

“In My Dreams I Was Almost There”: Personal Music Players, Curated Soundscapes and the  
Contemporary Québécois Coming-Of-Age Film

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A Thesis  
In  
The Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts (Film Studies) at  
Concordia University  
Montréal, Quebec, Canada

June 2020

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**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY**

**School of Graduate Studies**

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts (Film Studies)**

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## Abstract

In bridging the fields of sound studies, film studies, and Québécois studies, this thesis suggests a novel way of exploring national identity formation within the context of coming-of-age cinematic narratives. In many contemporary Québécois coming-of-age films, protagonists develop imaginary worlds into which they can escape from their oppressive social circumstances, but ultimately fail to reach adulthood in the way they desire. This thesis project applies two key elements in sound studies to the Québécois context: it examines how personal music players (e.g. a Walkman, an iPod, a vinyl player, etc.) and curated soundscapes (the imaginary worlds developed through interaction with said personal music players) are used by protagonists in coming-of-age films set in Québec. This study examines the ways that the personal music player and the curated soundscapes protagonists create are present in three recent coming-of-age films: *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, 2005), *Mommy* (dir. Xavier Dolan, 2013) and *Les êtres chers* (dir. Anne Émond, 2015). Each of these films' protagonists use the personal music player and the curated soundscape as a means to escape their marginalization in a socially oppressive Québécois society.

This project conceives of the coming-of-age journeys as manifested in Québécois cinema as a process with three nodes. In Chapter 1, this project examines how these protagonists interact with their personal music players and curated soundscapes, creating imaginary worlds which they can control. Chapter 2 explores how these protagonists develop their curated soundscapes so intensely that they recognize they can never be realized in an oppressive Québécois society, revealing the contradictions of the curated soundscape in Québec. Finally, in Chapter 3, this project considers how silence is present in each of these films after these characters abandon their personal music players and curated soundscapes. It argues that they use this silence as a bridge to adulthood, but ultimately fail to reach the ideals they developed within the curated soundscape.

## Acknowledgements

There are so many people who I would like to thank in this project. If I were to list them all, my acknowledgements page would be as long as my thesis itself. If I have forgotten to include your name here, please know that I am thankful for your support.

First, I would like to thank my family. Mom and Dad - thank you for your endless support in my education and in my work. No matter what, I know I can rely on you for wisdom and optimism. To my sister, Emily - thank you for your humour and your ability to listen to me talk endlessly about my ideas. Your constant love and appreciation of me and my ideas has brought me so far in my life. Without my family, there would be no project.

Next, I would like to thank my circle of friends for always being around to encourage me. Patrick, Calum, Cole and Victoria - you are some of the brightest people I know. From the very beginnings of this project, you have helped me anchor me ideas and shape them into a solid thesis. During the drafting process, you have each given me thoughtful and insightful edits. You are all brilliant and so humorous. I am so grateful for having all of you around in my life.

Next, I would like to thank Concordia University's Film Studies faculty and students. Dr. Haidee Wasson - you helped me so much in developing a thesis proposal and taught me invaluable skills as an academic. Thank you so much for this. I would also like to thank the group of thesis-writing students at Concordia. Our group sessions have been so helpful in the making of this project. You are all so wise, and our post-session lunches have been so enjoyable. Thank you to each one of you.

I would also like to thank my mentor, Dr. Karine Bertrand. Karine - you were the one to introduce me to Québécois cinema in the first place. In FILM226, you presented *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, and thus sparked my love for studying film. As I finished my undergraduate degree, you hired me as your research assistant for three wonderful years. In this time and beyond, you have given me countless opportunities to develop my work and myself. You are the reason I want to pursue film academia. *Merci beaucoup, Karine. Je ne vous remercierai jamais assez.*

Finally, to my supervisor, Dr. May Chew - thank you for your boundless support in this project. You are so lovely to work with. You always help me push my ideas further. You have taught me so much about my own writing and have developed my skills as an academic. The fact you have always checked up with me personally in our sessions has meant so much to me. We

have often talked about Québécois identity and Québécois futurisms in our meetings, but you have given me such a great example to aspire to as I pursue academia. Thank you for everything.

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## Preface

In order to properly begin this project, I feel it is important to introduce my relationship with the materials I am studying, in order to outline how I arrived at my research questions. My first personal music player was a Samsung Creative Zen Stone MP3 player, which I received for my twelfth birthday in 2008. It was bright red, and the size of my palm. It had sleek, plastic buttons. It was a twelve-year-old's dream toy. I spent the entire day downloading all my favourite CDs onto its seemingly infinite 8GB of storage space. I had previously amassed a collection of CDs to play aloud on the family boombox, but with this new MP3 player, this collection of music felt entirely my own. I could now play music wherever I went. It made me feel special, as I knew that I could get a free personalized concert whenever I wanted one. It soon became the favourite item I owned. Wherever I went, I needed to play music. Car rides, walks to school, breaks from my homework all needed a soundtrack. Developing playlists for each of these occasions became one of my favourite past-times. Listening to music made me feel like an adult. It gave me a sense of confidence and – most importantly – a sense of identity. Listening to my personal music player also gave me another sense of freedom – it gave me a way to feel as if I was in control of the world around me. As I would go for walks, I would listen to my favourite upbeat songs and imagine that I was part of a movie. Suddenly a world that seemed indifferent to me became pliable, as I was in control of my own narrative. Thanks to my tiny MP3 player, I was able to re-discover and re-imagine the world around me.

As I got older, I discovered the music of the Québécois band Arcade Fire. Throughout my teenage years in both eastern Ontario and in northern England, their 2010 album *The Suburbs* became an important lens through which I understood the world. The grungy basslines, saturated guitar riffs and poetic lyrics spoke directly to my teenage self. These songs reflected the joys of self-discovery whilst also highlighting the oppressiveness of the suburbs. Lyrics such as the following seemed to be a call for the suburban teen to rise up against the limitations that suburban life imposed and to find others like them:

In the suburbs the city lights shine  
They're calling at me, come and find your kind.  
("Sprawl II: Mountains Beyond Mountains")

The album relies quite heavily on nostalgia, as the twenty-something band members reflect on their youths growing up in Québec (and, for the Butler brothers, Houston, Texas). However, when I grew older, I started noticing that some lyrics painted not only a picture of teenage rebellion, but also a hope to leave a milieu that is socially oppressive. Lyrics such as the following depicted youth to be a phase in life that demands an overcoming of obstacles:

In my dream I was almost there  
And you pulled me aside and said you're going nowhere  
They say we are the chosen few  
But we're wasted and that's why we're still waiting  
On a number from the modern man  
Maybe when you're older you will understand  
Why you don't feel right  
Why you can't sleep at night now.  
("Modern Man")

Slowly, this album was becoming not just a celebration of the highs and lows of youth, but a melancholic reflection on the lost potential of youth. I was left wondering why this album changed for me as I got older - why did I notice these lyrics now? What specific social obstacles are these lyrics speaking of?

At this point, I had discovered Québécois coming-of-age films as an undergraduate student, thanks to my friend and mentor, Dr. Karine Bertrand. I had been introduced to films directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, Xavier Dolan, Anne Émond, and more, that all depicted Québécois youth trying to find their way in the world. However, I realized that these films portrayed the same dual meaning that I had noticed in *The Suburbs*. Not only were there the typical signposts of teenage rebellion, but also the desperation to get out of an environment that limits their bodies as well as their journeys into adulthood. As I watched these films, I noticed that, within certain Québécois coming-of-age texts, adolescent protagonists must often find ways to overcome and adapt to the socially oppressive norms within which they are deeply embedded (including limited economic opportunities, paternalistic and homophobic Catholic traditions,

racism and ableism). I was very curious to research how these films had this dual meaning, and how their individual coming-of-age experiences could be understood in relation to the province's history.

