience taste, but also seen as a consequence of recurring rumors about Delon's entourage and mysterious "faits divers" in which his name appeared, in particular the Markovic affair in 1968.⁸ His image was also blurred by the many business ventures he launched, including horse racing, boxing matches, art collections, clothes design, and cosmetic ranges which cemented his international branding.

As producer, Delon had more power to influence the casting but also the filmmaking process and artistic decisions, including those concerning *mise-en-scène*. Significantly, he stayed away from a new generation of emerging stars and directors, increasingly cutting himself off from the cinema of his time (Violet 2000, 380–1). He even tended to cast himself as a sole star, playing an isolated protagonist, and teaming up with relatively unknown actors in secondary roles. In this respect, his production practices sought to boost his star status.

Delon worked with Deray on five films in the 1970s, including *Flic Story* in 1975, with Giovanni for *Deux hommes dans la ville/Two Men in the City* (1973) and *Le Gitan*.⁹ He also made three films with Lautner *Il était une fois un flic* (1971), *Les Seins de glace/Someone is Bleeding* (1974) and *Mort d'un pourri* (1977).¹⁰ These films all announce his transition to scriptwriting and directing mainstream *polars*, assigning himself "lone wolf" performances of cops or marginal characters. In *Flic Story*, for example, he plays Roger Borniche, the real-life policeman whose story is adapted, rather than the criminal Emile Buisson, played by Jean-Louis Trintignant. The film retraces the relentless chase of the determined cop to arrest the criminal. The film attracted just under 2 million viewers. The box-office results of *Le Gang*, also adapted from a Borniche novel in 1976, were disappointing—1.19 million viewers. *L'Homme pressé* only attracted 730,000 viewers in 1976, signaling a decline in the star's box-office pull (Violet 2000, 380–1 and Chiesi 79–81).

Audiences failed to identify with Delon as the bubbly, unpredictable, curly haired gangster of *Le Gang* and of the hyperactive protagonist of *L'Homme*

pressé, constantly rushing somewhere new in search of new business ventures, thus conforming to one facet of Delon's own star image of a man constantly in need of new challenges and experimentation. For *Mort d'un pourri* seen by 1.85 million viewers in 1977, Delon took on the part of a politician, Xavier Maréchal. The film addressed the themes of lost values and political corruption, which will later reappear in *Pour la peau d'un flic*. It is tempting to suggest that Delon's screen image in the second half of the 1970s fell out of line with audience tastes. Or would it be more accurate to suggest that Delon did not intend to be popular? Patrick Poivre d'Arvor's portrait of the star in 1979 helps to understand the nature of the discrepancy between the star's image and his characters:

I like Alain Delon because he is not really popular. He is a sort of Lord (a "seigneur"), the opposite to ... Belmondo, with whom it is easy to identify. Delon does not belong to the public consciousness of French people; no one wants to say "tu" to him, or to give him a pat on the back. The man is not simple; he is not close. (in Violet 2000, 379)

This distance may explain Delon's need to re-focus his screen image counting on the crime thriller genre and its solitary heroes to reinforce his sense of difference and maintain control over his audience. The move from star to producer highlighted his directorial debut in 1981, an extra move that he saw as the "logical outcome of the career in entertainment that [he] wanted to fulfill" (in Baudin 1981). The deaths of two of his artistic masters in the 1970s, Melville and Visconti, may also have affected his new career choices (Chiesi 2003, 80). But it would be difficult not to see in these strategic moves an attempt to prove himself as an accomplished "homme de cinéma" and to curb the decline of the star's box-office appeal by increasing his control over his later films.

