Foreword

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Foreword

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Ever since the digital revolution radically blurred the boundaries between media, cinema – in any case, cinema as it had been known – is, according to some, in the midst of dying. In a recently published book (which I co-authored with Philippe Marion), entitled, incidentally, *The End of the Cinema?* (note the question mark), we studied the effects of the most recent technological innovations on cinema and on the crisis that the medium faces in the digital age. We tried to show that though the medium itself is far from expiring, there is still *something of cinema* that is actually dying – even if only a certain ‘idée du cinema’, to use the French title of Dudley Andrew’s recent book (2014). While the digital turn produced a previously unprecedented *convergence* of media, this movement was concomitant with the production of a large number of *divergences* – between what cinema was (or rather, ‘the idea’ we had of what cinema was) before the transition to digital technology and what cinema is becoming.

Within the international community of film researchers, this digital turn has fueled many debates, which have logically led to the return of film technology as an integral element of film theory, film aesthetics, archiving and restoration, and discourse about film industry and film epistemology. What had once been at the margins of film studies, a distinct, circumscribed area of film history for aficionados, collectors and some notable researchers (such as Barry Salt, Paul Spehr and Deac Rossell, for example), has become a central hub of theoretical questioning. The impact of this confluence of media convergences and divergences thus initiated a new stage in the history of film studies. To give only two personal examples (relevant to this book), in the last six years I co-organized (with Martin Lefebvre) one of the largest film conferences ever on the effect of technological innovations on film theory and film historiography (*The Impact of Technological Innovations on the Historiography and Theory of Cinema*, or simply, IMPACT, in 2011 in Montreal); I also participated in the launch of an inter-university partnership, TECHNÈS (between Université de Lausanne, Université Rennes 2 and Université de Montréal, and other film institutions), with the aim of producing a new digital encyclopedia of film technology, from its origins to the present day.

These new initiatives are outcomes of the fundamental, groundbreaking impact of the digital age, which not only changed the face of cinema in the form of special effects and viewing platforms, but also the underlying
tenets that provided cinema with a distinct identity (such as celluloid). This disintegration of identity and subsequent self-questioning have resulted in wholesale reorganizations of film departments, with the inclusion of video game studies and media studies, or the absorption of film itself within broader, more diffuse disciplines (such as film and moving image studies). In the midst of this, film technology has emerged as a new centralizing arena for film researchers to excavate, sort, and classify. Its identity feels clearer – clearer, at least, than the competing ideas of cinema – the materiality offering an objective reality on which to test old film theories and to fashion new ones.

So, then, what is the importance of these apparatuses and devices of all kinds for the theory and history of cinema? Have they contributed to opening up new ways of thinking and methodologies or to contest certain ideas received in the field of cinematographic studies? Notions as fundamental as realism, authenticity, or representation, for example, are now placed under the banner of technology, which determines their intrinsic modalities. Today, we speak of the language of new media. The tools of computer-assisted analysis developed for academic purposes (Cinemetrics, Lignes de temps, etc.) are multiplying. Digitizing has revolutionized film restoration and archiving. Media issues become technological issues. The urgency of questioning the emergence and development of these discourses by putting them in their historical context is beyond question. These are the issues that the IMPACT film conference attempted to answer. Uniting over a hundred researchers of different backgrounds for a week-long, collective investigation of the impact of film technology on the history of film theory and historiography, the conference was a resounding success, with one reviewer calling it “the defining event in Film Studies in 2011”, and produced a series of collections and publications.

It also resulted in this important volume and collection of papers, organized around the notion of the impact of technology and the different phases of film scholarship, which is the end product of the work of researchers, teachers, archivists, and scholars. New technologies – not just those involved in the production of film – have revolutionized the way we think about and experience film. The works of my colleagues in this volume, many of which were first presented at the IMPACT conference, and selected and edited by Santiago Hidalgo, provide an authentic, vibrant account of where we stand today in the study of the relationship of technology and film, spanning from the beginnings (with the works of my post-Brighton early cinema studies colleagues Charles Musser and Tom Gunning), to the present day, with a new generation of scholars (Vinzenz Hediger, André Habib, and Benoît Turquety among them).
From the groundswell of energy, goodwill, and collaboration that sprung from the IMPACT film conference emerged the TECHNÈS partnership, in collaboration with Turquety (from Université de Lausanne) and Gilles Mouélllic (Université Rennes 2). The members of the TECHNÈS team will carry out, over the next seven years, an in-depth study of the links between film aesthetics and film techniques, practices and film forms, machineries and concepts of cinema, focusing on different moments of technological upheaval, stretching from the advent of the first projectors and chemical innovations that resulted in the projection of film strips, through the coming of sound and competition with the new mass media of television, to the ultimate integration of the new, digital, transmedial universe we all inhabit. Each of these moments was accompanied with a set of discourses, a set of practices, and a set of public and institutional usages, which constitute the object of study questioned and explored in this work. Not only is it an essential work, it marks a moment of passage between paradigms of film study.

Notes

1. Gaudreault and Marion, The End of Cinema?
2. Andrew, Une idée du cinéma.
3. The partnership, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2015-2022), consists of 48 experienced Francophone and Anglophone international researchers and 18 partners, including three research groups (GRAFICS of the Université de Montréal, the Dispositifs group of the Université de Lausanne and the Arts pratiques et poétiques team of the Université Rennes 2), six institutions related to archival missions (the Cinémathèque québécoise, the Cinémathèque suisse, the Cinémathèque française, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, the International Federation of Film Archives and the George Eastman House), three schools of cinema (Canada: Institut national de l’image et du son, Switzerland: the l’École cantonale d’art de Lausanne; France: the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des métiers de l’image et du son), and six producers/broadcasters/publishers (the National Film Board of Canada, Canal Savoir, the Presses de l’Université de Montréal, Amsterdam University Press, Érudit and Idéeclic). http://technes.org.
5. Fairfax, ‘The Impact of Technological Innovations’.
6. Including André Gaudreault and Martin Lefebvre (eds), Techniques et technologies. Modalités, usages et pratiques des dispositifs cinématographiques à travers l’histoire (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015); André Gaudreault

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**About the author**

André Gaudreault is professor in the Département d’histoire de l’art et d’études cinématographiques at the Université de Montréal, Canada Research Chair in Cinema and Media Studies, and director of the Canadian section of the TECHNÈS international research partnership. As of 1992, he heads GRAFICS (Research Group on the Emergence and Development of Cinematic and Theatrical Institutions), and from 1997 to 2005, he was head of CRI (Center for Research on Intermediality). In 2010, in collaboration with filmmaker, producer and visiting professor Denis Héroux (producer of *Atlantic City* and *Quest for Fire*), he founded at the Université de Montréal the OCQ (Observatory of Cinema in Quebec) whose objective is to support the research and studies on cinema in Quebec. His publications include *From Plato to Lumière: Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema* (2009) and *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema* (2011); he has also co-authored *The End of Cinema? A Medium in Crisis in the Digital Age* (with Philippe Marion, 2015) and *Le récit cinématographique. Films et séries télévisées* (with François Jost, 2017).