



## Introduction: “Locating the Intimate within the Global: Xavier Dolan, Queer Nations and Québec Cinema”

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Guest edited by Kester Dyer, Andrée Lafontaine, and Fulvia Massimi



Fig. 1 (Screenshot, *Mommy*)

“I’d rather be referred to as a precocious young Québec talent, than not be referred to at all.”

Such was Québec-based director Xavier Dolan’s response to Etan Vlessing, who interviewed him at the 2012 Festival de Cannes for *The Hollywood Reporter*. In this now famous interview, Dolan embraced audience’s recognition of his dual local/national specificity with a pinch of his well-known sassiness.<sup>1</sup> Allergic to labels—first and foremost those concerning the contention that his cinema is an example of queer filmmaking—Dolan never regarded his sense of national belonging with the controversial attitude he demonstrated towards the awarding of the Queer Palm for his

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<sup>1</sup> Etan Vlessing, *Cannes 2012: Canadian Director Xavier Dolan on 'Laurence Anyways' (Q&A)*. Web. May 18, 2012. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/cannes-festival-xavier-dolan-qa-326081>

third feature *Laurence Anyways* (2012), also at Cannes. In an interview with Canadian television host George Stroumboulopoulos, Dolan further elaborated on the subject:

“I define myself as a Canadian *person* because I live in Canada, I define myself as a Québécois *filmmaker* because my movies are soaked with the Québécois attitude, and culture, and language, and vocabulary, and history... so yes, I define myself as a Québécois filmmaker.”<sup>2</sup>

Whereas Dolan himself often discusses the exploration of gender and sexuality in his films as a reflection on the vast spectrum of human relationships, rather than a matter of queer “categorization,” the relevance of his cinema to the specificity of Québécois spaces and identities has never been questioned with the same vehemence. On the contrary, it has been a *fil rouge* running through Dolan’s filmography up to his latest feature *Mommy* (2014), paradoxically the most Québécois of his films in spite of its global circulation and critical acclaim.

Following in the steps of Québécois directors such as Denis Villeneuve, Jean-Marc Vallée, and Philippe Falardeau—who have all successfully emigrated to Hollywood in recent years—Dolan is currently exploring the international possibilities of his career, directing French band Indochine’s *College Boy* video, British singer Adele’s music video *Hello*, and working on the upcoming French-Canadian and US productions of *Juste la fin du monde* (2016) and *The Death and Life of John F. Donovan* (2016, in pre-production). However, Dolan’s “very Québécois” profile combined with the wide circulation of his films in foreign markets continues to enhance the relevance of Québec’s cultural specificity within wider frameworks of film reception, and the director’s prolific output provides a growing corpus from which rich thematic, socio-political, and aesthetic approaches can be considered. With this in mind, *Synoptique* has taken Dolan’s work and its relevance for both Québec and world cinema as an occasion to intervene in the debate on the global reach of small national and subnational cinemas sparked in the last decade from the publication of Mette Hjort’s ground-breaking book *Small Nation, Global Cinema* (2005). In light of growing interest in these branches of Film Studies scholarship, *Synoptique* issue 4.2 will use Dolan’s cinema as a departure

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<sup>2</sup> Xavier Dolan on George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight: Interview. Web. October 5, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynEqZzz-EMs>

point to reconsider the position of Québec film and Québécois cultural imaginary within a global cinematic culture.

Far from representing mere dichotomies of space, time, and feeling, the local and the global, the intimate and the public, the marginal and the central are crucial concepts around which the articles of this issue explore two intertwined sets of thoughts. On a wider scale, they highlight the tensions embedded in the circulation, reception, and production of moving images across the globe. On a more local scale, these articles locate in Québec cinema, and in Dolan's *oeuvre* more specifically, an ideal terrain for a challenging re-articulation of gendered and national issues within the contemporaneity of subnational film industries, imaginaries, and cultures.