Revamping Delon's image

For all the control that he established over the three films he wrote and or directed, Delon certainly did not work alone. He chose arguably the best collaborators in his professional context. For their plots and character types, he drew inspiration from established *Série noire* authors but without preserving their style or social and political contexts. He engaged actors whom he knew well, such as Michel Auclair, Jean-Pierre Darras, Daniel Ceccaldi, Pierre Mondy, and François Périer, the policeman of *Le Samouraï*, who returns in

Le Battant as Gino. This helped to form viable working teams based on reliable networks (see Noli 1981; Violet 2000, 388–89; 397–99), and it contributed to preserving the sense of continuity in his filmography by comforting a canonical, international screen image while retaining the dimensions of isolation and authority identified by Austin (2003, 50). However, to ensure the development of a more mature authority figure, ever-younger female partners were introduced to replace the likes of Mireille Darc, Natalie Delon, and Romy Schneider.¹¹ Particularly remarked was the appearance of Anne Parillaud as Choucas's secretary and lover Charlotte in *Pour la peau d'un flic* and as Nathalie, the girl sent over to watch Darnay and who falls in love with him in *Le Battant*. These two characters helped Delon to transform his screen image toward a tough but protective maturity. Delon's increased input as writer and director thus coincided with the fine-tuning of his mainstream persona, trying to combine the reliable expected screen image and more mature character types.

In terms of the screenplay and direction style, the three films share common features, which contribute to their unity and the consolidation of Delon's screen image of tough guy and "brooding lone wolf" (Chiesi 2003, 76). He recycled the familiar stylized figures that he had played in Melville's films and proposed scripts for more aggressive American-style action outsiders operating in underground Parisian or urban French settings.¹² Delon's three protagonists display imposing physical presence, both visually and spatially, reinforcing his powerful visual image as an actor who fills the space in which he operates. Also reminiscent of Melville is Delon's inscrutable facial expression and fetishization of smart stylized costume, which were the tropes of his star image in the late 1960s.¹³ Increasingly, the trench coat and trilby are replaced by a trendy leather jacket, but Delon's natural elegance is often emphasized by impeccable suits and shirts regardless of the situation he is placed in. There is even a change of shirt ritual integrated into the screenplay of in *Dans la peau d'un flic/For a Cop's Hide*. Together with the use of cars and guns, this costume fetishism also helps to enhance his sexualized playboy image.

The three plots revolve around familiar narratives of score settling, revenge, and persecution. The protagonists are mostly defined by their social and physical isolation, resorting to violence to solve their problems. Their nearly obsessive determination to conquer or win at all costs and their fighting spirit are other recurrent motifs, which are central to Delon's persona. These motifs echo his personal story—he often says that he had to fight to get to the top (Jousse and Toubiana 1996, 29), although he is also known to have argued that his stardom

was predestined (Violet 2000). They mimetically recall his place in French cinema, isolated and unique, independent and untamed, and point to (conscious) commentaries in his films on important changes taking place in French cinema that he tries to eschew. For example, in *Dans la peau d'un flic*, the dialogue refers to the relations between the police and criminals, Delon/Choucas evoking “changing times, and time passing by” to his ex-colleague. A similar remark is made in *Le Battant*: “times have changed. What we have lost in folklore, we have gained in efficiency,” which could be interpreted as Delon’s positioning on the changes taking place in French cinema with noticeable influences from American fast paced plots, more violent and stunt-filled action films, as well as the increasing impact on film style of emerging high-profile TV series.

Among the motifs retained from the star’s earlier films, we can identify several features. The narrative of each of the three films is psychologically superficial and limited to the familiar archetypes of the hero fighting with determination to help a friend, for honor or revenge, which seems to suggest that the screenwriting supports Delon’s image. Self-awareness in terms of screen image, body and face remain priorities. As Vincendeau has argued, Delon’s early image was predicated upon the “narcissistic display of his face and body,” and that later, it evolved from “gigolo” to “melancholy” masculinity (2000, 174–77—see Waldron in this volume). This interpretation is also valid in the three films under discussion. Recalling the days of *Plein soleil*, Delon includes into each screenplay a few timely opportunities for displaying his torso. Yet, his wrinkles transform the angelic facial features into a mature, more cynical hero, but one who, nevertheless, also assumes his virility. The secondary roles attributed to female characters in these masculine films remain rather limited to sexualized objects. Women serve above all to highlight Delon’s masculinity and illustrate his intended derision of the post-1968 sexual liberation in explicit nude scenes and references to sexuality. Occasionally, the young female characters add a more protective, paternal dimension to the star’s maturing screen image that Parillaud’s girly roles emphasize.

