

## The NFB's Turn to Heritage: Revisiting Montreal in Luc Bourdon's *La mémoire des anges*

### ABSTRACT

Released in 2008, Luc Bourdon's *La mémoire des anges* (2008) consists of footage of Montreal shot between 1947 and 1967, selected from some 120 films in the National Film Board (NFB)'s collection. A product of the NFB's heritage strategy and of the long struggle for urban preservation in Montreal, *La mémoire des anges* participates in both the fabrication of the city's image and the valorization of its heritage. This article focuses on the film's dual heritage, placing it into the context of today's global push for cultural preservation—a drive that is in part motivated by urban economies—before analyzing how the film skirts the “heritage discourse,” making selective use of the NFB archives and adopting a formal composition that critically updates the past.

### RÉSUMÉ

Sorti en 2008, *La mémoire des anges* de Luc Bourdon est constitué d'images de Montréal filmées entre 1947 et 1967, tirées de quelques 120 films de la collection de l'Office national du film (ONF). En s'insérant dans la stratégie patrimoniale de l'ONF, et en évoquant les mouvements de protection de l'héritage urbain, *La mémoire des anges* contribue à la fabrication de l'image de la ville et à la mise en valeur de son histoire. En se penchant sur ce double héritage, nous le plaçons d'abord dans le contexte actuel de la campagne globale pour la préservation culturelle—une campagne motivée en grande partie par les économies urbaines—avant d'analyser comment le film contourne le « discours patrimonial » en faisant un usage sélectif des archives de l'ONF et en adoptant une composition formelle qui actualise le passé de manière critique.

**KEYWORDS:** audiovisual heritage; urban heritage; urban economies; digital archives; deindustrialization; city-symphony film

In 2009, the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) chose to celebrate its seventieth anniversary with a screening of Luc Bourdon's *La mémoire des anges* (2008) at the open-air amphitheatre in Montreal's Parc La Fontaine. The film was an ideal showpiece for the occasion: released in 2008, it consists of footage of Montreal shot between 1947 and 1967, selected from some 120 films in the NFB's collection. Piecing together these archived images, *La mémoire des anges* pays a melancholy tribute to the NFB and the Montreal cityscape's shared history.

A product of this dual heritage, *La mémoire des anges* shows a series of historical transitions that have given shape to today's Montreal. These include material shifts in the city's architecture and built environment, the social and political transformations of the Quiet Revolution, and the advent of media practices that, like the *cinéma direct*, would produce images of a distinctive historical stamp. The film's survey of the intense modernization that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s also gives a sense of the futurity that so heavily marked the period. Like other recent attempts to assess the legacy of "yesterday's tomorrows,"<sup>1</sup> the film is an indication that the past's forward-looking temporality has given way to today's inflated retrospection on its multiple legacies. In the case of the city, this first becomes evident in the 1970s, with the efforts to conserve what today we call the urban heritage or *le patrimoine urbain*. The case of the cinema comes into view later, with the NFB's search for new ways to protect and distribute what it recently began calling its "audiovisual heritage" (National Film Board of Canada 2008: 17).

The growing institutionalized valorization of these distinct kinds of heritage seeks to bring the past closer to the present through targeted investments in culture, which in turn touch on the temporal horizon through which we experience the cinema and urban space. This strategy is by no means unique to Montreal or the NFB. Over the last thirty years, heritage and preservation discourses have changed the present's relation to traces of the past around the globe. After studying the extent of the heritage phenomenon, several scholars have concluded that our present is "possessed by the past" or that the past has been colonized by the present: in brief, that the "heritage" discourse is diluting the temporal disjuncture between historical epochs.<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps most visible in cities, where concentrations of historic buildings have long been vulnerable to the "spatial fixes"<sup>3</sup> that drive cycles of new urban constructions. Luc Noppen underlines the proliferation of urban heritage—the focus of his research chair at the Université de Québec à Montréal—in the context of globalization of cultural exchanges. He argues for a method that will analyze urban heritage in terms of the physical and memorial dimensions that participate in "the fabrication of its image," and will study both its "discourses" and the material "valorization" in order to gauge the criteria for its processes of "selection, conservation, *mise en valeur* and interpretation" (Noppen n.d.).<sup>4</sup>

A product of the NFB's heritage strategy and the long struggle for urban preservation in Montreal, *La mémoire des anges* participates in the fabrication of the city's



Fig. 1. *La mémoire des anges*. Réalisé par Luc Bourdon. Produit par Christian Medawar, Les shop Angus, chute de film – collection Archives ONF. Photo tirée de la production ©2008. Courtesy of Office national du film du Canada. All rights reserved.

image and the *mise en valeur* of its heritage. While the film seems representative of today's global push for cultural preservation, and while local heritage is unquestionably a determining factor in its production, this study also explores how the film diverges from contemporary heritage discourses. In what follows, I turn first to the kinds of heritage that intersect in *La mémoire des anges* before analyzing how the filmmaker's selective use of the NFB archives points to elements of the past that have not been salvaged by "heritage," including the temporal complexity by which the film escapes the discourse's "potential for permanence."