What intrigued me most about these films is how often personal music players were used by these protagonists as part of their coming-of-age experiences. Like me, they used personal music players to re-imagine their worlds to accord with their own thoughts. In a number of these films, these characters are seen to be attached to their personal music players, interacting with them constantly. In emotionally heightened sequences, they are seen using their devices to discover and re-imagine the world around them, feeling as if they are testing out and performing the identities they want to take on as adults. However, I noticed a trend amongst a few of these films. By the film's conclusion, they eventually abandon their personal music players, as well as their fantasies about fitting into the oppressive world around them. I was now really interested in knowing how music, sound and the personal music player played a role within these films, and researching why there was a narrative commonality between these works. Using my own experience with personal music players and these films as my starting point, I developed a few research questions I wanted to answer. How does the dual meaning of adolescence (the freedom that comes as a character chooses their own path and the oppression that comes with having to live under societal norms) manifest within the Québécois coming-of-age genre? How does the personal music player operate as a vehicle for characters' physical and emotional escape? What can the use of the personal music player and sound within these films tell us about coming-of-age experiences in Québec on a cultural and political level, and potentially beyond?

## Introduction

### Personal Music Players

In 2018, Apple released an advertising campaign to promote its newest invention - the Apple Home. The campaign mostly relied on billboards and online advertisements, featuring a variety of images of people using their Apple Homes in private settings. However, in addition to these static images, Apple created an extended video advertisement, framing the unique over-the-top dynamics of this newest product. This advertisement is a four-minute online music video directed by Spike Jonze, entitled “Welcome Home.” In this video, Apple not only explains to its audiences exactly how the Apple Home functions, but also dramatizes the feelings and emotions that the Apple Home promises to create. This video begins by following a woman (played by avant-garde musician FKA Twigs) on her way home from work. She is first seen in a dimly lit subway train, covering her ears from the noise. She is then shown in a dark and crowded street, pushing people aside so she can get home. Once she returns to her cramped apartment, she appears visually exhausted from her workday. She then asks her Apple Home to play her “something [she] likes.” The Apple Home responds with Anderson.Paak’s upbeat rhythm and blues song “Til It’s Over.” As the woman settles on the couch, the song is played in a muted fashion, with the bass notes barely audible. When she starts to relax, smile, and dance with the music, the song’s instrumental tracks shift from monotonous to become multilayered. Through her dancing, she pushes a wall that was originally limiting her ability to move. She realizes that, by dancing to her desired tracks, she gains the ability to change her apartment at the command of her hands. She modifies other walls and adjusts the flicker of the lights above her to match the beat of the song. As she gets more comfortable with the song, she moves more confidently. Eventually, she is dancing ecstatically around an apartment that looks nothing like its original version, with her every move choreographed to the song. When the last few notes play, she falls back on her couch in her original cramped apartment, much happier, as she has had the enhanced experience of listening to the song.

In this vivid advertisement, Apple captures the purported power that such personal listening technologies have in shaping our cognition and our everyday experience. These technologies have the ability to let listeners imagine themselves to be the sole audience to a song, giving them an intimate experience with the music they are listening to. They allow listeners to

match their music with their immediate experience, as they create playlists to reflect certain thoughts and moods. As Paul Valéry notes, music and music technologies are “the most involved [art form] in [our] social existence, the closest to life,” as music “animates, accompanies, or imitates, [...] combining and transfiguring [our] pace and sensory values.”<sup>1</sup> Since the start of the twentieth century, sound recording devices have served as a guide for humans to understand themselves and their surroundings. As this Apple advertisement aptly demonstrates, listeners can feel empowered by the music they are listening to, which gives them the ability to feel in control of their immediate surroundings. With the help of music, they are able to re-visualize their sites of experience to be more in tune with what they desire.

Before the invention of sound recording technologies, listening to a song was a one-time-only event. For the listener, music could only be delivered live through musical instruments and no one could play any melody the same way twice.<sup>2</sup> However, as life-capturing technologies (such as the plate camera) became popular in the twentieth century, soon came the arrival of the sound recording devices such as the wax cylinder and the gramophone, both invented in 1877.<sup>3</sup> These inventions opened up a world of opportunity for the listener. Once these sound recording technologies were commercialized, tracks could be listened to more than once. In re-listening to songs, the listener could develop even deeper emotional connections with their preferred tracks, personalizing their libraries to their tastes. With the technological innovation of sound recording, the song was no longer a one-time-only event, but now a full experience loaded with the listener’s personal feelings. Musical technologies were no longer a novelty, but rather a popular commercial product that each listener could curate and personalize.

On July 1st, 1979, Sony presented the world with the newest innovation in musical technology: the Walkman cassette player equipped with a headphone set. With the Walkman and its headphones, listeners could limit the audience of any song to only themselves. Because of its size, the Walkman became more portable. Thus, listeners could take their music anywhere they wanted to. Due to the revolutionary innovation in mobile technology that the Walkman provided, music became an intimate experience where the listener could enjoy music in any setting they

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Valéry, “The Conquest of Ubiquity’, in *Aesthetics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim. (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964), 225.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 47.

wanted to. At any time, they could choose music to reflect the emotions they wanted to engage with - knowing that they are the only one experiencing this unique field of emotion. Thanks to the invention of the Walkman, music could suddenly become a “private” and “individuali[zed]” experience that only the listener could enjoy.<sup>4</sup> From analog devices such as phonographs and vinyl record players, to manual devices such as the Walkman and other cassette players, to digital devices such as CD players and iPods, music gradually became an object which the listener could enjoy several times over, allowing for personalized and interactive sonic experiences. Thus, the personal music player was born.

The personal music player is here defined as any device that allows the listener to play music to an audience of themselves (such as a personal stereo, a Walkman, an iPod, etc.). When writing about the iPod, Michael Bull describes the feelings of freedom that the personal music player provides. He claims that this device allows its listeners to move “to the rhythm of their music rather [than] the rhythm of the street. In tune with their thoughts - their chosen music enables them to focus on their feelings, desires, and auditory memories.”<sup>5</sup> Sound scholar Les Back adds that these devices are “portable and unobtrusive” as well as relatively “affordable and practical” to anyone who wishes to own one and use them anywhere on their daily journey.<sup>6</sup> In Bull’s study of the iPod, he writes that because of its mobility, it grants the listener the ability to manage everyday life, especially in urban scenarios. He relates this notion to the effects of labour in the twenty-first century, where mechanized noise often pollutes the space of the listener. The demands of capitalist productivity also create stretches of unproductive or “dead” time throughout the day (such as commuting time, time spent doing arbitrary tasks at work, time doing household chores, etc.).<sup>7</sup> Due to the presence of the iPod, listeners can make these tasks more exciting, as they can focus on the emotions and the sensations that come with the songs they choose to listen to, instead of the noise and ennui of urban space. As the listener chooses to make tasks more exciting, the iPod becomes a means of re-negotiating the space around them. Bull writes that “[t]here exists a powerful motivation to use sound to reorganise [the] user’s relation to space and place in Western culture” and that sound allows the listener to “actively

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<sup>4</sup> Paul DuGay et al, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of The Sony Walkman*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SAGE Publications, 2013), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London: Routledge, 2015), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Les Back, “Tape Recorder,” in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, eds. Michael Bull, Les Back, and David Howes (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 139.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 109.

recreate and reconfigure the spaces of experience.”<sup>8</sup> He believes that “through the power of sound, the world becomes intimate, knowable and possessed.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, according to Bull, personal music players allow the listener to develop a sense of empowerment. In listening and re-listening to their favourite songs, they feel like they are in total control of the world around them.