The development of the dual personality motif is another facet reinforced in Delon’s image in the early 1980s. It helps to enhance the *battant/battu* duality of his screen image, but the “battu” dimension seems to take over in the narratives. For example, *Trois Hommes à abattre* sees Delon/Gerfaut killed at the end of the film in a scene, which lacks drama. In *Pour la peau d'un flic*, the isolated, battered hero, Delon/Choucas, is repeatedly physically attacked and disfigured by his enemies, which is significant when it is clear that Delon’s star image has

been constructed around his angelic face. He may be trying to override his early star image and signal a transition to different roles (more ironic and less stylized for instance). The final scene at the hospital shows him wearing a face bandage, unable to speak and passively listening to his girlfriend's love declaration shows him to the audience as more human and approachable. The poster used for the promotion of *Le Battant* brings together two mirror images of the star's face, suggesting the duplicity of the character, although this is not the major theme of the film. Delon/Darnay is secretive rather than deceptive, the duplicitous character of the film being his alleged friend, Gino.

When scripting and staging his own roles, Delon plays on the ambivalence of his star persona, balancing between auteur cinema and popular film. In other words, his screenplays are based upon decisions that affect the Delon screen image more than the narrative development of the polar genre. In the three popular films discussed here, he offers the audience mirror images of how he sees himself as a star, a determined *battant* who is not prepared to give up but also a "beaten" figure, remote from the present and isolated, who belongs to the past. He seeks to modernize his screen image to make it more ordinary, to move away from the myth of the unattainable hero. His star presence remains imposing, as though he were unable to move beyond his earlier star image, suggesting nostalgia for his former smooth, impenetrable face. The three films that Delon wrote tend to have more cynical protagonists, with moralizing plots and explanatory dialogues, which underline their mainstream status. Repeated attempts to infuse some humor into the dialogue are equally surprising, for example when Parillaud/Charlotte makes knowing references to film classics. They suggest how Delon-the-screenwriter harked back to his earlier stardom rather than developing a contemporary image.

Delon's distinctive mobilization of space is retained. His walking style and movements onscreen become more coded to include intertextual references to previous films. He also gives himself ample opportunities to display action performances in these films through a series of carefully staged car chases and shooting episodes. More generally, the control of screen space within the frame and diegetic setting is clear, as through the careful *mise-en-scène*, Delon occupies the space and closes it off. He is omnipresent except in the initial scene of *Le Battant*. The film's dialogues retain Delon's familiar diction, yet are wordier than in the films that he had made with Melville. For example, action scenes and plot elements are often commented on by the protagonist who feels the need to justify his actions. As critics have noted, irony and humor creep into the scripts,

for instance with an overt reference by Parillaud/Charlotte to Belmondo's tough guy image in *Pour la peau d'un flic*, and Mondy/Rouxel's pastiche of inspector Columbo in *Le Battant* which suggest hints of self-irony but also more popular mainstream references. And yet they still point to the star's narcissism even when it comes to constructing his characters or writing dialogue.

From the perspective of genre, it is clear that Delon aimed to develop his own brand of European crime thriller around his screen image and American-style action thrillers. Many reviewers agree that *Pour la peau d'un flic* and *Le Battant* were inspired by, and reminiscent of, American action movies, in their narratives, mise-en-scène and marketing strategies.¹⁴ Moving away from stylized noir and placing less emphasis on gangster codes, Delon also abandoned the iconic French gangsters *Borsalino* and *Le Gang*, focusing more instead on Delon-modeled outsiders placed by circumstance in exceptional situations. If the three films of the early 1980s recycled the conventions of film noir through their visual style, the action-packed narratives staging effective car chases, spectacular stunts and violent gun fights, imitated Americanized mainstream action entertainment movies.¹⁵ Delon himself admitted in an interview that for him, "cinema [would] always be a form of dream and escapism" and that *Trois hommes à abattre* "was not meant to lead to a reflection on our society" (in Samson 1981). As we have seen, there are nevertheless occasional commentaries on society, underneath the veneer of Americanized action thriller narrative.