### A Double Heritage

In its strategic plan for 2008–13, the NFB underlines the urgency to digitalize its collection of "heritage works," conserving it from physical degradation and distributing it through more accessible interfaces (National Film Board of Canada 2008). Digital remastering has made possible the re-release of "added-value NFB classics" while, on the distribution side, recent investments in new digital conversions have kept pace with the use of new platforms, allowing different interfaces, from online films in HD to iPhone and iPad applications (National Film Board of Canada 2008: 14). The NFB's use of these new distribution technologies is explicitly designed to access economic networks. In the five-year plan, the NFB links the new technologies to the need for a business model that "justifies" the renewal of

lapsed rights and provides opportunities for public-private investments (15). The model calls for a new openness to international private enterprises from Brazil, Singapore and elsewhere, which pass through the NFB before engaging with the larger Canadian audiovisual industry. The report argues that the NFB's national collection is at once a global one, an "invaluable heritage for Canadians and for the world" that the NFB will conserve and disseminate anew (13). In short, the NFB's turn to heritage combines digital technologies with openness to the global market.

*La mémoire des anges* is tailored to the NFB's new strategy. This explains why it was chosen to commemorate the NFB's seventieth anniversary, and why it was produced only recently despite Bourdon having presented the idea some twenty years ago.<sup>5</sup> As part of the NFB's drive to valorize its "audiovisual heritage" (17), the film and its recycled clips were pushed quickly into the new digital-distribution networks shortly after its theatre release. The NFB Web site devotes five pages to the film, giving *La mémoire des anges* more coverage than any other single film in the archives. These pages function as a heritage network for the extended archive that holds the original material. While the main page presents the full film, trailers and clips of an interview with the filmmakers, the other pages offer full versions of several of the films from which Bourdon culled the images for *La mémoire*. This allows Internet users to reverse the process undertaken by Bourdon; instead of editing analogical samples into a single film, *La mémoire* becomes a kind of hypertext that allows viewers to move from one of its clips to the digitalized version of the full film in which the clip originally appeared. This reversible "sampling,"<sup>6</sup> the word Bourdon uses to describe his editing process, is representative of the NFB's heritage discourse, which emerges as a new institutional strategy in conjunction with digital technologies and globalized cultures. To the same degree that it fits with this new strategy, *La mémoire des anges* also holds traces of the history that led to what Michèle Garneau calls the NFB's "*démarche patrimoniale*" (2010: 2).

The NFB's strategic turn to "heritage" derives from a shift in the balance of production and distribution caused by budget cuts that began in the 1970s and accelerated through the 1980s. Over the long term, these cuts created conditions unfavourable to the making of the kinds of films that appear in *La mémoire des anges*, by forcing a series of changes: the diminution of exclusive in-house productions and a shift to private-public co-productions, with a downturn in overall output; the replacement of full-time in-house filmmakers with short-term contracts for all stages of production—from shooting to editing—which halted the long-term collaborations that typified the earlier years; and a change in the film aesthetic that had developed over twenty years, and that had established a specific kind of rapport between filmmaker and documentary subject, as well as positing correlative forms of sociality (Froger 2010).<sup>7</sup> As such, this shift marks the end of a series of elements that, taken together, provided the conditions of possibility for the transition from the Griersonian school that gave the NFB its signature style in

the 1940s to the *cinéma direct* that took shape with handheld cameras and synchronized sound.

*La mémoire des anges* shows how this transition toward the *cinéma direct* implies a different image of social space. For example, Michel Brault invented a hand-held filming style using a wide-angle lens that allowed him to be physically close to the people he filmed, establishing a tacit agreement of mutual presence with the filmed subjects who interacted with the camera (Brault 2004).<sup>8</sup> Among the images taken from Brault, Bourdon chooses a shot taken from the midst of a crowd that jostles the camera as a young woman gives it a look of friendly complicity. This contrasts sharply with the steady and distanced images of the Griersonian school, which, Brault quipped, taught its young cameramen that “to make beautiful images one must be, above all, well-seated” (quoted in *La direct avant la lettre*). The use of synchronized sound also eliminated the Griersonian voice-of-God narration; filmmakers began to prefer having subjects narrate their experiences in their own words and intonations, without any voiceover. As has been discussed elsewhere, and as *La mémoire des anges* makes clear, this new style coincided with and participated in the social and political changes that were then bringing about a new era in Montreal and Quebec.