As listeners use personal music players to make their urban routines more enjoyable, they also use their personal music players to re-organize the sites of their experience to be in accordance with their own thoughts, emotions and ideas. As they listen to their chosen tracks, their imagination takes over the literal space they inhabit. As mentioned before, a prime example of this process is seen in Apple’s “Welcome Home” advertisement, where the woman uses the personal music player as a means to re-organize and re-invigorate her own personal space. Although she is not using headphones, she is still able to seal herself into an imaginary, personalized soundscape created through her music. At the end of the ad, she returns to the space she originally disliked, but appears happier as she has had the experience of listening to the song and getting to re-imagine that space with her own thoughts and emotions. Thus, for the listener, any space becomes one which they can “possess” through their own thoughts, emotions and ambitions.<sup>10</sup> These imaginary spaces become personalized to each listener who is interacting with the technology. This idea is reflected when Bull writes about how listeners use iPods in public spaces: “iPod culture concerns the privatization of public space; public space is possessed through the process of auditory privatization and exclusion.”<sup>11</sup> Sound scholar Jonathan Sterne adds to this idea, writing that through listening to a personal music player, “the space of the auditory field has become a private property, a space for the individual to inhabit.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the personal music player grants the listener not only the freedom to choose what track they want to listen to while experiencing urban everyday life, but also the ability to create imaginary spaces in which they can freely express their aspirations.

As the listener uses the personal music player to repeat and listen to chosen tracks throughout their day, they spend more time with these imaginary spaces, personalizing and curating them to their needs. According to Bull, this process of immersion into these spaces is

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 109.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 109.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 160.

inevitable, as the listener will return to these imaginary worlds they have created and continue to curate them to their own desires. He writes that the use of the personal music player allows listeners to continually visit their “own imaginary realm” where “differences are negated to become one with the user.”<sup>13</sup> A similar process is described by Shuhei Hosokawa in his elaboration of the “Walkman effect,” where he writes, “not only is the subject but also the environment susceptible to transformation through this act [of using the Walkman].”<sup>14</sup> He continues to argue that, when using the Walkman, the listener will “listen to the ‘beat’ of [their] body,” adding that, “when the Walkman intrudes on the skin, the order of the body is inverted.”<sup>15</sup> When the listener falls into their imaginary space, their body “loses its balancing function through which it activates the interpenetration of self-and world.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, Hosokawa believes that the listener begins to aestheticize and narrativize their experience as they return to their imaginary worlds, becoming “a *mise en oeuvre* in the body, through the body, of the body” as they further immerse themselves within the sounds they are listening to.<sup>17</sup> Here, Hosokawa argues that, for the user, these imaginary spaces become realistic, to the point where listeners completely submerge themselves within their own imaginations. They solipsistically imagine a physical landscape that unfolds in front of them, in which both the listener’s imagination and the sounds they choose to listen to have control over what appears for them. Both Hosokawa and Bull term this imaginary space the “soundscape,” employing the concept previously described by R. Murray Schafer.<sup>18</sup> For Schafer, the soundscape is the “study” or “isolat[ion] of the acoustic environment” where the sounds the listener engages with are individual “events [that are] heard and not seen.”<sup>19</sup> However, I believe that because the listener is continuously returning to and developing the imaginary world around them, the soundscape should be considered more than a series of sporadic auditory events. Rather, there is potential for continuous engagement with, and development of, the auditory imagination. In continuously engaging with their soundscape, the listener curates their preferred tracks as well as the tenor and texture of the imaginary worlds

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Bull, “The Audio Visual iPod,” in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (London: Routledge, 2012), 198.

<sup>14</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, “The Walkman Effect,” *Popular Music* 4, no. 1 (January 1984): 172.

<sup>15</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, “The Walkman Effect,” 176.

<sup>16</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, “The Walkman Effect,” 176.

<sup>17</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, “The Walkman Effect,” 176.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 163.

<sup>19</sup> R. Murray Schafer, “The Soundscape,” in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (London: Routledge, 2012), 99.

they are engaging with. Thus, I term this re-imagination of space, as propelled by the sounds of the personal music player, the curated soundscape. These curated soundscapes are unique to each user and can last as long as the user is engaging with their personal media player. These devices are designed to seal the listener into their own thought processes, their own daydreams, far removed from the noise of urban and suburban everyday life. When the listener chooses to return to their imaginary worlds and further develop them, they are creating a curated soundscape.

However, as Bull argues, the personal music player allows the user to have complete control over their usage. When speaking about the user's cognitive processes when using the iPod, Bull writes "[f]rom a Bergsonian position, the third nature of music itself, coupled with the structure of choice offered by digital technologies like the iPod, complements the very nature of the user's consciousness."<sup>20</sup> This consciousness consequently enables the listener to "construct an 'individualised' relationship between cognition and management of experience."<sup>21</sup> Bull writes that devices such as the iPod are used in "free time" for any user, where they have the ability to "micro-manage their urban experience" and thus have "uninterrupted control over their daydreams."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Bull argues that this use of personal media players infers that the listener has complete control to turn off the device whenever they are finished daydreaming and can return to their urban social realities whenever they so choose. He also argues that, although the listener often enjoys tuning in to the soundscape that the personal music player creates, the imaginary will "always obey the will of the listener" and will shut off whenever the listener becomes bored of the experience, enabling them to return to the real world at any point.<sup>23</sup> For example, if the user reaches the end of a playlist they have created for themselves, they can take control of their soundscape and either press "play" again, or return to their reality. Therefore, combining Hosokawa's ideas of the Walkman effect with Bull's idea that the user is always conscious when using the personal music player, it is clear that the personal music player is a device where the listener can become submerged in these curated soundscapes, even while consciously knowing that these soundscapes are imaginary. Through the cognitive management of the experience of listening, the listener always has the ability to turn off their personal music player, as well as return to their urban realities whenever they so choose.

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 123.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 123.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 9.

Looking through its various definitions, it is clear that the personal music player is a device designed to provide listeners with the ability to choose whatever song they want to listen to, no matter where they are. These personal music players also grant the listener the ability to create playlists to modulate their moods within these environments. Through the subsequent creation of their curated soundscapes, the personal music player allows listeners the chance to create imaginary spaces that encompass thoughts they want to explore. From this choice in listening, the listener can re-organize space through sound, thereby creating a soundscape they can immerse themselves in, without fear of losing touch with their tangible “reality.”

However, in looking at the ways in which the personal music player and the curated soundscape are presented in the context of contemporary Québécois cinema, it is clear that there is a gap in literature dealing with how these both function when they are used frequently and in relation to identity formation. While sound scholars argue that this device gives its listeners paramount choice, a number of films present the case that the personal music player and the curated soundscape leaves its users with few options as they attempt to imagine their futures as Québécois individuals. Their curated soundscapes allow them to exist temporarily in worlds free of social judgement and stigma. In this process, they temporarily forget the social judgement they receive in their realities. Eventually, they realize this and must find ways to adjust to a society that does not allow them the choices that their personal music player provides. If sound scholars such as Michael Bull argue that this sense of freedom is common to listeners, what makes the socio-political landscape in Québec different?

