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Fertile Contacts: Québec Cinema and the Other Arts

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ELSPETH TULLOCH

Although film is well established as an art form in its own right, it is also a synthetic art, one that draws upon, integrates, and converses with other arts. Indeed, some call it "the first truly intermedial medium [for its] … adaptation, convergence, and amalgamation of discrete features from literature, music, dance, theatre and painting" (Heinrichs and Spielmann, p. 6). In addition, film may rework or resist other arts. The degree to which other arts interplay with it depends, among other things, on the needs and capacities of film as a medium, the artistic or social movements within or against which individual productions may operate, the idiosyncratic interests of directors, and the availability of technological innovations. While film has exhibited periods of medial anxiety, notably with the advent of television and, later, new digital media, film has nevertheless remained a wonderfully welcoming art, as Alain J.-J. Cohen and Dominique Sipière affirm in the introduction to their collection *Les autres arts dans l'art du cinéma* (p. 12).

Even as other popular art forms have come into their own, cinematic art has continued to lend a curious ear or cast a covetous eye towards them, if at times uneasily. From using comics as script fodder to offering models against which new screen language or techniques can be forged, film can be found absorbing aspects of or otherwise interacting with past, contemporaneous, and later popular art forms. It is hardly surprising, then, that the relationship between film and one of the other arts is periodically scrutinized by groups of scholars and regularly debated by individual theorists from various disciplines [1]. Relationships among the arts are ever evolving – and to a certain extent are intermeshing as boundaries between the arts become ever more porous – and these relationships, hybridizations, and comminglings are ignored to our creative and investigative loss. Long an interest of media studies specialists, among others, the study of these relationships has been increasingly taken up by film scholars, drawing upon concepts such as remediation, intermediality, or interart theories [2]. Many of the articles herein engage – if not directly, then at least indirectly – with these concerns.

Given film's propensity to interact with a variety of other arts, the art forms examined in this issue are unabashedly diverse, ranging from the so-called serious arts to both established and emerging arts of mass distribution. From video games to web series, from rock to opera, from Proustian prose to modernist poetry, this issue testifies to the multiple art forms interacting with or against cinema in Québec. The articles here are largely unconcerned with the thorny question of hierarchization,

although one makes use of the attempt to classify art forms and one challenges the concept of hierarchization. While the contact between film and another art may manifest itself differently from example to example, it is often enriching to the receiving art (whether it is film or another art), as these studies attest. Some films incorporate the other art into the film wholesale, while others take but a fragment; some seamlessly absorb either aspects or all of another art, while others betray a sense of friction between film and the other art. The points of intersection, as delineated here, often serve as harbingers of change or signs of renewal. When dissonant, these contacts may inject a social critique or at least commentary of some sort. In one article, the author is concerned with comparing a technique found in several screen arts rather than studying an actual point of intersection between film and another art. This more technical comparison allows for the elucidation of formal innovation in a new screen art. In short, this collection of articles does not seek to offer an exhaustive survey of current research in the fields of intermediality and interart studies but rather a sampling of several directions recently taken as these areas of inquiry relate to Québec cinema.

The shooting of *Assassin's Creed: Lineage*. © Ubisoft

The first article turns its critical lens to links between film and one of the more recent forms of mass-produced art and entertainment: video games. Taking advantage of its proximity to the United States and connections to European publishers, Canada has become a significant contributor to the development of these games (Dyer-Witheford and Sharman, p. 204). Boasting "almost 70% of all large video game companies in Canada" (Secor, p. 8) and accounting for "over half of the industry's jobs" (Entertainment Software Association of Canada, p. 8), Québec stands out as a major player on the Canadian scene, employing over 8,000 people (Secor, p. 11). Montréal has grown into a major hub, drawing on the "clustering" of a digitally qualified local workforce around a major studio, Ubisoft; this generative crucible is nourished by institutions offering cutting-edge training in computer programming, art, and graphic design (Dyer-Witheford and Sharman, p. 195). The large number of creative workers involved in the development of game-related material in such a dynamic local

industry points to the social, economic, and artistic value of analyzing both the product and the industry creating and promoting it; these are activities in which researchers are already well engaged. The comparability of virtual games and film as popular art forms and the increasingly interrelated nature of the industries that generate them also invite study.