*La mémoire des anges* shows the invention of this aesthetic, but only hints at how the same filming techniques would eventually take on political overtones, often in urban contexts. For instance, Maurice Bulbulian’s well-known *La p’tite Bourgogne* (1968), excerpts of which Bourdon cites, shows the shifting urban landscape through new housing projects and infrastructure development, focusing on its social effects by looking at disadvantaged citizens’ attempts to counter the changes through political activism. The *cinéma direct* techniques allow for a greater proximity to the activists, who articulate their own concerns through the stories they tell. *La p’tite Bourgogne* was a “flagship film” for the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program<sup>9</sup> that flourished in the 1970s and embraced all aspects of urban administration and development through two subseries, *Urbanos* and *Urba2000*.<sup>10</sup> This strong political orientation also reached beyond Challenge for Change, marking several films that the NFB ultimately censored on the heels of the October Crisis. According to Caroline Zéau, the NFB used “the pretext” of budgetary restrictions to discontinue the program and curtail other forms of political expression (2006: 426).<sup>11</sup> By deliberately slowing the production of this style of filmmaking, the NFB began downsizing production as a whole, effectively beginning the shift toward the institution the NFB is today. Almost imperceptibly, the NFB turned toward the economic rationalization and political neutrality that would eventually lead to the 2008–13 business plan, which emphasizes distribution and the valorization of its archived collection.

In its histories of both the cinema and the city, *La mémoire des anges* sits between these two periods. If the historical changes that curtailed the *cinéma direct* also

prepared the ground for the NFB's recent focus on its "audiovisual heritage," *La mémoire des anges*, looking back, retains that aesthetic's political engagement and sociality in its images of the urban environment. On one hand, it shows the transition from one film style to another—from Grierson to Brault—and the invention of a new aesthetic that coincided with many other shifts that marked Quebec's entrance into modernity. On the other, it is the consequence of a decision to truncate this aesthetic's political potential, reduce production and, eventually, turn to heritage. Ironically, the concern for the heritage that arose as the 1960s' cinematic aesthetic declined also produces a film whose contents show that selfsame aesthetic taking shape. Further, as the historical valorization of heritage in Quebec is strongly shaped by the urban context, *La mémoire des anges* shows the traces of the urban activism that combined concerns like those shown in Bulbulian's film with the struggle to save the city's heritage buildings. Before analyzing how *La mémoire des anges* recuperates this activist tradition, in both its content and its form, I will review the urban context of heritage.

Since the 1960s, the heritage debate has risen in volume and pitch, as it has followed the rise and subsequent changes of multiple forms of cultural preservation. In a recent book, Martin Drouin divides Montreal's heritage movement into two periods: a first phase beginning in the 1970s that saw clashes between conservationists and real-estate developers, and a second phase in which heritage discourses became an agenda item for municipal legislation, urban development and architectural preservation. These initial movements marked a shift away from the 1960s' "idéologie de rattrapage,"<sup>12</sup> an ideology that emphasized growth and progress, imposing a modernist ethos whose buildings disregarded the existing urban fabric and local architectural styles (Place Ville Marie, Radio-Canada). Countering this trend, citizens' movements like Sauvons Montréal, L'association Espaces Verts and Héritage Montréal<sup>13</sup> sought to ensure that building projects would remain close to the vernacular and intimate in scale.

The heritage movement that arose in the 1970s owed much to earlier citizen groups (as seen in Bulbulian's *La p'tite Bourgogne*) that focused their energies on social issues: health, housing, pollution and so on. While these first groups provided a plan for how to organize and take action, the heritage movement also diverged from them in important ways. First, the movement initially focused on specific buildings, such as the Van Horne mansion, and only turned to industrial buildings in working-class neighbourhoods once the movement has become consolidated, in its second phase.<sup>14</sup> Second, as Jean-Claude Marsan shows in *Montréal: Une esquisse d'un future*, the early concern for conservation quickly became part of a real-estate lexicon that adopted the heritage discourse in order to market high-end apartment complexes; this discursive appropriation was a pivotal factor in the transition between the heritage discourse's two phases.<sup>15</sup> Third, as I will show in my analysis of *La mémoire des anges*, the heritage discourse focused on

the built environment but not on the cultures that inhabited it and gave it other kinds of meaning.

The changes that have ushered in the second phase of the heritage struggle are not specific to Montreal or other local identities, but coincide with a shift in concerns for cultural preservation on a global scale. Heritage is everywhere. Recent studies focus on its proliferation in concerned citizens' movements; new policies at several tiers of government; international declarations and conventions promoted by organizations like ICOMOS and UNESCO; and, perhaps most visibly, new museums, including "living museums" and "museum cities."<sup>16</sup> In several perspicacious readings of the "allegory of heritage" that manifests itself in the history of urban space and architecture, Françoise Choay compares its contemporary expressions to earlier preservation discourses. The specificity of the latest stage, which began in the 1960s and accelerated through the 1980s, comes from its gushing abundance—the "inflation" of conservationist rhetoric and the "fetishism" of the past (2006: 224)—and its ubiquity, emerging everywhere for virtually everything, for culture and nature alike. For Choay, this proliferation is a direct consequence of globalization, a term she uses to refer to two main elements that ground her materialist analysis of heritage: its valorization, or *mise en valeur*, and the technological means of its dissemination.