### **Québec and Its Cinema**

Throughout most of Canadian history, Québec has often been represented as a province without a voice, and in the last four centuries, one that has been governed by external powers – both French and English. Through the twentieth century, the Québécois were often seen as alienated from the rest of the country as a result of its social differences, culture and language. In his account of the history of Québécois cinema, Scott MacKenzie notes that in this time, the Québécois people and their experiences were often marginalized in political arenas.<sup>24</sup> MacKenzie

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth acknowledging that, in this section of his book, MacKenzie traces the history of Québécois cinema and writes generally about the Québécois socio-political experience. While the Québécois people are collectively marginalized in a broader, political sense, it is important to acknowledge that marginalization varies significantly between Indigenous, Black and working-class Québécois people. For more on the intricacies on how

believes that they lacked “three essential elements of an imagined national community: a common past, a shared language, and shared imaginings.”<sup>25</sup> Politically, the notion of an independent Québécois nation did not appear on a grand and public scale until the fervour of the Quiet Revolution as well as the October Crisis in the 1960s and 1970s. At this point in history, Québec began to more actively protest its treatment by the Canadian government. This era is marked by the increasing public campaign for sovereignty, a demand for more internal control over Québec’s financial decisions, and the creation of ministries that were controlled by the province.<sup>26</sup> Québécois felt their opinions were often forgotten or ignored in political matters pertinent to their wellbeing as a province.<sup>27</sup> When Québec attempted to assert itself on a national level, politicians, social leaders and artists collectively sought out to reevaluate what separated them from their other provincial counterparts, and what it meant to be Québécois (or possess *québecitude*).<sup>28</sup> One venue where the Québécois identity was explored was within the realm of cinema. Film scholar Michèle Garneau writes that, in the 1960s and 1970s, Québec cinema was not “committing to an already constituted statement” on defining its national identity, but rather existing “on the threshold of the utterance itself [of] a statement to be made.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, Garneau argues that the cinema of this time was used as a device to initiate these discussions about what it meant to be Québécois, while there was no collective agreement over what needed to be discussed. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a wave of Québécois films exploring the topic of national identity in various manners. From uncompromising documentaries such as *Un pays sans bon sens!* (dir. Pierre Perrault, 1970), to fiction films such as *Le chat dans le sac* (dir. Gilles Groulx, 1964), films began to look at the various elements of what it meant to possess a Québécois identity. Through examining the dynamics of family relationships, exploring the use of natural resources in rural landscapes and observing how younger generations explored their

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marginalization has affected different groups, see Rouillard (2004), Clarke (2018) and Manuel and Derrickson (2018).

<sup>25</sup> Scott MacKenzie, *Screening Québec: Québécois Moving Images, National Identity, and The Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>26</sup> For more on the social and economic impacts on the Quiet Revolution, see Mann (2002).

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Latouche, “Quebec In the Emerging North American Configuration,” in *Contemporary Quebec: Selected Readings and Commentaries*, eds. Michael D. Behiels and Matthew Hayday (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 704.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Véronneau, “Genres and Variations: The Audiences of Québec Cinema,” in *Self-PortraitS: The Cinema of Canada Since Telefilm*, eds. André Loiselle and Tom McSorley (Ottawa: The Canadian Film Institute, 2006), 101.

<sup>29</sup> Michèle Garneau, “*Pour une esthétique du cinéma québécois*” (PhD diss, Université de Montréal, 1997), 144. Translated by author.

personal identities within contemporary culture, Québécois film was in the process of self-examination and national recognition.

This pride in *québecitude* culminated in the sovereigntist movement, in which a growing number rallied around the idea of Québec being its own state, and visions of a future wherein Québécois people were in charge of their own fates. However, following the two independence referendums in 1980 as well as 1995, Québec lost its bid to become a sovereign nation. After these losses, a shift in tone could be seen in Québécois films. Since both referendums had failed, the endeavour to cement a national Québécois identity on the political stage experienced a setback. This is reflected in Québécois cinema of the time, as Marcel Jean notes in his historical documentation of the nation's cinema: "the heyday of young Québec cinema and those that followed the birth of the private industry supported by the State had given way to post-conflict disenchantment. The pit between the Québec public and its cinema seemed so deep that one would think that nothing could fill it."<sup>30</sup> As Jean suggests, politically, Québec was unable to assert its identity on a national level, and its art could not produce any work in which the search for identity felt realistic or accurate. Throughout the study of Québécois cultural products from this period, the recurring theme of an individual asserting their personal and collective national identity was represented as an unfulfilled quest. Film scholar Christian Poirier calls this unfulfilled quest this "*un manque de re(pères)*" [or a lack of positionality] as he believes that characters often feel they have no set of national origins, and thus no future to aspire to.<sup>31</sup> Film scholar Bill Marshall also posits that "key political challenges"<sup>32</sup> became apparent in Québécois identity politics after the referendums, as Québec did not know how to acknowledge its Indigenous and immigrant populations, finding no meaningful way to make the dominant Québécois political identity "hybrid"<sup>33</sup> without "problematiz[ing] the future"<sup>34</sup> of the province's quest for sovereignty.<sup>35</sup> This feeling of uncertainty is furthered by cultural historian Robert Bothwell, when he describes the feelings of powerlessness the Québécois people had post referendum. He notes that, historically, the moment after the referendums was "the moment [they

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<sup>30</sup> Marcel Jean, *Le cinéma québécois* (Montréal: Les Éditions de Boréal, 2005), 87. Translated by author.

<sup>31</sup> Christian Poirier, *Le cinéma québécois: À la recherche d'une identité?* Vol 1. (Montréal: Presses de L'Université de Québec, 2004), 98. Translated by author.

<sup>32</sup> Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 239.

<sup>33</sup> Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema*, 240.

<sup>34</sup> Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema*, 263.

<sup>35</sup> For more on this topic, see the chapters "The Indigenous Other" and "The Immigrant Other" in Bill Marshall's *Quebec National Cinema* (2000).

knew] they could do nothing. [...] Quebec was in Canada, with a new constitution, and quite possibly a new political balance, a new politics. What the long term implications would be remained very unclear.”<sup>36</sup> Bothwell believes that this led the Québécois people to feel like the search to locate themselves socially and politically would not remain a useful task, and to explore their identities cinematically would be unfruitful.

After the referendums, youth who were growing up in Québec had little sense of their own identity. Québécois philosopher Jocelyn Maclure notes that post-debate, individuals in Québec continued to be divided over their nationalist allegiances.<sup>37</sup> He argues that this ongoing debate, alongside Québec’s inability to recognize Indigenous groups as sovereign nations, caused “inevitable disagreements over identity representations and public policy” in the provincial government, meaning that no decisions could be reached over Québec’s identity as a province or a nation.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the younger Québécois generations experienced “the tragic but unavoidable moment when injustices are committed and freedoms abridged.”<sup>39</sup> While Maclure does not elaborate on what these injustices are, Québécois sociologist Jocelyn Létourneau offers an explanation. Létourneau argues that the most current generation suffered as a result of the referendums, as they grew up in a province “so weighed down by the [political events of the] past” that they were never given the tools to imagine their future.<sup>40</sup> Létourneau blames a “lack of custodianship” taken on by previous generations for this lack of futurity, as those who lost in the referendums have a forgetful “self-amnesia” in teaching the younger generations about their provinces’ history, and do not assist them in “envision[ing] new solutions” to problems in the future.<sup>41</sup> Thus, there exists a lack of communication and sense of continuity between generations. Film scholar Heinz Weinmann writes that this division between generations is so commonplace in Québec, that a genre of literature and filmmaking has come out of it. Weinmann calls this genre the “*roman familial*” (or family melodrama), films that explores how the Québécois child character feels “abandoned” by their parents, and tries to imagine a different world where “they

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Bothwell, *Canada and Québec: One Country, Two Histories* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998), 176.

<sup>37</sup> Jocelyn Maclure, *Quebec Identity: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 140.