As the article "Au-delà de 'l'envie cinématographique': le complexe transmédiatique d'*Assassin's Creed*" by Dominic Arsenault and Vincent Mauger notes, the video game industry took off in Montréal with the arrival of the French-owned Ubisoft some fifteen years ago; it is the company behind *Assassin's Creed*, one of the few important video game franchises to have been fully developed locally. Of all the media offshoots of this highly successful franchise, the trilogy of short films *Lineage* (2009) best embodies, in the authors' view, the technological convergence of film and video games. Directed by the well-known Québec film director Yves Simoneau, this trilogy allows Arsenault and Mauger to illustrate a conceptual model they call *la constellation transmédiatique*, to extend the critical discussion on remediation, and to elucidate some similarities and differences between video games and film.

With the expanding application of computer technology in the screen arts, the increasing accessibility of cheap technology, and the concomitant advent of web television, web series have been proliferating and drawing increasingly larger audiences. In Québec these series include the Radio-Canada production *Les Chroniques d'une mère indigne* and the wildly popular, independent production *Tête à claques*. As with video games, web series warrant comparison with pre-existing forms and genres expressed through motion images, like film. Using two representative web series as examples, the aforementioned *Les Chroniques d'une mère indigne* (Myriam Bouchard, Québec, 2008-2010) and *Lonely Girl 15* (Miles Beckett et Greg Goodfried, U.S.A., 2006-2008), Jean Châteauvert's article "Les séries web de fiction. Interpeller" investigates *le regard-caméra* or the return gaze. Châteauvert focuses on characters that look into the camera in order to call upon or engage the web spectator. Observing that such characters typically manipulate an audiovisual device, which in turn affects the viewers' perception of the narrative, Châteauvert argues that these visual gestures or communicative acts can be distinguished from the look to or into the camera historically found in cinema and television.

While Châteauvert's study illustrates how the blossoming new screen arts are reworking traditional screen conventions, Eric Fillion's article "*Kid Sentiment*: la *parrhèsia* chez Jacques Godbout et Les Sinners" reminds us that the relationship between cinema and other popular arts has sometimes been fraught with tension. In seeking to address the so-called generation gap between youth and those over thirty in the turbulence of the late 1960s, *Kid Sentiment* (Jacques Godbout, 1967) becomes one of the first films to bring rock music to the big screen in Québec. The teenage protagonists, two members of the popular Québec group Les Sinners, eschew the loose direction of filmmaker Jacques Godbout, who hopes to document the adolescent quest for love and tenderness. In a key "time-out" scene pitting the director against his actors, the film betrays its ultimate irony: the thirty-something Godbout becomes, in spite of himself, the frustrated representative of the older generation, unable to

fathom the apparently directionless frivolity and meaningless banter of the younger one. Fillion argues that the recalcitrant youth and the rock music they consume embody the essence of Michel Foucault's concept of *parrhesia* – a term drawn from the Greek, meaning to speak freely and by extension frankly. Ultimately, for Fillion, this is the aim of both the filmmaker and the film itself. As an encounter between *cinéma direct* and fiction and between cinema and rock, the film goes beyond intergenerational conflict, giving voice, as Fillion observes, to a clash between discursive modes. As such, *Kid Sentiment* is one of the notable films of the Quiet Revolution, while the place it accords youthful forms of expression is not without resonance in today's rocky social climate.

The multiple ways that contemporary popular and mass-distributed arts intersect with cinema does not eclipse the fact that Québec's cinema, like all cinema, has an extensive history of drawing upon, synthesizing, and contributing to the on-going development of previously established art forms. The next two articles turn to literature, an art form long commented on in relation to film in the general critical literature, as the early twentieth-century French debates summarized in Jeanne-Marie Clerc's *Littérature et cinéma* exemplify (p. 11-29). Although in the past decade various researchers have continued to consider these ongoing debates as they have been unfolding on Québec literature and film [3], the study of this entangled relationship is far from exhausted, especially when matters unrelated to adaptation or transécriture are examined, when intermedial issues are raised, or, as in the case of these articles, the main object of study is shifted from literature to film or de-hierarchized altogether. The first article uses André Bazin's famous precepts on *un cinéma impur* as a springboard for a more philosophical discussion on cinema as medium of coexistence, while the second article broaches interart considerations, offering a case study on cinema's influence on literary form.