Choay's analysis of the cultural "value" of heritage demonstrates its convergence with its status as an economic investment, a concern that we found in the NFB's strategic plan to release "added-value" editions of its heritage collection. Briefly, the "heritage industry" has been harnessed by the urban economy where traces from the past are concentrated (1999: 158), but has also become of increasing consequence for entire national economies.<sup>17</sup> This is most obviously tied to the tourist industry, where it dovetails naturally with the "staged authenticity" that has long been the magnet attracting local and foreign visitors.<sup>18</sup> But Choay also shows that the lines between the tourism sector and current real-estate development are blurred, and that neither can be separated from the context of global competition between cities.<sup>19</sup> An example of the "expediency of culture," heritage is one of the pre-eminent uses of culture as a resource being exploited in urban contexts around the globe.<sup>20</sup>

Choay is equally concerned with how communications media have distilled heritage—and urban and architectural heritage, in particular—into a visual image. These new media are having profound effects on culture, transforming the way we visually perceive traces of the past. While the *quattrocento* invented a way of seeing that appropriated the material past for historical knowledge and aesthetic experience, and the 19th century began preserving cities' built structures, today's media revolution has changed these traces into economic goods packaged for consumption (2006: 319–20). The city passes through multiple mediations and screens, as much for those who inhabit it as for those who visit its iconic sites. In Choay's

words: “The consequence of this primacy of the visual image is the dematerialization [*déréalisation*] of urban signs. Having become a mere framework for a world of images, they appeal only to an immediate appropriation by vision. They are given in the instant, without effort, and lose their physical and symbolic density” (2006: 142–43). This echoes Michael Sorkin’s analyses of today’s urban “theme parks,” which show that “the preservation of physical remnants of the historical city has superseded attention to the human ecologies that produced and inhabit them”; urban renewal creates architectures of deception that become unhinged from the urban fabric, a play of semiotic codes that occludes the ties to city life.<sup>21</sup> Heritage has become an iconic discourse that conserves the facade but little of the building’s contents, much like the spate of Montreal’s religious buildings that have been converted into condominiums over the last decade.

These two factors point to a third: a shift in the perception of time. The fabrication of a city’s media image comes increasingly from the digital technologies plugged into global networks, its authenticity tied to “the surface of the present” that brings the past ever closer through the heritage it unceasingly produces (Choay 1999: 168). As François Hartog argues, the heritage discourse corresponds to a historicity where the present colonizes the past. Unlike the preceding “regime of historicity” that was oriented toward the future, today’s *présentisme* annexes the past—or a certain past—through a peculiar way of showing its traces. The way of bringing the past closer implies a “regime of visibility” that frames its traces in proximity with an elastic and inflated present (181). Following Hartog, Noppen and Lucie K. Morisset argue that these regimes of historicity are intrinsic to the ways of seeing the traces of the past, and that studying the built heritage means considering the superposition of multiple “images and usages” of the past: “it is in their [the artists’] gaze, in our gaze, that heritage is now born” (2005: 65).<sup>22</sup>

These readings show how heritage discourse has invested in the city’s mediated images, and call for a critical position before its dominant way of seeing. For Choay, this means rejecting the hegemony of the eye and the seductions of photographic or digital images, and establishing an unmediated bodily interaction with buildings that will “traverse the mirror” of the heritage discourse to develop a new “art of the trace” (1999: 195–98). For us, it means analyzing how *La mémoire des anges* presents a distinct and critical approach to the image, one that emerges in a specific media practice that offers another way of seeing the city’s past. Paraphrasing Noppen and Morisset, it means analyzing the degree to which the film offers a distinct “image” and suggests a different “usage.” If it is correct to say that heritage spreads through communication networks that favour the image, then it is apposite to ask what kind of audiovisual practice can give another sense to the past’s visible traces. While *La mémoire des anges* certainly operates with the same digital technologies that feed today’s world of images, it seems to create a different logic of visual signs, sidestepping heritage’s smooth cultural continuity with

the present. Taking film to be an art of time made visible, my analysis asks how it can be used to perform a kind of culture jamming with the signs of the heritage industry.

### Ways of Seeing the Past

The NFB's strategic plans for *La mémoire des anges* arise at this crossroads of urban heritage and the digital image. Yet while the film's production context is strongly defined by heritage, its selection of images opens questions concerning the degree to which it adheres to that discourse's way of seeing the past. A close analysis suggests that the film reframes the dominant heritage message in Montreal's local context in at least three ways. First, its overall narrative thrust stresses the loss of elements that fall beyond the purview of preservation, which remains focused on prestige buildings more than workers' neighbourhoods and cultures.<sup>23</sup> Second, although the film's focus on elements of the urban infrastructure that have escaped heritage concerns is seemingly oriented toward the past, this in fact points to ongoing concerns in contemporary Montreal; *La mémoire des anges* thus makes use of the political filmmaking style that has progressively declined within the NFB since peaking in the 1970s. Third, the filmmaker's repeated concern for the film's formal construction invites an analysis of the ways in which its juxtaposition of images and editing rhythms create a temporal complexity that escapes heritage discourse's *présentisme*.