In the opening article of the peer reviewed section, "A Boy's Best Friend is His Mother: Québec Matriarchy and Queer Nationalism in the Cinema of Xavier Dolan," guest editor Fulvia Massimi identifies Dolan's cinema as a privileged case study for the post-revolutionary revision of Québec's nationalist design within the framework of feminist and queer perspectives on nationhood. Departing from dominant critical accounts of the heterocentric impulses of Québec's nationalism under the Quiet Revolution, Massimi aims to underscore how the predominance of queer and feminist discourses in Dolan's representation of alternative family structures and mother-son relationships poses a challenge to traditional male-driven understandings of Québec's national identity.

Following up on the relocation of queer and female bodies at the core of an alternative understanding of Québec's cinematic and socio-cultural identity, Jason R. D'Aoust's article "Les voix queers dans *Mommy* de Xavier Dolan" examines the polyphonic texture of Dolan's most recent film by taking up the materiality of its multiple voices as a way to challenge the normativity of logocentrism in feminist and queer terms. D'Aoust passionately examines the employment of the *joual* vernacular and the performative incorporation of the soundtrack within the film, so as to point towards the ingenuity of *Mommy's* take on queer sexuality and female subjectivity via the vocal construction of transgressive identities.

Moving from the particular of Dolan's cinema to the broader horizons of Québec film production and cultural representation, Julie Ravary's and David Hanley's contributions to the peer-reviewed section further interrogate the tensions between the intimate and global stances of Québec cinema that sit at the core of this issue's very title. The question of intimacy is especially central to Julie Ravary's historical and feminist account of Yves Simoneau's *Pouvoir Intime* (1986), wherein she recovers an understudied but highly emblematic piece of Québec's post-referendum film history and makes it resonate within the larger context of Québécois post-revolutionary momentum. Her article "Pouvoir et déclin de l'intime: Films postréférendaires, identités genrées et identités sexuelles" indeed focuses on the transgressive mise-en-scène of the "masculine" femininity and homosexual masculinity of the film's protagonists as a symptomatic reaction to the heterosexist design of nationalist movements in the wake of the first referendum for Québec's independence.

Opting for a "top-down" approach in lieu of Ravary's "bottom-up" one, David Hanley's "Conceptualizing Quebec National Cinema: Denys Arcand's Cycle of Post-Referendum Films as Case Study" situates the global impact of Québec subnational cinema at the core of its argument. Hanley aims to place Québec's film industry within an international context, using Denys Arcand's francophone film production to understand the different ways that domestic and foreign "mainstream" audiences receive and perceive Québécois films. Arcand's cycle of films concerned with the failure of Québec's national sovereignty is thus taken as a model for the application of Stephen Crofts' national cinema paradigm to Québec cinema, and as a case study to explain how and why certain films cross borders into foreign markets.

Hanley's account of the globalization of Québec's film industry guides the reader into the non-peer reviewed section of this issue, which features an interview with Bill Marshall conducted by the guest editors as its opening piece. Author of *Quebec National Cinema* (2001) and *The French Atlantic* (2009), among other seminal contributions to the study of Québec cinema and Francophone cinema at large, Marshall discusses the shifting paradigms of post-national and global cinema in relation

to Québec's film production, and more broadly, to *la francophonie*. Resituating his own scholarship within the evolving context of global film productions and circulations, Marshall refers to Dolan as one of the most significant examples of the emerging transnational dynamics in Québec cinema, as well as in the wider context of the 'Francophone Atlantic.'

The following contribution to the non-peer reviewed section of the issue, "Lectures croisées et pistes de réflexions autour de *Laurence Anyways*," is comprised of three different critical perspectives on Dolan's third film, and seeks to address the current dearth of scholarly work on this key film. This dossier performs a bilingual cross-reading of *Laurence Anyways*, approaching his articulation of intimacy and subjectivity through the lens of fashion, gender, and queer theory. Christina Brassard's contribution "La transgression de la norme chez Dolan: une invitation à l'émancipation" employs key concepts from Judith Butler's canonical work on gender to unpack the resistance to heteronormative behaviours exhibited in the film within the broader context of contemporary Québec cinema. Katrina Sark's "The Language of Fashion and (Trans)Gender in Dolan's *Laurence Anyways*" takes up the popularization of the colour-block fashion trend between 2009 and 2013 to investigate the impact of the chromatic and clothing choices within the film on the construction of the characters' identity and interiority. Finally, Angela Urrea and Mariana Gil-Arboleda's "*Laurence Anyways*: The Transgression, Narrative and *Mise-en-Scène* of Transition" reprises Butler's gender theory to discuss the importance of the encounter with otherness in the search and construction of Laurence's identity.