Contemplating another film in the *cinéma direct* mode – one that led the so-called Québec New Wave, Claude Jutra's *À tout prendre* (1963) – Thomas Carrier-Lafleur builds on the ideas of his book-length essay *Une philosophie du "temps à l'état pur"* (2010). In his new article "La pureté et la coexistence. Sur *À tout prendre* de Claude Jutra," the author continues his reflection on Serge Doubrovsky's concept of *autofiction* in relation to Jutra's film. As Carrier-Lafleur argues, while Jutra fictionalizes an intense love affair that he had in his thirties, the director/self-adapter both draws upon the documentary tradition in which he himself had previously worked and engages philosophically with Marcel Proust's autofictional novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The result is a film that embodies documentary and fictional modes, affirming their cinematic coexistence. Informed by personal history and literary intertext, the film allows Jutra to become the reader of himself, as Carrier-Lafleur shows. Jutra's previously unpublished manifesto on this film, which Carrier-Lafleur uses as supporting evidence, is included in its entirety in the section "Documents."

Rafaël Chamberland's article "Le cinéma comme agent de l'exotisme chez Marcel Dugas" shifts the spotlight to poetry, revealing how early cinema influenced poetic form in Dugas's modernist *Psyché au cinéma* (1916). Chamberland shows how the playful call for one type of fanciful cinema or another at the beginning of each prose poem in the collection serves as a unifier, knitting together – editing

together as it were – the disparate sequences, combining their individual expressions of alterity and ultimately evoking a veritable cinema of the psyche. In so doing, he points out the prescient role Dugas played in Québec letters by exploring the evocative ways in which an emerging visual art could inform verbal imagery. An example of the procedure Dugas uses can be found in the "Documents" section, where several of the prose poems have been reproduced, one under the heading "Douches rapides" and two under the heading "Douches gémissantes."

Although not primarily concerned with the theme of this special issue, Christian Poirier and Mélissa Thériault's article "Cinéma, éthique et politique. La société québécoise au prisme de *Réjeanne Padovani*" gives consideration to the judicious incorporation of yet another so-called serious or high art form – opera – into a particular film narrative, a political satire directed by Denys Arcand. Released in 1973, *Réjeanne Padovani* offers a stinging indictment of both a political system that colludes with powerful cliques in the construction industry and a social milieu rent by greed and betrayal. The insertion of operatic aria and soaring line adds ironic moments of rarefied passion and intense beauty to the film's grim atmosphere, while also reinforcing its more tragic narrative concerns. As corrupt provincial and municipal governments forge ahead with a contested *autoroute* and as shady characters assault investigative journalists and brutally quash youthful protestors, a lone woman, Réjeanne, seeks to reunite with her estranged children. In the authors' reading, the association of this eponymous character, the wife of a crooked contractor, with the eponymous character of Georges Bizet's most famous opera sets Réjeanne up as the Carmen of *la Belle Province*, as a representative of liberty, integrity, and authenticity. Her eventual murder at the hands of one of her husband's henchmen and its cover-up within the cement walls of the controversial *autoroute* carry uncannily ominous overtones for contemporary spectators. Making a nuanced distinction between *le* and *la politique* and drawing on the scholarship of various political ethicists, Poirier and Thériault make a cogent argument for why this film remains relevant today.

This article and several of the others remind us of the continued relevance of considering context – whether social, political, or cultural – particularly when reading locally grounded texts. This reminder suggests questions regarding the different ways cinema and other art forms engage, for one reason or another, with matters of cultural identity and plurality. What might such differences mean, for example, for future comparisons between film and video game production in Québec? Whereas the former has been strongly anchored in the local, the other, highly commodified, is geared to the global. What does this situation mean for the circulation of cultural references and social commentary, or for the fostering of cultural identity or cultural plurality? While researchers have begun to tackle these questions, they seem large enough to merit continued consideration in the context of Québec specifically [4].

