

## [Everyday Heroes and Heroines: Micro and Macro-Resistances in Post-2001 Feature Films](#)

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### **Everyday Heroes and Heroines: Micro and Macro-Resistances in Post-2001 Feature Films**

Conference to be held at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, October 22-23, 2022

*A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength  
to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming  
obstacles.*

CHRISTOPHER REEVE

This international and bilingual (in both French and English) conference aims to critically examine the micro/macro-resistance of ordinary cinematic heroes and heroines when they face events (fictional or not) that call into question their relationship to their daily lives and their environment.

The term "hero" derives from the ancient Greek *hērōs* ("warlord") and from the classical Latin heroes ("demigod"), as indicated by the foundational texts of Homer (*The Iliad*) and Virgil (*The Aeneid*). In both cases, individuals possess positive qualities that distinguish them from their peers, such as superior merit and courage, or an almost divine person, the fruit of the loves between a god/goddess and a mortal. As indicated by Franco et al. (2016), the figure of the hero has considerably evolved in recent years. For example, Becker and Eagly (2004) describe the hero or heroine as an individual taking physical risks in order to protect one or more people. For Koben (2013), the hero and the heroine are to be understood as people at the crossroads of "physical heroism" and social heroism: they are individuals who become aware of their mortality and who, in the service of a principle, take serious risks and/or manage to overcome important tests. Franco and Zimbardo (2006), for their part, point out that the hero is no longer necessarily from an elite. Rather, heroic acts have become banal

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("the banality of heroism").

Therefore, it seems that the concept of ordinary heroism relies on a fundamental tension: heroes have become both ordinary and exceptional yet they are anchored in a social reality that they also transcend. For example, during the first waves of COVID-19, members of the medical profession carried out their tasks in an unprecedented and dangerous context and are widely considered to be heroes. In the same way, Jean-Paul Belmondo, a well-known star of French cinema, was described right after his death as "a hero in the appearance of Mr. Everybody" (Frodo 2021). The Hollywood superhero has certainly not lost its cultural importance and its appeal (for proof, see the success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise) but it coexists with protagonists which are much more discreet, but that carrier of diverse meanings (personal, philosophical, political, ideological).

It is thus the ordinary heroes and heroines that interest us - especially their various representations and expressions in contemporary post-2001 non-Hollywood cinema. In what cinematic universes do they evolve? Are there any connections between ordinary heroes and cinematic genres? What obstacles do they face on screen that are more realistic than those in superhero movies? How do these heroic individuals position themselves vis-à-vis the collective and the systemic? How do ordinary heroes try to overcome their conditions as well as obstacles of a personal (illness, etc.), systemic (economic precariousness, discrimination etc.) or historical (wars, conflicts etc.) nature?

Confronted with exceptional personal or collective situations, protagonists within these works transgress and escape their condition of distress, oppression and sometimes extreme alienation. They seek to deploy the appropriate means in order to overcome the obstacles presented to them by the story. In the context of realist films, whose heroes are not "extraordinary," what are the possible resistances in the face of adversity? This adversity is embodied by either 1) an ideology (racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, ageism, etc.), 2) an economic system (neoliberalism, communism or other), 3) a major political crisis (a conflict, a war, a dystopian election), or 4) a natural cataclysm (an earthquake). How can a character survive, resist and rebel against what is presented to him by force without validating (through his bravery and determination) what oppresses him? For example, how can the protagonist of *Louise Wimmer* (Menegun, 2012), a woman living in her car and desperately seeking accommodation, achieve her ends thanks to her moral strength and resilience without justifying the economic system that transformed her by necessity into an ordinary heroine? How do individuals and communities facing colonialism and its multiple effects manage to resist through large and small actions without being silenced and without contenting themselves with minor roles or depictions, as it is the case in the movie *The Mission* (R. Joffé, 1986)? Finally, how can cinema itself (through its aesthetics, the means of production now accessible, the ethics of filmmakers) constitute a tool of resistance for minority cultures (such as Latin, Quebec and Indigenous cultures, disabled and queer, to name but a few)?