<sup>38</sup> Jocelyn Maclure, *Quebec Identity*, 143.

<sup>39</sup> Jocelyn Maclure, *Quebec Identity*, 143.

<sup>40</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for The Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Québec*, trans. Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>41</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for The Future*, 9-10.

are adopted by real, loving parents” who nurture their imaginations and assists them in their creation of their personal and national identities.<sup>42</sup> While Weinmann composes this argument on genre in 1990 before the second referendum took place, scholars such as Morgan Charles posit that the family melodrama is just as present in contemporary Québécois cinema, reflecting the current generation’s anxiety of not knowing their national identity and feeling abandoned by previous generations. She writes there are many films that “have attempted to negotiate the painful processes of decolonization and societal change through the dynamic of the intergenerational relationship.”<sup>43</sup> She believes that, within this genre, “uncertainties regarding the fate of cultural memory and futurity can be articulated through the complex and often fractious relationship between the past (as represented by parents) and the present (as represented by the child) as she or he moves into the future.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, Maclure and Létourneau acknowledge a generational trauma that is experienced by contemporary Québécois youth, in which they grow up in a generation defined by endless political strife and were thus never bequeathed their national and provincial identities, their history or their futurity. In their analyses of Québécois cinema, Weinmann and Charles acknowledge that within the world of cinema, this generational trauma is best represented by the relationship these characters have with their parents. To them, Québécois youth of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must find ways to reconcile this fractured relationship with their parents and act independently to find ways to overcome this lack of direction. What these scholars suggest is that it must be up to the youth themselves to locate their own identities as Québécois individuals, and be responsible for reconciling the generational trauma imposed on them.

Twenty years after the political and social denouement of these two failed independence referendums, there was a growing interest in defining a solid Québécois identity. In his study of Québécois music, Francis Dhomont posed the titular question “Is There a Québec Sound?” in an effort to define a musical style that was unique to Québec, and thus provide Québec with a cultural identity. He writes that that it was not until the age of acoustics (or, the age where sound could be reproduced from another source in a digital manner, such as a CD player) that

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<sup>42</sup> Heinz Weinmann, *Cinéma de l'imaginaire québécois: de La petite Aurore à Jésus de Montréal* (Montréal: l'Hexagone, 1990), 19. Translated by author.

<sup>43</sup> Morgan Charles, “Coming of Age in Quebec: Reviving the Nation’s “Cinéma orphelin,” *Nouvelles Vues* 12, no. 1 (November 2018): 3.

<sup>44</sup> Morgan Charles, “Coming of Age in Quebec,” 3.

Québec found its voice. He writes that, immediately after the referendums, a Québécois cultural sensibility was not worth exploring, but with a new generation of Québécois youth getting increasingly involved in the arts as they became more accessible, the younger generation was able to ponder their social and cultural identities through the medium of their art. Dhomont posits that “the last few years have seen the emergence of a number of very active affiliates in several places – Québec is one of these.”<sup>45</sup> Québécois philosopher Jocelyn Létourneau argues in his analysis of Jacques Godbout’s filmography that Québec was only able to find its voice through its art once it abandoned the narrative of political inferiority. He writes that Québécois artwork of the twenty-first century shows that art no longer had to be politically relevant, and that Québécois artwork could attempt a search for identity of its own, looking at how social issues affect Québécois people.<sup>46</sup> Both Dhomont and Létourneau agree that starting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in turning away from the political to focus on the individual, Québécois youth are able to re-initiate discussions of national identity, without recourse to their parents or any other previous generations. This idea of a nation finding its voice (and thus, social identity) through the artistic mediation of sounds and images is also apparent in the filmmaking of this time. Since the start of the twenty-first century, there has been a rapid increase of new filmmakers who are making films about this search for identity, such as Jean-Marc Vallée, Xavier Dolan, Anne Émond, etc. Their films offer unique “images of the ‘Québécois experience’” - one that offers “cosmopolitan cultural identities for French-Canadians; identities that have been informed by their rural, habitant past” but avoids “the inferiority complex that pervades many aspects of traditional Québécois identity “in their relationship with anglophone-Canada, increasingly Americanized culture, etc.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, through its separation from the angle of political inferiority and its refocus on social issues, Québécois filmmakers began relocating a national identity relevant to the new social landscape of the twenty-first century.

Since this new wave of young Québécois filmmakers started creating their works (*Sarah préfère la course* [dir. Chloé Robichaud, 2013], *Tu dors Nicole* [dir. Stéphane Lafleur, 2014], *Une colonie* [dir. Geneviève Dulude-De Celles, 2018], etc.), they have leaned towards the coming-of-age genre in particular as a means of exploring this new Québécois experience.

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<sup>45</sup> Francis Dhomont, "Is there a Québec Sound?," *Organised Sound* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 25.

<sup>46</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for The Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Québec*, trans. Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 94.

<sup>47</sup> Scott MacKenzie, *Screening Québec*, 1-2.

Typically, the plots of these films (for example, *Rushmore* [dir. Wes Anderson, 1997], *Naissance des pieuvres* [dir. Céline Sciamma, 2007], *Sleeping Giant* [dir. Andrew Cividino, 2015], *Closet Monster* [dir. Stephen Dunn, 2015], *Lady Bird* [dir. Greta Gerwig, 2017], etc.) revolve around teenage protagonists unsure of how to define their identities as they enter adulthood. These films present these teenage protagonists experimenting with mass-marketed cultural products (including clothing and make-up, films and television, as well as books and magazines), in order to locate their identity, and figure out which subculture they belong to.<sup>48</sup> As Catherine Driscoll notes, in the American and European models of these films, these adolescent protagonists will go about this process of experimentation until they find which aspects of a pre-existing subculture they relate to most.<sup>49</sup> While many of these characters eventually realize what subgroup they feel they belong to and settle into the social role they have chosen, in a select number of Québécois coming-of-age films, the teenage protagonist is often left feeling like they must conform to societal expectations of them, unsure of whether or not they will ever be able to find the social belonging they desire.

### Québec and the Search for Identity

As cultural theorist Stuart Hall often acknowledges in his works, the search for identity is a long and sometimes never-ending process.<sup>50</sup> He argues that the search for identity always involves the process of social dreaming, where the individual will imagine themselves in many different social groups until they find one they are happy with. Hall posits that “[l]ike all signifying practices, [the quest to locate identity] is subject to the 'play', of *difference*.”<sup>51</sup> In stating this, Hall suggests that the individual will “play” with their identity by positioning themselves in different social groups as a way to negotiate their identities. In many coming-of-age narratives, the teenage protagonist must be engaged in the process of social dreaming in order to come-of-age by the end of the narrative. Cultural theorist Angela McRobbie posits that this search for identity is most common with young people, and often revolves around how the individual places themselves within an already existing culture.<sup>52</sup> However, McRobbie analyzes

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<sup>48</sup> Catherine Driscoll, *Teen Film* (London: Berg, 2011), 12.

<sup>49</sup> Catherine Driscoll, *Teen Film*, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul DuGay (London: Crane Resource Centre, 2006), 18.

<sup>51</sup> Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?,” 3.

<sup>52</sup> Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 24.

youth culture within a strictly British context. The idea of an already existing culture being available for youth as a context does not always appear in every context. Québécois scholars such as Jocelyn Maclure argue that this process of social dreaming changes significantly as the Québécois culture is “fractured” and “biodegradable,” as it is still young and fluid, and does not have a strong imagined national community or foundational history as its American or European counterparts possess.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the individual must confront their place within larger socio-political debates that are occurring in Québec in order to discover their place within them. As discussed previously in this chapter, the current generation of Québécois youth must also go on this quest on their own, without help from their parents or other previous generations. This idea is echoed in Christian Poirier’s examination of young characters in Québécois drama films, where he notes that, while characters explore their individual and social identities in relation to cultural subgroups, they must also ask themselves questions of where they belong in the national tapestry and attempt to search for solutions by themselves.<sup>54</sup> It is thus clear that the Québécois process of coming-of-age experience requires social dreaming in a format that is much more socially and politically engaged, where youth must consider their positions within the national tapestry, as well as their positions within certain cultural subgroups.