The film's content shows what has been irretrievably lost in Montreal in the destruction that marked the transition to the Jean Drapeau era. The first song used in the film, "The Song of Jericho," sung a cappella by the Commodores, captures this general thrust with a refrain about how the "walls come tumbling down," and anticipates the film's final images: shots of buildings falling as wrecking balls swing through old stone walls and French colonial spires, edited together to a slow blues rhythm. Between these two moments—which poetically evoke Walter Benjamin's angel of history—the film focuses on elements that have disappeared from the selective urban memory of both the cityscape and heritage. Destruction is a key catalyst for the heritage movement, of course, but the salvage efforts focus on the built structures—especially the facades—and not on the cultures surrounding them.

For instance, *La mémoire des anges* favours images of manufacturing and workers. Images of heavy industry appear in a long sequence of foundries and metalworks. The growth of these industries from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries concentrated in the Lachine Canal area, which simultaneously housed several working-class neighbourhoods that appear in *La mémoire des anges*: St. Henri, Petit Bourgogne, Griffintown and others. These neighbouring areas entered into decline when the canal was closed to shipping in 1970, a first step toward

deindustrialization that continued steadily throughout the 1980s until the area became a concentrated site of real-estate investment in the 1990s. Investment strategies to revive part of this area include the Cite du multimédia, a concentration of smart buildings hosting high-tech industries attracted to provincial employment subsidies and tax breaks; companies specializing in wired technologies now thrive behind the facades of old steel foundries.<sup>24</sup> A more recent example of the same trend comes from the images of women at a dressmakers' union local, where rows of sewing machines hum in concert. These remind us that the clothing and textile industry has entered into decline after reaching its peak in 2002, when new trade liberalization treaties pushed the industries into recession. Quebec's local production—the most important nationwide and largely based in Montreal—saw the greatest losses in Canada; by 2005, it had fallen by 40 per cent, accounting for 60 per cent of the national drop.<sup>25</sup>

These images of manual labour play a dual role. Showing the twilight of the industrial economy, they hint at the new activities that have emerged in their place, including the digital technologies that Choay considers as an integral part of the heritage discourse. They also remind us that the deindustrialization of urban economies is a cultural process, one that investments in preservation seldom acknowledge. As Steve High and David Lewis argue, the turn to tourism to “re-tool for the post-industrial area” forgets the implied “seismic cultural shift” for what were formerly blue-collar local communities (30–31). The film integrates the images of manual labour into scenes of working-class cultures.

In *La mémoire des anges*, the images of lost neighbourhoods show the daily activities of the classes that inhabited them: talking on a street corner, singing in the pubs, diving into the local swimming hole, playing ball in the alleys or pitching horseshoes in the courtyard. Just before the credits roll, a man pets his dog while another man decorates his car for a wedding; the final montage of images of destruction gives way to washed-out images of everyday life in the forgotten Faubourg à m'lasse neighbourhood shortly before the area was levelled to build the Habitations Jeanne-Mance. (Significantly, these closing images are the only ones that do not come from the NFB archives, having been given to the filmmakers by one of fellow NFB filmmaker Norman McLaren's former assistants.) These cultural changes are similarly evident in the images of the debauchery on the Main—mostly culled from *Adultes avec réserve... (1962)*—that Drapeau purged as part of his modernization platform (Weintraub 1996: 86). As Bourdon mentions, even the shots of the crowds, which interact with the camera in a manner specific to that historical moment, are not present in today's cinema to the same degree or in the same way.

*La mémoire des anges* shows how little has been salvaged in the transition from a manufacturing to an information economy, where the signs and icons of “heritage” package the city for the consuming eye. And just as it shows a past that is irre-

trievably lost, and invisible to heritage, it also shows a past that continues to weigh on the present and similarly escapes heritage's concerns. In the tradition of Bulbulian's *La petite Bourgogne* and the Challenge for Change series it heralded, *La mémoire des anges* expresses poetically what the activist cinema voiced politically.

This point centres on the Turcot interchange, where highways 15, 20 and 720 intersect, leading down to the Rive Sud, up Décarie, and toward downtown or Dorval. One of the most important mega-projects from the 1960s, the interchange has recently been slated for renovations or reconstruction. In 2007, some four years after the interchange structure began dropping concrete slabs on the lower levels, the Ministère des Transports du Québec (MTQ) released a plan that would build a new highway where the residences of 780 rue St. Rémi now stand, before demolishing the existing lanes. Local residents are contesting the project, forming a coalition with other neighbourhood-rights groups, environmental organizations and proponents of urban mass transit (Mobilisation Turcot).<sup>26</sup> Pressure from the coalition, along with the 2008 financial crisis, resulted in a revised proposal, which the MTQ presented in April 2010, delaying the project until at least early 2012.<sup>27</sup> In order to underline the backwardness of the MTQ's proposal in its relative indifference toward questions relating to mass transit and ecological impacts, concerned citizens' groups organized "retro" protests: protesters, disguised in period fashions, marched to period music, evoking the Drapeau era to draw parallels between the unilateral governing style behind the 1960s mega-projects, including Turcot, and the current government's decision-making process.<sup>28</sup>