Certainly the sense of synergy emanating from the flourishing cinematic and new media art scenes in Québec suggests that more critical attention to the interchange and dialogue among these arts and their creators as well as to the comparative aspects of their form and production is warranted. Moreover, the sheer quantity of existing cinematic material beckons yet more and closer delineations

and dissections of links already made between and among Québec cinema and other arts. If the prospects for future research are not limitless, they are certainly rich; their existence is as assured as the light, image, and motion that first enticed curious spectators into the cinema. Indeed, this area of study is as complex as film's mingling with the other arts, as fascinating as its foray into the digital age, as promising as a blank screen.

New Section

On behalf of the general editor, I am pleased to announce the introduction of a new section "Notes de recherche." Graduate students and academic researchers alike are invited to submit summaries of research projects related to cinema in Québec. This issue features a summary of the master's thesis by Gabriel Laverdière « Poétiques identitaires. Refigurations des identités québécoise et homosexuelle dans le film *C.R.A.Z.Y.* » (Université Laval, 2010). It examines the intersection of national and gay identity in Jean-Marc Vallée's film *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (2005). Laverdière argues that the film, set between the Quiet Revolution and the 1980 referendum, a period typically associated with political debate, expresses a contemporary and ambivalent point of view, a more postmodern sensibility favouring an ethics of community founded on the acceptance of difference.

Acknowledgements

NOTES

[1] Since the general literature on this topic is vast, I will, given the focus of the journal, limit my references to some examples from Québec or about Québec cinema. A notable early collection of essays is found in the special issue of *Protée*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1991) dedicated to *Le cinéma et les autres arts* (1991), edited by Denis Bellemare and Rodrigue Villeneuve. Based on papers presented at the colloquium on *Le cinéma et les autres arts* organized by the Association québécoise des études cinématographiques (November 14-18, 1990) at the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, it addresses

several arts in relation to cinema, including architecture, dance, and photography. Broad theoretical considerations of the intermedial relations among the arts have since been taken up by *Le centre de recherche sur l'intermédialité* (Université de Montréal) with its flagship journal *Intermédialités: Histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques*. Of related interest is the work of *NT2: Nouvelles technologies, nouvelles textualités, le laboratoire de recherche sur les œuvres hypermédiatiques* (Université du Québec à Montréal), and *La chaire de recherche sur les cultures numériques* (Université Laval). For recent monographs specifically concerned with cinema and one of the other arts in Québec, see *Le film sur l'art, l'art et le cinéma: fragments, passages* (2005), a book-length essay on art films by Gilles Marsolais, which surveys examples from both world cinema and Québec. Of particular note is its chapter on "*Le cinéma et les autres arts*," which includes a discussion on films about the art of cinema. For analysis of cinematic adaptations of theatre, see the monograph *Stage-Bound: Feature Film Adaptations of Canadian and Québécois Drama* by André Loiselle (2003). For a more personal snapshot of cinema's reception as an art form in Québec from the perspective of creators and critics, see the summary of a round table discussion held with various artists and a literary critic on *Les autres arts et le cinéma* reported in *24 Images* no. 95 (winter 1998-1999). See note 3 for references on cinema and literature.

[2] For an overview of some of these theoretical concerns as they relate to cinema see Ágnes Pethő (2010). Also see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's seminal *Remediation: Understanding the New Media* (1999).

[3] The special issue on *Littérature québécoise et cinéma*, assembled by Laurent Mailhot and Benoît Melançon for the *Revue d'histoire littéraire du Québec et du Canada français*, no. 11 (Winter-Spring 1986), was billed as the first collection examining links between Québec literature and film. For more recent samplings of this type of work, see the conference proceedings edited by Gilles Dupuis, Carla Fratta, and Manon Riopel (1997), and Carla Fratta in collaboration with Jean-François Plamondon (2008), the collection edited by Michel Larouche (2003), the special issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing (Literatures, Cinemas, Cultures)*, no. 76 (Spring 2002), and the monograph *Screening Gender, Framing Genre: Canadian Literature into Film* by Peter Dickinson (2007). For a useful filmography of adaptations made in Québec, see Xiangwen Hu and François Gagnon's *Adaptations filmiques au Québec: Répertoire 1922-1996* (1996).

[4] The recent collection *Enjeux des industries culturelles au Québec: Identité, mondialisation, convergence*, edited by Claude Martin et al. (2012), provides useful contextual background to some of the issues.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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Photo insert (introduction and home page): the shooting of *Assassin's Creed: Lineage*. © Ubisoft