In many cases, Québécois people want to imagine themselves in better social circumstances than they are currently in. As Jocelyn Létourneau describes, it is common for people to engage in processes of social dreaming about the lives they could be leading, often projecting themselves into futures where they can find emotional and financial success or security. According to Létourneau, such aspirations stem from the uncertainty surrounding their current socio-political identities and positions, which cause an “alienating self-negating amnesia” or a “refusal to recognize oneself as one was, as one is [...] and what one will be” within its people.<sup>55</sup> While perhaps casting Québécois identity in a universalizing and monolithic light, Létourneau usefully identifies how the dreamscape works in a Québécois context. When defining a common Québécois experience, Létourneau cites the imaginary as a key arena for the Québécois people to explore their identity, and one that helps the Québécois to aspire to move

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<sup>53</sup> Jocelyn Maclure, *Quebec Identity*, 136.

<sup>54</sup> Christian Poirier, *Le cinéma québécois: À la recherche d'une identité?*, 27. Translated by author.

<sup>55</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, “Remembering (From) Where You’re Going: Memory as Legacy and Inheritance,” in *Contemporary Quebec: Selected Readings and Commentaries*, eds. Michael D. Behiels and Matthew Hayday (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 734.

past the status as the “hopeless loser” (a typical Québécois representation), and find ways to “think about the past while binding its wounds [...] seeking in the past the impetus to go beyond the old torments rather than constantly coming back to them.”<sup>56</sup> For Létourneau, escaping to the imaginary allows for the individual to be in “the cosmopolitan utopia of not being anywhere [in Québec], of always being elsewhere, in transit between two free zones,” ultimately reflecting anxieties of living in a province which in itself has “anxieties of the inner quest, the confusion of the universe, and the uncertainty of the future without reference or paths.”<sup>57</sup> Québécois philosopher Jocelyn Maclure also speaks to the idea of Québécois people using the imaginary as a means to explore a search for identity, but adds that these imagined spaces came about as “spaces of exploration [that exist] in ambivalence.”<sup>58</sup> For Maclure, ambivalence is “not perceived as an essence, encoded in the Québécois genes or written in their soul, but as the product of a historical process in which they have sought to mediate.”<sup>59</sup> He then posits that these spaces cannot be essentialized as a means for every Québécois person to find their identity, but rather exist as places for the individual to explore their history and future as a person existing in Québec, navigating through various identities until they find a cultural identity that will help them move past this collective uncertainty, building from various cultural models and stereotypes, including Canadian, European and American. Maclure adds that, through this process, people will often imagine themselves in better circumstances, or in positions where they do not need to worry about social stigmas or political problems facing the nation.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, both Létourneau and Maclure argue that many Québécois use their imaginations in order to visualize a future of social and economic success, as a context to perform their search for national identity. As written previously in this chapter, this search involves projecting themselves into positions of economic security, social acceptance, and self-realization without fear of being societally judged or persecuted. With this imagination, they explore identities that they desire to take on in the future. While the futurities they develop vary depending on the social group,<sup>61</sup> within the context of certain Québécois coming-of-age films examined here, protagonists use the curated soundscape to imagine and construct viable futures for themselves.

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<sup>56</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, “Remembering (From) Where You’re Going: Memory as Legacy and Inheritance,” 741.

<sup>57</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, “Remembering (From) Where You’re Going: Memory as Legacy and Inheritance,” 735.

<sup>58</sup> Jocelyn Maclure, *Quebec Identity*, 77.

<sup>59</sup> Jocelyn Maclure, *Quebec Identity*, 78.

<sup>60</sup> Jocelyn Maclure, *Quebec Identity*, 81.

<sup>61</sup> For other readings of futurity, see Muñoz (2009), Womack (2013), Dillon (2016).

Certain films from the new wave of Québécois coming-of-age films (including by filmmakers such as Jean-Marc Vallée, Xavier Dolan and Anne Émond) have visualized this use of imaginary space to show how Québécois youth pursue their search for identity. In these films, this space is often the backdrop for adolescent protagonists to pursue their search for identity and try on different socio-economic identities. While exploring these spaces, these Québécois characters are not only mediating their identity as adolescents between childhood and adulthood, but also locating their identities as a young generation of Québécois people. Through this process of social dreaming, they often realize their ambitions and recognize who they want to become within a community marked by turbulent histories. However, as my analysis of the Québécois coming-of-age film will suggest, there is one device that facilitates the protagonists' visualization of their futures and allows them to frequently interact with their imaginations. It allows them to imagine worlds in which they can overcome the various ways that Québécois society marginalizes them. With the help of this device, the protagonists can return to their imaginary worlds and curate what they want their futures to look like. This device is the personal music player.

### **Personal Music Players in Québécois Coming-Of-Age Films**

The first section of this introduction makes clear that the personal music player is labelled as a device that allows its users to engage with their own curated soundscapes. These curated soundscapes become imaginary spaces that allow the listener to choose and explore emotions, thoughts or ambitions they want to at any given time or place. In the second and third sections of this introduction, I argued that the Québécois people have historically felt uncertain about their identity and as a result must embark on their search for identity in a manner where they must consider their socio-political labels within the national tapestry. Next, by combining these two sections, I will introduce how the personal music player and the soundscape acts as tools for the Québécois adolescent as they attempt to pursue these ambitions. Throughout the genre, the personal music player is quite a popular prop. It is used by the protagonists in *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (dir. Jean Marc Vallée, 2005), *Mommy* (dir. Xavier Dolan, 2013) and *Les êtres chers* (dir. Anne Émond, 2015). This device often recurs as a means to develop the physical imagination of these spaces for identity exploration, or a crutch that the protagonist relies on in times of extreme stress. Given the empowerment that the personal music player provides, which sound scholars

such as Bull investigate, as well as the traditional expectations of the coming-of-age genre, it would follow that the personal music player can facilitate Québécois adolescent protagonists' exploration of their personal and national identities without any social repercussions. However, in observing the conclusions of these three films, it is clear that the imagination alone is not sustainable, and that the socially regressive environments that the protagonists find themselves in eventually causes them to relinquish their devices. This project will explore the role of the personal music player throughout these films and question its success in supporting the Québécois search for identity.

In these Québécois coming-of-age narratives, the personal music player plays a crucial role as the object that provides its adolescent listeners with a curated soundscape that allows them to imagine a future in which they are able to locate their identities free of societal limitations. The films studied in this project are all produced within Québec, written, directed and edited by Québécois people. They all feature a protagonist who faces societal oppressions and must try to locate their personal and national identities without the support of their parents: *C.R.A.Z.Y.* features Zac, a queer protagonist who lives in a society that is predominantly Catholic and unaccepting; *Mommy* features Steve, a protagonist with a disability who is placed in an ableist society; and *Les êtres chers* features Laurence, a protagonist who experiences depressive episodes in a society that suppresses mental health issues. While these three are my main focus of study, I also want to briefly acknowledge films that similarly narrativize societal oppression in Québec through personal music players, such as *Tout est parfait* (dir. Yves-Christian Fournier, 2010), *Sonatine* (dir. Micheline Lanctôt, 1984) and *Trois histoires d'Indiens* (dir. Robert Morin, 2014). As explained previously, the curated soundscape provides its listeners with the ability to visualize and mediate their own space of identity exploration. While the protagonists already mediate imaginary spaces in order to place themselves within this national tapestry, the curated soundscape provides them with the unique ability to focus on their personal goals and futures as individuals. The personal music player and the curated soundscape become crucial to these protagonists by providing them the opportunity to imagine themselves as being part of a future without any societal limitations. However, as this project will analyze, through the process of curating these soundscapes, these protagonists experience a moment in which their soundscape breaks with their reality, causing them to realize that they will always exist in a socially oppressive society, and that they must find alternate ways to enter adulthood.

