

Sex and the City: a Feminine Franchise

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Dalle rubriche della scrittrice canadese Candace Bushnell pubblicate sul *The New York Observer* alle avventure televisive della giovane Carrie Bradshaw andate in onda sul fino al 2014 sul *The CW Television Network*, il franchise *Sex and the City* abbraccia due decadi e include due serie tv, tre libri e due film. Affermare che *Sex and the City* è un franchise piuttosto che una serie di adattamenti, sequel e presequel, enfatizza le dimensioni industriali e collaborative della produzione delle varie parti. Il concetto di franchise come definito da Derek Johnson (2013) implica il dover combinare approcci strutturali e culturali per tenere in considerazione le strategie industriali, le pratiche discorsive e le forme narrative legate a tale nozione. L'analisi delle varie parti del franchise, i discorsi dei produttori e dei critici, e le osservazioni del contesto di produzione sottolineano quanto *Sex and the City* sia rappresentativo delle tendenze delle industrie creative e audiovisuale negli ultimi vent'anni.

From Candace Bushnell's columns published in the New York Observer to the televised adventures of the young Carrie Bradshaw broadcast on the CW until 2014, the Sex and the City (SATC) franchise spans two decades and includes two TV series, three books and two films. To say that SATC is a franchise rather than a series of adaptations, sequels and prequels, emphasizes the industrial and collaborative dimensions of the production of the various installments. The concept of franchise as defined by Derek Johnson (2013) implies that we should combine structural and cultural approaches to take into account the industrial strategies, discursive practices and narrative forms attached to the notion. The analysis of the installments of the franchise, the discourses of producers and critics, and the observation of the context of production underline how SATC is representative of the trends of the creative and audiovisual industries over the last twenty years.

Key Words: Sex and the City; Franchise; Gender; Creative industries; Production



Fig. 1: Sex and the City 3 Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/satc3quel>

In May 2014, the Twitter account @SATC3quel announced the cancellation of *The Carrie Diaries* (Harris, 2013-2014), a teenage drama launched by the CW the previous year telling the story of a young woman growing up in the 1980s, Carrie Bradshaw. This character was born twenty years before, in the columns written by Candace Bushnell for the *New York Observer*. Her story has been told to women and girls through columns, books, films and TV series, thus giving birth to a media franchise that is one of the few almost exclusively targeting women. This research focuses on the feminization of *Sex and the City* (SATC) as a media franchise, its different installments and their reception in the industry

Media franchising was defined and studied by Derek Johnson in *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (2013) in which he analyzes the historical, economic, cultural and narrative dimensions of this phenomenon. Johnson also points out how media franchises and serial narratives are evaluated (or devaluated) based on gendered representations of high and low culture (Johnson, 2011). Johnson's contribution is also central to this research because he endeavors to combine political economy and cultural studies. Before Johnson, Henry Jenkins studied some media franchises through the notion of convergence and underlined the coexistence of corporate and grassroots convergence in an approach that celebrates viewers' loyalty and involvement (Jenkins, 2008). Jenkins further notes that the realm of media franchising is masculinized. Feminist perspectives on serialized narratives have mostly focused on soap operas and their reception and they have underlined the role of gender representations in the devaluation of popular culture and mass media, and especially of serialized narratives (Ang, 1985; Brunson, 2000).

The problematic association of serialization and feminization via franchising is central to this research. In analyzing the discourses produced by and around the SATC franchise, the ways in which gender representations may have shaped its reception are examined. The notion of franchise as defined by Johnson implies that structural and cultural approaches should be combined to take into account the industrial strategies, discursive practices and narrative forms attached to the notion. The focus bears first on the serial dimension of the franchise, both within the installments and within the franchise itself. Then it moves on to how discursive practices around the franchise in the industry demonstrate the role of gender representations in the reception of the SATC franchise. Finally, the analysis reframes the representation of the writer as a means to negotiate gender representations within the franchise.