Released a year after the MTQ's first plan and the ensuing controversy, *La mémoire des anges* includes montage sequences of the Turcot area that can be read as an intervention in the renewed debate. The scene's opening images show this part of Montreal as it looked in the 1950s: smoke from a passing train fills the screen, joining the smoke rising from industrial stacks in the distance; a stone angel, superimposed by the filmmakers, appears momentarily in the mist, before the camera cuts away to trains entering the Turcot roundhouse. Once the largest roundhouse in Canada, the building was torn down in 1962 to make way for the interchange, completed in 1966. The image of the roundhouse also shows 780 St. Rémi, the residential structure housing some 200 apartments that is today threatened by a new cycle of capital investment in infrastructure (see Fig. 1). Turcot returns near the film's conclusion, in a five-minute montage that begins with shots of the new interchange while, on the soundtrack, we hear Jean Drapeau calling for unfettered urban circulation.<sup>29</sup> This montage immediately precedes the film's images of destruction, as if to show the ensuing consequences of the interchange's original construction. Significantly, the sequence also includes several archival images of the Turcot overpass that *do not* come from the 1960s, but are culled instead from Jacques Giraldeau's *Les amoureux de Montréal*, released in 1992. With this singular breach of his declared mandate—to use only images from

the 1950s and 1960s—Bourdon takes a jump from the 1960s into the future, or into a more recent past, without ever ceasing to be up-to-date.

Giving Turcot a privileged place, *La mémoire des anges* relieves itself of its preservationist patina and teases its way into an ongoing debate on the city's infrastructure. Like the "retro" protests, it reignites an activist media practice that once flourished at the NFB and, unlike the heritage discourse, it frames the past's ongoing presence critically, questioning the basis on which a building or structure is selected for preservation or slated for destruction. The past is not a collective museum or an archive for everyone, but an ongoing social confrontation with winners and losers. It is not consensual, but a source of continued dissension. From the Commodores to the final sequence, the film's retrospective adopts an activist gaze that shows a repeating cycle of creative destruction.<sup>30</sup> The temporal complexity that structures the critical dialogue of these two characteristics—the focus on elements overlooked by the heritage discourse, and an activist use of the past—pivots on the film's formal composition, the third dimension of our analysis.

Comparing *La mémoire des anges* to the city-symphony genre gives an initial sense of its temporal complexity. As Bourdon explains, the NFB's intentions were to make *La mémoire* with "samples" culled from other films, basing the montage on sequences that were themselves structured around the era's music, including tunes from Raymond Levesque, Willy Lamothe, Paul Anka and Oscar Peterson, as well as, from abroad, Igor Stravinsky and Charles Trenet. Splicing these clips together, the film shows us life in Montreal through thematic clusters that relate to everyday activities (work, leisure, sports, dating, consumerism, faith, mourning, etc.) and the occasional special event (Queen Elizabeth's 1957 visit or Expo 67, which appears in the closing credits). *La mémoire des anges* shares several of the city-symphony's characteristics: the attention to daily gestures; the intercutting of shared activities and private moments; the unspecified narrative drift, reduced to an all-encompassing "day in the life" structure; and, the priority of rhythmic montage, which both unites disparate images and gives the film its overall direction.

Yet *La mémoire des anges* differs from the city-symphony films in a fundamental way. Bourdon's film lacks the key contextual element that defines the original city-symphony films' historicity: the tempo that formally emulates the impulses of urban industrial modernization and technical progress.<sup>31</sup> In the first examples of the genre, the cinema not only gave expression to these forces, but was co-substantial to them, a part of the same frenzied progress; today, after the rise of television and digital media, film has become a minority expression tied to another era.<sup>32</sup> Bourdon's reference to "sampling," by which he defines the editing process of analogical materials as though it were a crosscutting of digitalized information, hints at this anachronism.

The editing rhythm also captures this anachronistic complexity, moving between images that carry different temporal charges and distinct historical resonances.

Through the editing, each thematic cluster—work, leisure, transportation—repeats the historical transition that the film as a whole covers. The alternation between black-and-white and colour images, for example, makes visible technical progress and the “newness” of later inventions. The sequence on the Main alternates between grainy black-and-white and colour images, whose neon-charged Technicolor anticipates the “chlorophilia” that Expo 67 postcards used to transmit a sense of modernity.<sup>33</sup> Yet this juxtaposition is seldom unidirectional. Instead, it presents a series of contradictions between the images’ temporal quality and their historical contents. For instance, one sequence intercuts a black-and-white tracking shot that shows a young artist lifting his gaze toward the skyline with colour footage that, tracking in the opposite direction, shows a church steeple and the Maisonneuve statue in the Place d’Armes. Repeated cuts establish a temporally disjointed dialogue between these images: although shot in black and white, the artist seems to walk towards the future, an emblem of the Refus global’s modernizing impulse, while the colour images drift into the city’s distant colonial and more recent ecclesiastical past.<sup>34</sup>