The transgression of the heteronormative design of (French) Canadian nationhood discussed within the cross-reading of *Laurence Anyways* taps into broader questions of homonormativity and homonationalism addressed in the first contribution to this issue's book reviews. Here, Clinton Glenn's review "The True (Homonational) North, Strong and Free" provides an insightful account of OmiSoore H. Dryden and Suzanne Lenon's edited collection *Disrupting Queer Inclusion: Canadian Homonationalisms and the Politics of Belonging* (2015). The volume's engagement with questions of hetero-

patriarchy and pink-washing in the allegedly queer-tolerant Canadian nation-state is carefully examined, so as to provide a potential future reference for the further examination of queer matters within Dolan's cinema as well as Canadian cinemas *tout court*.

The three following contributions in the book review section move away from Canada to travel across different geo-political spaces and trends in Film Studies, situating themselves within the current debate around national and transnational cinemas, generic modes, and theoretical approaches. Meredith Slifkin's analysis of *Melodrama in Contemporary Film and Television* (2014) discusses the relevance of Michael Stewart's anthology in tracing the complex way in which the melodramatic mode works across boundaries of geography, media, genre, and time. Justin Langlois' engaged account of *Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema: Traces of a Lost Decade* by editors Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare, Charlie Ellbé, and Kristopher Woofter traces an American-centric approach in the analysis of a neglected decade of the horror genre. Finally, Parichay Patra's critical inquiry of Suranjan Ganguly's monograph *The Films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Cinema of Emancipation* (2015) challenges limited perspectives on authorship and auteur study in the national context of Indian cinema beyond Bollywood.

The global-local dialectic running through this issue of *Synoptique* ultimately returns to close the cycle in the last section, in which Bradley Warren's review of the 68<sup>th</sup> edition of the Cannes Film Festival and Adam Szymanski's report on the 2015 Cinemalaya Film Festival discuss the opposite polarities of globalized and localized film economies at play in these film festivals. On the one hand, Warren offers a personal insight into one of the world's most notorious A-list festivals in "On Heroines, High Heels and Hierarchies: Challenging the 68th Festival de Cannes' "Year Off"," by focusing on the diversified representations of nuanced female characters as a thread to navigate through the dense corpus of films selected for this edition. On the other hand, Szymanski's "Cinemalaya 2015: A Decade of Philippine Independent Cinema" discusses clusters of films addressing everyday-life in the festival's selection in this tenth instalment of Philippine's most prominent Indie film festival. As a localized

phenomenon of alterity and marginality which purposely works in opposition to both global and domestic mainstream cinemas (i.e. Hollywood and Filipino commercial cinema), Cinemalaya offers an interesting counter-example to the globalized film economy embodied by Cannes' *kermesse*. Whereas in the former festival review, the more mundane preoccupations of red carpet security and critics' film-slashing take the lion's share of the rationale for Cannes, in the latter, the preservation of independent and digital filmmaking practices concerned with the representation of diversity and minority issues strive to lead an internal revolution, attempting to rescue the intimate from the danger of an undifferentiated, globalized cinematic experience.

Like the protagonist of *Mommy* who forcibly expanded the film frame's aspect ratio to physically broaden the horizons of his otherwise restrained existence (Fig 1.), *Synoptique* issue 4.2 aims to perform a similar gesture by expanding the perimeters of Québec film scholarship. In departing from the circumscribed microcosm of Dolan's work, this journal issue focuses upon queer bodies and desires to move towards a wider understanding of the local in dialogue with the global within Québec cinema.

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