SATC: A Serial Franchise

The *SATC* franchise focuses on Carrie Bradshaw, a single New Yorker who loves expensive high-heels and is looking for love. The columns, written in the first-person, set the author as a reporter investigating the love and sex lives of Manhattan's socio-economic elite. They were made into a book by Atlantic Monthly in 1996, and by Warner Books in 1997 (Bushnell, 1996). The columns and book are the basis for the HBO series created by Darren Star, that lasted from 1998 to 2004 and includes 94 episodes, each lasting around 30 minutes. Four years after the end of the series, New Line Cinema, a subsidiary of Time Warner, produced the first *Sex and the City* movie (King, 2008). *Sex and the City 2* followed two years later (King, 2010). Both films were written and directed by Michael Patrick King who was the showrunner of the HBO series. In 2010, a few months before the second movie came out, Candace Bushnell published *The Carrie Diaries*. This "young adult book" tells the story of Carrie Bradshaw's teenage years in Connecticut. *Summer in the City* is the sequel to this prequel and was published in April 2011. In 2012, the CW picked up the pilot for *The Carrie Diaries*. This teenage drama was broadcast for two seasons (26 42-minute episodes) between January 2013 and January 2014. Despite many rumors, and the existence of a "Sex and the City 3" Twitter account, no third film or further installment of the franchise has been announced.

To say that *SATC* is a franchise rather than a series of adaptations, sequels and prequels, emphasizes the industrial and collaborative dimensions of the production of the various installments. In Europe, the word "franchise" often conjures up images of fast-food restaurant chains, like McDonald's. In fact, media and retail franchising are quite similar concepts. Indeed, "at the most basic, economic level, a franchise is a business arrangement where one party extends to another party the right to use some kind of idea or intellectual property in a new market" (Jenkins & Johnson, 2014).

In principle, franchising relies on the collaboration between a franchisor who owns an idea, a concept, a technique, etc. and independent franchisees who exploit it. Within a franchise there might be tensions between the parties and struggles amongst them to gain more control. Those tensions are the result of the necessary collaboration between the various parties involved. Those tensions do not appear in the case of brand licensing where the distributors have no power. *SATC* might be called a brand, but this brand is not simply licensed by the original author (Candace Bushnell) to several persons or companies. Instead, the various parties can claim partial authorship and authority over the characters and the universe.

Calling *SATC* a franchise is a way to comprehend *SATC* as a product. This product has been copied, just like a Louis Vuitton bag. Not only has Bushnell's novel helped launch the chick lit genre, the *SATC* brand has been copied on TV. In 2008, two new series were broadcast telling the stories of three or four female friends living busy lives in Manhattan, juggling their private and professional lives while wearing very high heels. *Cashmere Mafia* was created by Darren Star for ABC and *Lipstick Jungle* was created by Candace Bushnell for NBC. This situation was made possible by the collaborative nature of media franchising.

While retail franchising uses contractual relations to emulate vertical integration across production, distribution, and sales, media franchising pursues horizontally multiplied production of media related through some shared, familiar content, each product with its own separate considerations of distribution and consumption (Johnson, 2013, p. 41).

Media franchising delegates production whereas retail franchising mostly delegates distribution. Still, it is necessary to keep in mind the relationship between the two. The term “franchising” carries negative connotations because it emphasizes the economic nature of media production. However, the aim here is not to denounce the standardization of culture, but rather to illustrate the power dynamics involved in the collaboration of various franchise producers, from the original author to the consumer, via several other producing intermediaries.

The final aspect that is central to franchising is its serial dimension. Franchising is a way to understand the multiplication and the reproduction of culture. Media franchising implies a balance between repetition and difference. Enough elements of a narrative must be present to attract and reward the loyal viewers/readers/consumers. At the same time, there must be enough variation and novelty to justify the extension of the franchise. Ideally the franchise needs to be coherent. However, there is a difference between transmedia storytelling as defined by Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture* (2008) and franchising according to Johnson. Transmedia storytelling is an ideal form of franchising. It applies best to situations where the different installments complete one another, and neither repeat nor contradict one another. For Johnson, all transmedia narratives are franchises but not all franchises are transmedia (Jenkins & Johnson, 2014). In the case of *SATC*, the franchise was not created as such. Instead, it emerged over two decades with a series of media productions created by various parties, thus creating tensions both within and outside of the narrative. *SATC* is a serial franchise, which means that not only do the installments share a common universe, they complete each other in a chronological way and the viewers/readers get a better understanding of each part if they are familiar with the others.