We do not seek here to further glorify bravery and individualism, important in the psychology and the actions of the traditional hero and the neoliberal societies. On the contrary, we mean to underline the paradoxes, the tensions, and the contradictions inherent to “ordinary” heroism within post-2001 contemporary fictional cinema. This conference is particularly interested in the French-speaking context, but we accept proposals concerning other film landscapes and various national contexts, including all types of diversity without any exception.

Some of the themes and films that can be presented are:

- **Economic insecurity:** *Louise Wimmer* (dir. Cyril Menegun, 2012); *Deux jours, une nuit* (dir. J-P and L. Dardenne, 2014).
- **Diseases:** *120 Beats Per Minute* (dir. Robin Campillo, 2017); *Amour* (dir. Michael Haneke, 2012).
- **Cataclysms and the Apocalypse:** *Children of Men* (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2006), *The Road* (dir. John Hillcoat, 2009).
- **Natural disasters:** *The Impossible* (dir. J. A. Bayona, 2012); *Force Majeure* (dir. Ruben Östlund 2015).
- **Attacks:** *The Attack* (dir. Ziad Doueiri, 2012); *9/11* (dir. Martin Guigui, 2017).
- **Epidemics:** *Blindness* (dir. Fernando Meirelles, 2008); *Contagion* (dir. Stephen Soderberg, 2011); *Last Train for Busan* (dir. Sang-Ho Yeon, 2016); *Blood Quantum* (dir. Jeff Barnaby, 2020).
- **Invasions:** *A Quiet Place* (dir. John Krasinski, 2018); *District 9* (dir. Neill Blomkamp, 2009).
- **Mourning and personal trauma:** *Seventeen Times Cécile Cassart* (dir. Christophe Honoré,

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2002); *Frantz* (dir. François Ozon, 2016); *Incendies* (dir. Denis Villeneuve, 2010); *Wild* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, 2014); *The Tree of Life* (dir. Terrence Malick, 2011); *Persepolis* (dir. Marjane Satrapi, 2007).

- **Colonialism:** *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (dir. Jeff Barnaby, 2013); *Rustic Oracle* (dir. Sonia Bonspille Boileau, 2019); *La Rivière sans repos* (dir. Marie-Hélène Cousineau and Madeleine Ivalu, 2019); *Before Tomorrow* (dir. Marie-Hélène Cousineau and Madeleine Ivalu, 2008); *Moolaade* (dir. Ousmane Sembene, 2004); *Beans* (dir. Tracey Deer, 2020).

- **Minority cultures and integration:** *L'Ange de Goudron* (dir. Denis Chouinard, 2001); *Monsieur Lazhar* (dir. Philippe Falardeau., 2011); *Before The Streets*, (dir. Chloé Leriche, 2016); *Le N \*\** (dir. Robert Morin, 2002); *Le Marais* (dir. Kim N'guyen, 2002).

The submissions in English or in French must include a title, a brief biography as well as an abstract of a maximum of 500 words. The abstract must delineate a corpus and put forward a thesis following one the angles or subjects suggested. The submissions can be sent to Prof. Karine Bertrand ([kb162@queensu.ca](mailto:kb162@queensu.ca)), Prof. Florian Grandena ([florian.grandena@uottawa.ca](mailto:florian.grandena@uottawa.ca)) and Prof. Mercédès Baillargeon ([baillarg@umd.edu](mailto:baillarg@umd.edu)) by **February 1, 2022**.

The conference will likely be held following a bimodal mode, to accommodate participants who cannot join us. Fees of \$75.00 (for those joining us via zoom) and of \$150.00 (for participants present in Kingston) will be asked, to be paid before June 1, 2022. These fees will help us pay for conference organization, space and technology.

## Bibliography

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