Delon steered clear of newcomers like Alain Corneau and Claude Miller during the late 1970s, who were bringing more introspection and realism into the *policier* genre, in such films as *Série noire* (Corneau 1979) or *Mortelle randonnée/Deadly Circuit* (Miller 1983) (in Samson 1981). He chose to look back to his past star image for his own projects in the early 1980s, in terms of tone and narrative, he relied on performances tested with Deray and Giovanni, while drawing inspiration from Lautner's know-how for the effective staging of fast-paced action scenes with spectacular car chases and stunts. He also tried to replicate the narrative rhythm of Clément's films and the hushed/muffled atmosphere of those of Melville, the masters to whom his two films as director are dedicated. If the films displayed a degree of technical mastery, they brought in few stylistic innovations. They accumulated intertextual references to Delon's filmography, instilling a dose of humor and self-derision, which pointed here to Delon's narcissism rather than his artistic talent.

The critics were quick to acknowledge the tested models that Delon as writer director tried to emulate and the limits of the exercise. Cieutat saw a competent

effort to direct (2012, 44), Rochereau qualified *Dans la peau d'un flic's* direction as "not so bad" (1981). Others rated the type of films that he produced as outdated (Chazal 1981), indicated his lack of writing experience (Chiesi 2003, 85). The media reduced the change in Delon's career to a desire to take control of his image and to make more lucrative films by taking fewer creative risks.¹⁶

Conclusion

Delon's gradual extension of roles from actor to producer, and from producer to director and screenwriter may have been driven by a desire to gain full mastery over his screen image in successful commercial projects and prove his autonomy vis-à-vis the French film industry. It is also possible that reaching maturity, Delon was, as Cieutat suggests, "a fallen angel who was still trying to seduce" (2012, 42). Discovering the limits of his stardom in the late 1970s, he had to address the evolution of public and the changing trends of popular cinema if he wanted to remain independent from any system. Like other stars of his generation, he had increasingly become more dependent on the public's desire for him to fulfill certain roles, not always to his advantage.

The tension between Delon's ambition to be considered as an "homme de cinéma," not just an actor, and his desire to make his star image more popular may have blurred his normally sound judgment to choose his roles. Placed in the center of the film production, he seems to have denied himself the necessary distance to assess the suitability of his own scripts, which were reduced to "the first cog of a large wheel" to borrow Jill Nelmes's phrase (2007, 107). His polar films made between 1976 and 1988 contain recurring motifs which point to his professional experience and network, more than they suggest the individual talent of an author or a director. By the late 1970s, Delon's brand alone was no longer enough to attract audiences. Neither were his efforts to recycle codes and conventions of the polar genre that had become his trademark, and modernize them by integrating action thriller set pieces into the plots. The scope of reviving the mythical Delon brand and persona through his looks and performance style was limited. The maturing, self-deriding facets of his dark, solitary character types simply positioned him more clearly within mainstream genre cinema and narratives, including spectacular stunts, which saw him competing on Belmondo's ground. Far from signaling a shift toward authorship or a renewal of his iconic capital, the three films that he wrote and produced froze his screen

image and star persona with repeated intertextual nods to his prestigious past filmography. They highlighted how isolated and helpless the French star had become when faced with the important changes taking place in genre cinema at the end of the 1970s. The form and narrative of each polar starring Delon in that period appear resolutely rigid, calibrated and predictable, not to say consensual. For all their authority, his protagonists display conservatism and disenchantment, and this continues in two later productions, *Parole de flic/Cop's Honour* (José Pinheiro, 1985) and *On ne reveille pas un flic qui dort/Let Sleeping Cops Lie* (Pinheiro, 1988). They are yet other versions of a similar prototype, and therefore difficult to differentiate from one another (Chiesi 2003, 85).