Moreover, each installment is itself serialized. Bushnell’s columns were the start of the franchise. The serial dimension of the columns may have been reinforced when Bushnell was offered a publishing contract only one month after her first column appeared in the *New York Observer*. Several columns are divided into two parts. For instance, the first part of “Manhattan Menage” ends with a teaser: “End of Part One. Next: the woman in the pink scarf. And: The men reveal they’ve engaged in another kind of threesome” (Bushnell, 1995a). The second part, published three weeks later, starts with a recap reminding today’s viewers of the “previously on” sequence that has become more and more common on TV (Mittell, 2010): “Recently in this column, seven men, age 21 through late-40’s, met in the basement of a SoHo art gallery to discuss the Manhattan passion for threesomes. [...]” (Bushnell, 1995b). Mittell explains that in television this type of technique is a way to “engage viewers and enable long-term comprehension” (Mittell, 2010, p. 78). Recaps triggers viewers’ memory and create narrative expectations.

Both TV series are typical of the programs described by Mittell as they “embrace a balance between episodic and serial form, allowing for partial closure of episodes while maintaining broad narrative arcs across episodes and even seasons” (Mittell, 2010, p. 78). About the HBO series, Darren Star says:

At one point I was thinking it would be an anthology series, just Carrie and a different story every week. But when *Sex and the City* became a book, I decided to give her these friends and have her explore the issues with them (quoted in Sohn, 2002, p. 14).

Despite the title of the series, the stories of Carrie and her friends were love stories. The series thus ends with all four characters in monogamous relationships. *Sex and the City* did break new ground in its depiction of female sexuality on screen; yet, the traditional happy ending in the series’ finale undermines the subversion of the previous seasons. While the serial form is defined by the refusal of closure, the end of *SATC* brings a narrative closure that inscribes the series in the romance genre.

The movies were immediately associated with the HBO series. They do not have specific titles. To promote the second one, a gigantic “2” stood in the background of the posters behind Sarah Jessica Parker’s figure. The slogan “Carrie on” emphasized the continuity with the HBO series and the first film. The films illustrate what happens when the romance genre is transformed by serialization. As An Goris points out, romance novels often end with the union of the protagonists but do not give information on what happens after the “happily ever after” (HEA) ending. With the success of serialized narratives, however, the desire of readers/viewers to know what happens afterwards can be satisfied (Goris, 2013). This is the kind of pleasure offered by the two films. The first one finds the protagonists five years after the series’ finale dealing with being in serious romantic relationships. The film offers another happy ending when Carrie finally marries Big (after he left her at the altar), and Miranda reunites with her husband who cheated on her. The second film focuses on Carrie two years after her wedding, when boredom has settled in, thus adding another layer of “post-happily ever after.” Both films offer what Goris calls “generically progressive but ideologically conservative post-HEA representations”: even though they transgress the romance’s generic limits in breaking up unions, “the romantic union is always reinstated within the same installment as the one in which it is fractured” (Goris, 2013).

The Carrie Diaries novels were introduced as the prequel to *Sex and the City*. The cover of the first volume claims “Meet Carrie before *Sex and the City*.” The second one, *Summer in the City*, is subtitled “A Carrie Diaries Novel” and the genealogy is emphasized through the following statement: “Before *Sex and the City* there was *Summer in the City*.” A commercial ploy is the possibility of reading the first pages of the second book at the end of the paperback edition of the first one.

Through this emphasis on the serial nature of the franchise, the production companies court the readers and viewers. *Summer in the City* was published only a month before *Sex and the City 2* came out. The movie starts with a flashback to Carrie’s arrival in Manhattan

in the 1980s explaining how she met each protagonist. The stories do not exactly match, but some elements are obvious nods to the viewers and readers who might be familiar with the other installments. For instance, the voice-over explains that Carrie met Samantha Jones when she was a bartender in a club, while on screen a young Samantha crosses the street, bangs on the hood of a 1980s cab and gives the driver a finger. This scene is almost identical in the first pages of *Summer in the City*:

She holds up her hand, causing a car to screech to a halt. "Move fast." She bangs on the hood of the car and gives the driver the finger. "And always wear shoes you can run in." (Bushnell, 2011, p. 4)

Bushnell was not directly associated with the movies, but it seems very likely that either she read the script when she was writing her book, or Michael Patrick King read the first drafts of Bushnell's book before directing this prologue.

The first episode of *The Carrie Diaries* illustrates the same efforts to create bridges between the installments of the franchise. It starts with the voiceover of young Carrie Bradshaw (AnnaSophia Robb) explaining "It's always the same dream. I'm in the city, and I belong" over a montage of Carrie walking down the streets of Manhattan in a blue light reminiscent of the opening credits of the HBO series.