Before I delve into the methodology of this project, it is imperative to assert that I am a white settler scholar who employs the texts of many other white settler scholars. The academic fields of Québécois film and sound studies are overwhelmingly white and male. Within these fields, scholars often generalize individual socio-political histories into collective experiences that are often only felt by select social groups. In order to ensure my project maintains some diversity, I have chosen to examine the experiences of a character who is queer, a character who is facing ableism and a character who experiences stigmas surrounding mental health. However, all three of the protagonists that I am studying are white, and both Zac and Steve identify as male, while Laurence identifies as female. If this project were to be further developed, the next steps would need to reconcile the model of identity formation I develop here with the experiences of Black, Indigenous and diasporic youth. For the purposes of this project, I have chosen to focus on these three films, as I believe they best exemplify how both the personal music player and the curated soundscape are used to develop fantasies in a Québécois context. In *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, *Mommy* and *Les êtres chers*, the personal music player is present throughout the film, and they play a significant role in the protagonists' development of their identity and their visions for the future. Thus, in order to keep my analysis centred on the personal music player's role in their coming-of-age journeys, I have chosen to focus on the three films indicated.

This project will bridge the fields of sound studies, film studies, and Québécois studies in order to explore national identity formation within the context of coming-of-age narratives. This study will be conducted through close analysis of how soundscapes operate in key scenes of each of the three films. This thesis tracks the process through which the protagonists' curated soundscape is developed and abandoned in order to gesture towards a Québécois coming-of-age process. While these films in question have been thoroughly analyzed in visual contexts,<sup>62</sup> this project will emphasize the importance of sound studies in tracking how aural landscapes are used by Québécois youth to locate their desired identities in cinema.

In order to observe the various ways that Québécois teenagers feel disillusioned, I will look specifically at these three films and focus on the ways that Québécois society is socially oppressive towards marginalized identities. I will also conduct this study with a focus on the intergenerational conflict that each protagonist experiences with their families, which ultimately affects their ability to locate their identities and come-of-age. In order to fully ascertain how the

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<sup>62</sup> See Baillargeon (2014), Schwartzwald (2015), de Rochegeonde (2015) and Honarmand (2018).

personal music player functions in the Québécois coming-of-age film, it is crucial to analyze the various degrees in which the player leads its users to detach from their social realities. Therefore, instead of observing each film separately, this project will be divided into three sections: the beginning of each protagonists' curated soundscapes; the moment in which they realize their social isolation and disillusionment; and the final decisions they make in order to come-of-age.

The first chapter will focus on the moment in each of these films wherein the protagonist initially realizes the potential of the personal music player, and begins to discover a soundscape in which they can feel comfortable, realizing that they can escape to a world where social stigmas and societal judgement do not apply. This chapter will culminate by showing how these protagonists begin to want to use the soundscape to curate their own needs and desires, feeling that the personal music player is their only tool to escape their current circumstances.

The second chapter will examine how the protagonists of each of these films begin to curate their soundscapes more intensely and often in relation to the image of their future selves, which will be accepted by society. The growing reliance on the personal music player and the curated soundscape causes an increased reliance on them when they feel overwhelmed or stressed by their current conditions or a need to escape. When these protagonists interact with the curated soundscape so frequently, they experience a moment in which they realize that interacting with their curated soundscape has become unsustainable. This chapter will culminate by arguing that these protagonists face an unfair contradiction, as they are led to dream of their futures with the help of the curated soundscape, but they must know they ultimately cannot realize their goals. As they recognize that they will always exist in their oppressive Québécois circumstances, they choose to abandon their personal music players.

The third chapter will explore the conclusions of each of these films, and how each of the three protagonists adjusts to a sudden and uncomfortable silence. When the protagonist abandons their personal music players and their curated soundscapes, they each face a silence as they are unsure of how to connect with their desires and how to communicate with those around them. This third chapter will observe the ways in which each protagonist makes a decision to end the silence they face, by choosing to quiet their own desires and finding social belonging within the structures of their families. This chapter will then discuss how the personal music player provides an important role in the eventual disillusionment of these Québécois adolescent protagonists.

In the analysis of these Québécois coming-of-age films, this project examines why the ecstasy and jubilation that the protagonist experience in her curated soundscape in the Apple advertisement is so different than the examples of these Québécois coming-of-age films. While the Québécois coming-of-age films studied in this project display how the personal music player allows users to change and interact with their environments through the use of the soundscape, these curated soundscapes are not sustainable.

## Chapter 1: Discovering the Potential of The Personal Music Player

*“I think I have to go away.”*

*“Where?”*

*“I don’t know. It feels like everyone is inside me. There’s nobody left on the outside.”*

*“What if you could be somewhere else?”*

- Antoine and Laurence, *Les êtres chers*

### Introduction

After Josh leaves his best friend Thomas’s funeral in *Tout est parfait* (dir. Yves-Christian Fournier, 2009), he realizes just how empty the landscape of rural Québec is. As he drives home with his parents, Josh slumps in the back seat. He looks at the passing fields, seeing a never-ending flatness that reaches out beyond the horizon. At this moment in the film, the soundtrack is quiet, with only the sounds of the wind outside Josh’s window. Josh fills this uncomfortable silence by commenting to his parents that he never noticed “how open and empty” his rural Québec town is, suggesting that it is “too quiet” without Thomas around. Later in the film, he is home, seeking comfort from them in his time of insecurity. Now that his best friend is gone, he has nothing to do. He has no idea how to adjust to a stark and overwhelming silence. Eventually, after rooting through his box of childhood toys, he picks up an iPod. He plays an unnamed heavy metal track, at full volume, pressing his earbuds to his ears while he lies on his bed. The film presents the sound as tinny and harsh, with lyrics that are difficult to parse. Josh, desperately trying to fill this void with other thoughts, closes his eyes tight. When he re-opens them, the sound quality changes. The heavy metal music loses its inferior quality and is played much at a much louder volume, as the bass notes become much more pronounced. He sits up. Suddenly his room has become much more colourful, as the walls have gone from grey to bright brown. He looks around his room and picks up more objects, as if he is unfamiliar with this visually brighter

and more interesting place. As Josh re-discovers his room, his body changes shape. While he used to slump and hide his face, his music now makes him move his body around more confidently. He stands as tall as he can and starts to dance with the song. Through his music, Josh re-makes his environment, and settles into his own body.

This scene in *Tout est parfait* presents a Québécois adolescent character overwhelmed by the environment they are in, using music and noise as a means to fill in the gaps when their life becomes both empty and overwhelming. When Josh finds the iPod, he is able to use music to escape into his imaginary. He discovers that his iPod allows him to exist in a place where he can fill the overwhelming silence with his own imagination. The vivid audio-visual display of Josh's imaginary exemplifies how Québécois teenagers use their personal music players within the coming-of-age genre. Josh's use of the personal music player in *Tout est parfait* is indicative of how these devices are often employed by protagonists as they seek to escape social oppression and general emptiness of the life contemporary Québec offers its adolescents.