In the late 1970s-early 1980s, Delon failed to set himself free from his screen image and the objectified heroes that constitute his brand, and who continue to lack agency, even in an autonomous financial and creative production model. His films and their reception echo the end of the “Trente glorieuses” and of the classical era for French popular stars (Vincendeau 2000, 13), which manifested itself by French audiences supporting new cinema heroes and stars as role models such as Gérard Depardieu, Patrick Dewaere, and Gérard Lanvin. The fighters’ era (*le temps des battants*) seems to have come to an end in 1983 with Delon’s last *battant* character emigrating to a sunny resort with the stolen diamonds, but not trusting anyone enough to reveal where exactly. His few original performances in that decade, *Notre histoire* (Bertrand Blier, 1984), a surreal drama in which he plays Roger Avranches, an alcoholic mechanic, and the pacifist fantastic fable *Le Passage/The Passage* (René Manzor, 1985) are exceptions. It is significant and ironic that the former offered him the only César Award for Best Actor of his career, while his incursion into writing and producing did little to transform his star image or reveal new facets to his talent. This does not affect his huge notoriety or his unique place in the history of French cinema, but exemplifies the limitations of agency when stars become prisoners of their image.

Notes

- 1 Delon was credited as director for two films and as co-writer for seven films in total between 1976 and 1988.
- 2 See Guérif (1981) for different forms of the French polar, and (1989) for definitions of “policier film.”
- 3 All box-office statistics are from Durant (2004, 297).

- 4 This phrase is used in French to refer to “flamboyant, hyperbolic figures,” (Vincendeau 2000, 3). It also implies an unquestionable status as star. It is applied to Delon on the back cover presentation of Durant (2004).
- 5 It was replaced by “Leda productions’ in 1987 to finance *Ne réveillez pas un flic qui dort* (1988).
- 6 See technical crew’s assessment in Noli (1981).
- 7 See Durant (2004: 144–45, 201). *Mr Klein* attracted 711.000 viewers, *Le Gitan* 1.78 m.
- 8 Stefan Markovic, Delon’s bodyguard and friend, was murdered in 1968. It was never resolved, but the investigation involved Delon and his Corsican mafia friend Marcantoni, The investigation uncovered a political scandal involving Georges Pompidou’s entourage. Vincendeau notes that Delon’s “high visibility as a gangster or flic coincided with the Markovic affair” (2000, 178).
- 9 Giovanni is a *Série noire* author with links with the criminal world who spent time in jail before becoming a recognized polar screenwriter and director with a personal touch.
- 10 The most successful was the last one with 1.87 million viewers. Lautner made cult comedies in the 1960s, often written by Michel Audiard and produced by Alain Poiré of Gaumont (as Italian co-productions). He later worked with Belmondo on popular hits in the early 1980s.
- 11 Ornella Muti in *Mort d’un pourri*, Nicole Calfan in *Le Gang* and Andrea Ferreol in *Trois Hommes à abattre*.
- 12 Delon’s name is set against the Eiffel tower in the credits of *Pour la peau d’un flic*.
- 13 For an example of Delon’s use of costume, see Stella Bruzzi’s analysis of *Le Samourai* in her chapter on the unstabilities of the Franco-American gangster (1997, 79–81).
- 14 From *Borsalino* onward, Delon producer explored the American promotion campaigns for the release of his films (Violet 2000, 292) effectively using trailers, teasers and the media.
- 15 On American style see contemporary reviews: “a thriller made the American way” (Anon. 1981; Rochereau 1981); “a real thriller, in the purest tradition” (Samson 1981; Douin 1983).
- 16 For examples of comments on Delon’s motivation at the time, see *Minute*’s review (Anon 1981). See also Durant for a retrospective assessment of Delon’s motivations (2004, 142).