This historical ambiguity similarly extends to camera movements. Compare the shots of the crowds greeting the Queen in the Griersonian *Royal River* (Sparling and Blais 1959) with the crowds in Gilles Groulx’s stunning *Golden Gloves* (1961), released just two years later: the first film shows the spectators from afar, in colour, with steady pans, while the second—a masterpiece of the *cinéma direct*—moves into the crowd, with the handheld camera studying faces and gestures, and following or responding to the spectators’ gazes. *La mémoire des anges* builds an editing rhythm that alternates between newer styles of imagery and images that hold distinct historical traces in their content or formal composition (colour, camera movements, framing and so on). The rhythm conveys the historic tension that defines the film as a whole, at once reflecting the archival unity that makes the images part of a common “heritage” and pointing to the disparateness of their forms of expression and historical origins.

Intervening into the debate on heritage from two different fronts—as part of the NFB’s effort to give added value to its audiovisual archive, and as an echo of the struggles for urban preservation—*La mémoire des anges* offers different ways of seeing Montreal’s past. It exemplifies how the “fabrication of a city’s image” converges with the digital technologies that Choay places at the centre of the heritage industry (Noppen n.d.). When revisiting images of Montreal from the 1950s and 1960s, however, the film forges an urban memory that has largely been missing from the concerns of what we have called the heritage discourse. The film’s focus on elements that have disappeared from the urban landscape show the consequences of deindustrialization, pointing particularly to the cultural fallout for certain communities of Montreal. Instead of buildings’ facades, it shows the everyday living that took place in neighbourhoods that no longer exist. In this tension between two

ways of looking back, *La mémoire des anges* communicates two distinct historical transitions, or two regimes of historicity: its content shows the changes sparked in the 1960s, when Montreal self-consciously moved into the future, and its form conveys the shift between then and now, when the heritage gaze remains enthralled with the past.

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## Notes

1. “Yesterday’s Tomorrows” is the title of an exhibition at Montréal’s Musée d’art contemporain; within the same year, the Canadian Centre for Architecture hosted an exhibition entitled “The 60s: Montreal Thinks Big.” In different ways, each show attempted to communicate the sense of futurity from the past.
2. See for instance David Lowenthal’s *Possessed by the Past* and François Hartog’s *Régimes d’historicité*.
3. I borrow this term from David Harvey, who first develops it in *The Limits to Capital*.
4. The full citation reads as follows: “Il s’agit en quelque sorte, d’associer à une herméneutique du paysage des villes une recherche sur la ‘capacité de sens’ et sur le ‘potentiel de pérennité’, aujourd’hui, du patrimoine urbain, depuis sa constitution physique et mémorielle jusqu’à la fabrication de son image, par le discours et par les aménagements matériels de valorisation, afin de cerner les gestes et les critères de la sélection, de la conservation, de la mise en valeur et de l’interprétation adéquats au regard des variables identitaires des collectivités urbaines et des villes de ce siècle.” Luc Noppen continuously calls for a hermeneutics that will also account for image-making process, as does Lucie K. Morisset, cited below, who works closely with the chair on urban heritage.
5. Bourdon states this in the interview included on the DVD and available on one of the film’s Web sites: <http://films.onf.ca/la-memoire-des-anges/extras.php>.
6. Bourdon says this in the interview that is included on the DVD of *La mémoire des anges* issued by the NFB.
7. Froger shows how a “cinematography of proximity” establishes a relational experience between filmmakers (*sujets filmants*), their subjects (*sujets filmés*) and the spectators.
8. This is how Brault himself articulates his practice: “Cependant, pour aller filmer les gens, pour aller parmi eux, avec eux, ils doivent savoir que nous sommes là, ils doivent accepter les conséquences de la présence de la caméra et ça nécessite l’utilisation d’un grand angulaire. La seule démarche légitime est celle qui sous-tend une sorte de contrat tacite entre les gens filmés et ceux qui filment, c’est-à-dire une acceptation mutuelle de la présence de l’autre.”