From the development of retail franchising in the mid-20th century to today's pervasive media franchising, "the franchise system has thus been most often mobilized through meaningful brands that motivate both franchisee and consumer loyalty" (Johnson, 2013, p. 40). In the case of the *SATC* brand, as for many other media franchises that span several decades, what is at stake is the loyalty of older consumers as much as the interest of the more recent, and often younger, ones. In an interview about her book, Bushnell declares:

The Carrie Diaries is geared for ages fourteen and up, but it's a real crossover book. I've had mothers read it and give it to their daughters and vice versa. And, of course, it's a book for fans of *Sex and the City* as well (quoted in Bushnell, 2010).

One specific aspect of *SATC* is that the latest installments target teenagers, who were barely even born when the book was released or when the original series was broadcast but who might be familiar with it thanks to syndication. *SATC* is also unique because it addresses women, who are not often the main targets of media franchising products.

Gendering the Franchise

The various installments of *SATC* were not created as parts of a franchise in the beginning. The multiple authors and production entities over the last twenty years have led to some inconsistencies in the storytelling. Yet, between 1994 and 2014, *SATC* fits into Johnson's definition of the franchise as "cultural shorthand for ongoing, serial production of culture from a set of shared, well-defined intellectual property resources" (Johnson, 2011, p. 1078). The *SATC* franchise relies on a few key components: Carrie Bradshaw, female

friendship, fashion, and love relationships. These aspects inscribe the franchise in the chick-lit/chick-flick genres. *SATC* is first devalued as a franchise, and then as a franchise targeting women. It is doubly inscribed in the gendered hierarchy between high and low culture. As a serialized narrative addressed to women, *SATC* is marked by the feminization of popular and mass culture in Western societies (Huysen, 1986, p. 47). Yet, *SATC* is a very successful franchise. The first book was re-issued in 2001, 2006 and 2008; in the US, the HBO series was syndicated on TBS and WGN and is still syndicated on E!; the movies earned around 700 million dollars in theaters worldwide.

At stake in the use of the notion of franchise is the cultural and economic legitimacy of the *SATC* books, series and movies. Johnson explains that this legitimacy is constructed along gendered lines. The franchise is the site of negotiations between “the feminized devaluation of industrially produced culture and the masculine value accorded economic rationality” (Johnson, 2013, p. 60). The uses of the word “franchise” where *SATC* is concerned testify to the gendered ambivalence of the term. Analysis of trade press articles and press releases written when the *Carrie Diaries* books, the movies and the CW TV series came out, shows that there are two main ways of using the term.

Critics use the term franchise or insist upon the links between the various installments to acknowledge their economic potential while denying them other qualities:

“Sex and the City” provides the first fresh glimpse of characters Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha since the skein went off the air four years ago. Women, particularly in big cities, are responding by buying tickets in advance, leading to numerous sold-out Friday and Saturday night shows. Film, written and directed by Michael Patrick King and reuniting the original cast, has clear advantages, and disadvantages, in terms of box office allure. On the plus side, the film has a built-in fanbase. On the other hand, the pic is rated R, making it tougher for teen girls to see it, and it may not play as well in smaller markets (McClintock & McNary, 2005).

For a series so steeped in romance, the eagerly awaited “Sex and the City” movie feels a trifle half-hearted. Although there’s pleasure in seeing HBO’s fabulous four reunited, writer-director Michael Patrick King doesn’t fully bridge the gap between TV and film — delivering major story flourishes but, too often, playing like a regular episode bloated to five times its customary length. Best in its small moments, the movie should find receptive gal pals congregating for the mother of all viewing parties, but appeal beyond that core should present New Line with less of a storybook finish than it doubtless would like (Lowry, 2008).

writer-producer-director Michael Patrick King seems to realize that for many of the franchise’s loyalists, simply experiencing the gang back together again and revisiting these characters is an event worth celebrating — something to be luxuriated in for as long as possible, like a warm bath. “Sex and the City 2” nevertheless puts all that goodwill to the test, based on the story’s limited merits (Lowry, 2010).

Even though the critics cannot deny the economic potential of the movies, they use this argument to undermine them, and write they are merely “bloated episodes” addressed to

“gal pals” and “the franchise’s loyalists.” Critics thus hesitate to compare *SATC* with the fourth installment of the Indiana Jones franchise, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Spielberg, 2008) that came out at the same time as the first *SATC* movie.