9. On the “flagship” status of Bulbulian’s film and its similarities to the controversial *Things I Cannot Change*, see Thomas Waugh “The Films of Maurice Bulbulian: Science and Conscience”; on the shared political tenor of this film with those that followed, including Michel Régnier’s urban series, see Liz Czach’s “Michel Régnier’s ‘Films-Outil.’”
10. According to Zéau, the other privileged area concerned women’s issues, in a series entitled *En tant que femmes* (425). Following his participation in Bulbulian’s *La p’tite Bourgogne*, Michel Régnier supervised the *Urbanos* and *Urba2000*. *Urbanose* has a strong political orientation, the general tenor of which is clear in Michel Régnier’s *Entretien avec Henri Lefebvre, Locataires et propriétaires*, and *Réhabilitation des habitations*, all from 1972. *Urba2000* series covers cities worldwide, often in comparative context; see Michel Régnier’s *Varsovie-Québec: Comment ne pas détruire une ville* (1974) or *Montréal—Retour aux quartiers* (1974).
11. Zéau writes: “Les restrictions budgétaires seront donc invoquées pour justifier [la] disparition [de Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle]. Cependant, au sein même de l’ONF, la légitimité du programme Société nouvelle s’était trouvée affaiblie par le conflit qui opposait les cinéastes au commissaire Sydney Newman au sujet des mesures de censure prises à l’encontre des films québécois évoqués plus haut [Groulx, *24 heures et plus*, et Arcand, *On est au coton*], jugés trop politisés dans le contexte tourmenté de la crise d’octobre” (426).
12. I am following Jean-Claude Marsan, who takes the term from the sociologist Marcel Rioux; see Jean-Claude Marsan’s *Montréal: Une esquisse d’un futur*.
13. On these groups, see Jean-Claude Marsan’s *Montréal: une esquisse d’un futur*.
14. The 2011 exhibition at City Hall’s history museum entitled “Les quartiers disparus” confirms this official revalorization of lost working-class neighbourhoods.
15. Using the example of how real-estate developers justified razing the wooded area surrounding the Grand séminaire de Montréal for the three “Fort de la montagne” condo towers on Atwater Avenue, Marsan shows that this strategy to harness heritage for investment begins as early as 1981: “Si les forces du capital empruntent le discours des tenants de la conservation du patrimoine pour les fins de leur mise en marché, on peut être certain que ce discours a désormais son importance. Il y a vingt ans, en plein dans les années de rattrapage, elles n’auraient jamais tenu un tels discours, cherchant plutôt à associer leurs opérations avec des images futuristes” (157).
16. Hartog discusses museums, living museums and eco-museums at length in his chapter on heritage in *Régimes d’historicité*.
17. See Choay’s *L’allégorie du patrimoine* on the importance of heritage for national economies. See also Hartog.
18. On “staged authenticity,” Choay follows Dean MacCannell’s classic study of tourism, as do Luc Noppen and Lucie K. Morisset. See Dean MacCannell’s *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*.
19. On this point, she echoes David Harvey’s reading of how contemporary forms of the “production of space” have led to investment in “lifestyle niches” that are a pivotal ingredient in the competition between cities to attract an elite class of transnational workers. See Harvey 2000: 78.
20. I borrow the term “expediency of culture” from Georges Yúdice’s reading of neoliberal modes of capitalist accumulation in *The Expediency of Culture*.
21. Both these points are from Sorkin’s introduction to *Variations on a Theme Park*.

22. See also Morriset's *Régimes d'authenticité*; this book follows François Hartog and Dean MacCannel to produce an original look at contemporary notions of heritage.
23. Steven High and David Lewis discuss this difference in *Corporate Wasteland*. While the "inflated" heritage discourse leaves nothing untouched, and includes the preservation of industrial buildings, they point out that this selective preservation does little, if anything, about deindustrialization's cultural fallout—only the buildings shell remains, with nothing of the working class affect that surrounded it.
24. See Nancy Dunton and Helen Malkin's *Guide de architecture contemporaine de Montréal*.
25. On the decline in the textile and clothing industries, see Diana Wyman's "Trade liberalization and the Canadian clothing market."
26. According to the Mobilisation Turcot Web site, the environmental and mass transit concerns were largely ignored in the original proposal. In the July 17, 2011, edition of *Le devoir*, a front-page article by Valérian Mazataud, with a photo of the building, confirmed that it would be razed.
27. This includes hearings held by Quebec's Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement held in June 2009. See <http://turcot.ca/project/bape-consultation/>. Mayor Gérald Tremblay assisted and spoke at the hearings, where he asked the province to give up the proposed public-private partnership.
28. See, for instance, the march recently organized by Projet Montreal, described in Valérie Simard's article "Manifestation rétro contre l'échangeur Turcot." Françoise David of Québec Solidaire has also accused the MTQ of operating as it would have in the 1960s.
29. Drapeau's voiceover states: "Il en est de la circulation dans une grande ville comme de la circulation du sang dans le corps humaine; si les artères ne permettent pas une libre circulation il peut en résulter une congestion économique très grave."
30. Steve High and David Lewis cite this term, coined by Joseph Schumpeter, in the introduction to *Corporate Wasteland*.
31. In the Ruttman film and contemporaneous examples like Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* or Rudolph Rex Rustig and Adalberto Kemeny's *São Paulo: Symphonia de uma metrópole*, both from 1929, the celebratory, even utopian tone shades the images of everyday city living.
32. Even recent versions of the city-symphony genre that show a disintegrating urban infrastructure are historically wedded to the present they record; see for instance Fernando Pérez's *Suite Habana* (2003).
33. See Johanne Sloan's "Postcards and the Chromophilic Visual Culture of Expo 67."
34. At 38:00, the Maisonneuve statue is from Giraldeau's *Au hasard du temps* (1964).

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