One of the most eagerly and long-awaited series follow-ups in screen history delivers the goods — not those of the still first-rate original, 1981’s “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” but those of its uneven two successors. “Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull” begins with an actual big bang, then gradually slides toward a ho-hum midsection before literally taking off for an uplifting finish. Nineteen years after their last adventure, director Steven Spielberg and star Harrison Ford have no trouble getting back in the groove with a story and style very much in keeping with what has made the series so perennially popular. Few films have ever had such a high mass audience must-see factor, spelling giant May 22 openings worldwide and a rambunctious B.O. life all the way into the eventual “Indiana Jones” DVD four-pack (McCarthy, 2008).

For some reason, “masculine” franchises are more legitimate. Even though the *SATC* movie sold out in advance on its first weekend, it is not praised as an “eagerly and long-awaited series follow-up.” The “ho-hum midsection” in a fourth film that is as uneven as number two and three, is hardly worth mentioning since the DVD four-pack will soon be in stores. On the other hand, the box office success of the first *SATC* movie and the more than 400 million dollars earned worldwide have not bought the indulgence of the critics. Indeed, they insist they are not among the “gal pals.”

In an incredibly misogynist editorial subtitled “Fifty years ago the Pill changed everything, including the movies,” Peter Bart, Executive Vice President and Editorial Director of *Variety*, sums up the prejudice women still have to face in Hollywood:

A quick glance at the summer release schedule points up this anomaly: The hot franchise movies this year are mostly chick flicks — “Sex and the City 2” and the new “Twilight Saga: Eclipse.” “Iron Man” is about to start clanking but, except for him, the studios have temporarily run out of superheroes. Unless you reach for the likes of “Jonah Hex” or “Marmaduke” (he’s a dog). Thus the girls may be dragging their boyfriends to date movies this summer that are a lot daintier than last summer’s “The Hangover.” [...] The action at the box office this summer hence will provide an appropriate metaphor for society’s contradictions. The girls will try to convince their boyfriends that the multiple wardrobe changes in “Sex and the City 2” comprise compelling dramaturgy (varicose verite instead of cinema verite) and that homoerotic vampires are more intriguing than the cast of “The Dark Knight.” Their dates may even listen. After all, the girls will be paying for the tickets and likely buying supper afterwards. Fifty years after the Pill, society is giving off very mixed signals. Sexual freedom was supposed to bring enlightenment. I actually believed that. What was I smoking? (Bart, 2010)

In an unabashedly sexist rant, Bart associates stupidity and lowbrow culture with the feminization of society while celebrating the quality of superhero movies. Criticisms against *Sex and the City 2* were especially harsh and raise the question of gender representations in an industry still very much controlled by men.

Despite those negative reviews, producers (including studios and publishers) referred to the franchise as a way to valorize female-targeted media products. Thus the press releases stress the link between the installments, the loyalty of the audience, and the renewed interest of a new generation of young women for the *SATC* universe. All these elements allow a revaluation of the franchise. It was praised for its economic performances and for its potential, thus emphasizing its institutional legitimacy.

Warner Bros., which is distributing the movie for the pared-down New Line, said the film doesn't need men to work. "With movies that appeal to boys and men, you never hear the conversation 'I hope we get the women.' We have a movie that skews heavily female, and while we would love to get as many men as possible, we can do extremely well without them," said Warners proxy of domestic distribution Dan Fellman (McClintock & McNary, 2005).

"We are incredibly thrilled," said Alessandra Balzer of Balzer & Bray. "Teenagers are rabid fans of the *Sex and the City* book and show. I can't wait to see what happens when Candace turns her sharp eye for social commentary to the other competitive jungle that is high school." Ann-Janine Murtagh, Fiction and Picture Book Publisher at HarperCollins Children's Books in the UK added "I am absolutely delighted to be publishing these two fabulous titles in the UK where Carrie Bradshaw has such a loyal following already. I am sure that Candace will offer us an irresistible insight into Carrie Bradshaw's early hopes and dreams and create stories which are sure to have universal appeal" (Roston, 2008).

For the producers of the latest installments, belonging to a franchise is extremely advantageous. This aspect is central to franchising agreements. Franchisees depend on the franchisor for their image and their communication. Extending a successful franchise is a way to minimize the risks associated with launching a new product. Thus, before launching *The Carrie Diaries*, the CW, a young network created through the merger of UPN and WB, had broadcast new versions of 1990s soap operas, *90210* (2008-2013) and *Melrose Place* (2009-2010). The media have become increasingly competitive and avoid taking risks. Franchisees benefit from the visibility and prestige of the brand. Jane Arthurs stresses this aspect:

the creation of a successful brand in this crowded market depends on the ability to innovate within a pattern of predictable pleasures to create a recognisable identity for a product that appeals to a commercially attractive audience (Arthurs, 2003, p. 83)

For professionals of the cultural industries, the *SATC* brand is a guarantee of financial success. Through extension of the franchise, the producers and publishers hope to attract the viewers and readers of previous installments.

Seriality: "the writer finding her voice"

Parallel to the rise of media franchises, the industry has witnessed the rise of the figure of the author. Thus, the new *Star Wars* movie is not simply the new *Star Wars* movie, it's J.J. Abrams' *Star Wars*. In an industrial landscape that is marked by economic convergence and the creation of larger media conglomerates, media franchising offers a suppler mode of production while guaranteeing the convergence of economic interests. The emphasis on the writer in Hollywood allows to partially mask the variety of those interests. The foregrounding of "creators" or "authors" is also a symptom of the tensions at stake in media franchising. "Media franchising has served as a site of negotiated identification for unequal creative stakeholders that variously navigate distinction, power, and fealty via their interests in shared cultural resources" (Johnson, 2013, p. 113)

Collaboration is crucial to the production of the various *SATC* installments. Bushnell sold the rights of her book to Darren Star, but she stayed involved in the writing of the first episodes. After that, the writers of the different installments passed the story and the characters on to one another. Star created the series and left Michael Patrick King in charge after the fourth season. King wrote and directed the two films. The showrunner of the TV adaptation of *The Carrie Diaries* was Amy B. Harris who had been a co-producer on HBO's *Sex and the City* and had written two episodes of the series.

The *SATC* franchise is therefore the result of a collaboration between individuals and production companies over the last twenty years. In cultural industries, collaborative work is sometimes contested by individual voices. Johnson explains that franchising is "not the replication of sameness, but a more reflexive and iterative process." In this process, individual creative voices may "pursue textual strategies of difference" (Johnson, 2013, p. 151). Candace Bushnell and Darren Star are examples of those voices fighting one another for creative authority. After the end of *Sex and the City* on HBO, Star struggled to find success again. Star and Bushnell were close friends, Bushnell wrote the *Lipstick Jungle* book at Star's house. Star tried to buy the rights from the book but was outbid by NBC (Salkin, 2007). In the Fall 2008, two very similar series were broadcast on two different networks. In the teasers, *Cashmere Mafia* (ABC) and *Lipstick Jungle* (NBC) were advertised as having been created by "the creator of *Sex and the City*" and "the author of *Sex and the City*." This example of competing claims for authority over the franchise is a crisis that illustrates the tensions over authorship and authority in media franchising.

Some writers insist on their role as author. Michael Patrick King for instance explains that he has his own vision of who Carrie is and of the stories that can be told about her:

"I'm not working on any 'Sex and the City' prequel at all," King said. "My Carrie Bradshaw started at 33, and I took her to 43. For me, the idea of going backwards and making her less evolved ... is something that I don't even imagine doing. I have no connection to the prequel." (quoted in Villarreal, 2011)

"The great gift or riches or luck is that I worked on two shows that were so full that they spilled over into people's lives and the characters were rounded enough that you could still wonder where they are," King says, [...] Acknowledging Parker's comments on a third film, King explains, "Sarah Jessica and I both know what that final chapter is. That doesn't mean it will or should be told, but I do think there's one story left. Whether it ever happens is a whole

other situation. But there's four girls, and those girls are still in my mind. There are other stories to tell and characters that haven't even been written yet." (quoted in Snetiker, 2014)

King asserts his creative vision while denying being connected to the extension of the franchise. Others, such as Stephanie Savage who was the executive producer of *The Carrie Diaries*, seem to embrace the industrial dimension of TV writing. She refers to *SATC* as a franchise that has rules that writers involved in extensions of the franchise should respect:

It's called *The Carrie Diaries* and you actually see Carrie write in her diary, so it seemed organic [to use a voiceover]. Plus *Sex and the City* had a VO [voiceover], so it seems like a convention of the franchise and a nice way to connect the two different eras in Carrie's life. The writer finding her voice... (Interview with author, 2012)

The serialization of the *SATC* universe is mostly built around the figure of Carrie Bradshaw. She is the first-person narrator of all the installments. Savage underlines the importance of Carrie's voiceover in the HBO series. According to the writer-producer, the story of the *SATC* franchise is that of Carrie finding her voice as a writer. Sarah Jessica Parker (who plays adult Carrie) and Michael Patrick King have repeatedly referred to the HBO series as the story of women "growing up."

Indeed, in the first TV series, Carrie is first presented as a columnist who is then hired by *Vogue* (s04e17, "A *Vogue* Idea") before publishing a book (s05e02, "Unoriginal Sin"). Her identity as a writer is central to the series. Her book party is described as her wedding and the ultimate achievement of her life. The movies also immediately establish her as an author: the prologue of the first movie starts thus with the voiceover announcing: "My name is Carrie Bradshaw, and I'm a writer. [...] Three years and three books later—". The *Carrie Diaries* books are also marketed as: "the story of how a regular girl learns to think for herself and evolves into a sharp, insightful writer. Readers will learn about her family background, how she found her writing voice, [...]" (Bushnell, 2010)

In each episode of the HBO series, Carrie is seen typing her column while the viewers hear the introduction through the voiceover. When the voiceover explains the theme of the episode and the question Carrie's column will try to answer, the image cuts to Carrie's computer screen so that the viewers see the question appear on their screen. This recurring image is hinted at in the *Carrie Diaries* novels:

I head up to my room, sit down in front of my mother's old Royale typewriter, and slide in a piece of paper. The Big Love, I write, then add a question mark (Bushnell, 2010, p. 39).

This highlighting of the voice and figure of the writer is a way to hide the industrial dimension of the franchise. When the production companies, which are all part of media conglomerates (mostly Time Warner, but also News Corp), foreground the writers of the franchise and feature the figure of Carrie Bradshaw as author, they foster the illusion of the franchise as the result of the imagination of creative talents and mask the industrial and economic logic that supports the extension of the *SATC* franchise. One of the

consequences of this strategy is that, in the discourses surrounding *SATC*, women's voices are louder than they often are in the media industry.

The franchise foregrounds women who are in charge of their own stories and whose discourses bear more authority. The emphasis on the individual voice is crucial in *SATC*. This idea of finding one's voice insists on the expression of one's identity as it is shaped by a variety of experiences. This idea goes with the claim that all voices are politically valid, a notion that can be linked to what Bonnie J. Dow called "lifestyle feminism" (Dow, 2002) which is a form of postfeminism. This notion that "encompasses a set of assumptions [...] having to do with the 'pastness' of feminism" (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 1) is well-represented in the franchise. For instance when in the HBO series Charlotte screams, "I choose my choice" to justify her decision to stop working and become a housewife instead (s04e07, "Time and Punishment"), or when in *The Carrie Diaries* the eponymous heroine declares:

I never thought you couldn't be a feminist if you wore pantyhose and high heels and pulled your hair back in a pretty barrette. I thought being a feminist was about how you conducted your life. (Bushnell, 2010, p. 121)

Feminism is thus reduced to personal choices and made palatable to media conglomerates and advertisers. *SATC* seems to say that writings by a female author must be *de facto* considered as "feminist". However, the emphasis on the individual sustains a liberal logic that undermines collective movements and the political dimension of feminist positions.

Conclusions

Analyzing *SATC* as a franchise deconstructs the fiction that the different installments are simply a series of adaptations initiated by individual creators. It emphasizes the economic stakes behind the production of the installments and highlights the tensions over authority and authorship. The installments of *SATC* over the last twenty years are one of the results of the emergence of cultural, economic and technological convergences in the media industry. The notion of franchise is a double-edged sword that is used to promote or to undermine a cultural product based on gendered representations. In the case of a feminine franchise, targeting women and young women, the economic success of the franchise is not always enough to rehabilitate it. To gain cultural legitimacy the franchise glorifies the figure of the female writer as the *ingénue* trying to assert her independence through finding her own unique voice. The feminine franchise can be seen as a means to show more independence of women, provided they follow the economic rules enforced by a still predominantly male dominated industry.

Nota biografica

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