Through an analysis of three recent Québécois coming-of-age films, I will examine how these Québécois adolescent protagonists feel uncertain about their identities as they enter adolescence, as they experience social marginalization and alienation. With the help of personal music players and their curated soundscapes, these protagonists are able to imagine worlds in which they are not judged, nor limited for their various marginalizations. *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, 2005) focusses on Zac, a protagonist using his vinyl player to imagine a world in which his queer expression does not isolate him from the heteronormative society he lives in. *Mommy* (dir. Xavier Dolan, 2013) focusses on Steve, a character who uses his Walkman to imagine a world in which he can control his physical tics, and where he is accepted by the ableist society that often judges him. *Les êtres chers* (dir. Anne Émond, 2015) focusses on Laurence, a protagonist who uses her Walkman to help curb her depressive episodes when she feels isolated from her family. In providing an intersectional understanding of the diverse uses of the personal music player by these protagonists, these three case studies demonstrate a uniquely Québécois practice of escapism.<sup>1</sup> In these examples, the protagonists imagine a world in which they do not

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<sup>1</sup> While this project focuses on three works in which the personal music player plays an important role in allowing for the protagonist to imagine a world without social marginalization, there are many more examples in which escapism through music can be seen: *Noir* (dir. Yves-Christian Fournier, 2015) focuses on Black Québécois characters using music as a means of imagining life outside poverty; "The Music In Me" (dir. Emilio Wawatie, 2016) details how music helps its Anishnaabe protagonist to feel a sense of confidence in his national identity; and *Sashinka* (dir. Kristina Wagenbauer, 2017) examines how music assists a female Russian immigrant in Québec in

need to conform to the social limitations that Québec prescribes on them and begin to discover the identities they instead want to take on.

### Personal Music Players and Escapism

As previously discussed in the introduction to this project, the personal music player is a tool designed to let its listeners reimagine and reinterpret their environments in accordance with their private dreamscapes. According to sound scholar Michael Bull, the personal music player affords listeners the chance to create a curated soundscape, or to “reconfigure the spaces of experience”<sup>2</sup> where “the self claims a mobile and auditory territory for itself through a specific form of sensory gating.”<sup>3</sup> When the listener becomes overwhelmed by the noises they experience as a result of the conditions of their daily labour (e.g. doing chores, working in a cubicle, commuting to and from work, etc.), they use their personal music players to tune into their dreamscapes to “control” the sounds around them.<sup>4</sup> In the scene where Josh picks up his personal music player in *Tout est parfait*, he decides what music, mood and feeling he wants to engage with (shutting out the ennui<sup>5</sup> of his life), and thus chooses what dreams he want to visualize (re-imagining his room to be more exciting). As evidenced in this scene, when listeners make these decisions, they subsequently point out what parts of their current environment are aggravating to them, thinking about how they would like to change them. The curated soundscape, as Bull notes, amounts to “the privatization of public space”<sup>6</sup> whereby the listener creates “a transparent but impenetrable wall of sound, transporting [them] out into the world while isolating [them] from it.”<sup>7</sup> As the listener curates their preferred tracks on their personal music player in accordance with the fantasies they wish to envision, they develop a curated soundscape. This

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developing a sense of social belonging. While these examples are all worth examination, my focus remains on these three protagonists as they frequently use both their devices and their curated soundscapes to escape in an audible fashion, while these other protagonists only escape once.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London: Routledge, 2015), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (London: Berg, 2000), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Mércèdes Baillargeon has defined this term specifically in reference to Québécois youth. She writes that ennui is “the moroseness of the everyday, the desolation of today’s youth, and the disillusionment of North American life, depicting a rather bleak portrait of the world we inhabit.” For more, see Mércèdes Baillargeon, “Romantic Disillusionment, (Dis)Identification, and the Sublimation of National Identity in Québec’s “New Wave”: Heartbeats by Xavier Dolan and Night #1 by Anne Émond,” *Québec Studies* 57, Special Issue: Bubert Aquin et les médias (Spring-Summer 2014): 172.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 7.

privatization of space is exemplified by Josh as he selects the track of heavy metal noise to drown out his feelings of emptiness, re-arranging his world to be one where he is not overwhelmed by the silence of Thomas's death. Bull goes on to suggest that the freedom of choice provided by the personal music player allows these curated soundscapes to become further personalized and curated by the listener. He writes that, in the repeated use of the personal music player, listeners participate in the regular "[m]aintenance of mood."<sup>8</sup> Here, Bull notes that, as listeners keep "enhancing" their experience in these soundscapes, they discover and build their "perfect environment[s]."<sup>9</sup> Thus, the curated soundscape is useful for listeners to re-imagine the immediate and stressful spaces of experience as those that are socially and sensorially more comforting. Because of the curated soundscape it provides, the personal music player consequently becomes a tool for escapism for its listeners. However, while Josh curates his soundscape to his needs in a similar way to Bull's description, it is clear that he is also participating in a unique practice of Québécois escapism, as he is not only re-imagining his immediate space, but the effects of the silence he is facing.

### **Cultural Escapism in Québec**

In order to understand how personal music players are used by the protagonists in these Québécois coming-of-age films, it is essential to first understand how Québécois cinema frames the twenty-first century socio-political situation for its youth. Sociologist Ian Lockerbie argues that in their works, Québécois directors reflect the harsh social conditions that young people face as they grow up in a society of adults who are still strained by the political events of the twentieth century, such as the Quiet Revolution, the ensuing October Crisis and the two failed political referendums. He writes that these directors employ "a hard self-examination and a pitiless exposure of the human inadequacies that had been produced by two centuries of subordination."<sup>10</sup> Scholars such as Thomas Waugh write about how Québec is often cinematically portrayed through the emptiness and existential dread felt by protagonists.<sup>11</sup> This existential dread is seen in how contemporary Québécois directors often frame Québec as an

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City*, 36.

<sup>10</sup> Ian Lockerbie, "Quebec Cinema as a Mirror of Identity," in *Canada on The Threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. C.H.W. Remie and J.-M. Lacroix (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), 303.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Waugh, *Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 112.

empty space with little room for young people to attain their ambitions. Film scholar Scott MacKenzie suggests that since the population of Québec remains deadlocked within political debates surrounding sovereignty, they cannot define for themselves a concrete culture in which to inhabit.<sup>12</sup> In her work on Francophone cinema, Lieve Spaas echoes MacKenzie's argument, saying that cinematically, Québec tends to be imbued as a place with no concrete culture. She writes that Québécois cinema is filled with physical and existential "open spaces" that entice characters to explore their own identities, which can be either freeing or terrifying for them.<sup>13</sup> However, these vast open spaces also cause characters to become cynical, feeling there are no overarching "social values or moral aims" they can attach themselves to.<sup>14</sup> The "emptiness" identified by these film theorists is also identified by political scientist Dale Thomson, who suggests that the contemporary generation of Québec youth faces a future in with limited economic opportunities. He writes that they have become a "lost generation" as they are "restricted in their attachments to Quebec and their deficiencies in English" causing "the public sector [to] offer fewer opportunities for employment."<sup>15</sup> Thomson further posits that this current generation of Québécois youth follow the generation of the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, and continue to face the social repercussions of that era. The Quiet Revolution was a period in which the provincial government increasingly aligned itself with separatist politics, developing its own welfare state. In this time, the province was gaining more social power than the Church and the federal government. Because of this, there was a growing sense of Québécois nationalism. Thomson believes that the youth of the Quiet Revolution era were "cast off of religious and social frameworks" causing them to "certainly be more free but often lack a clear set of values and societal structures to guide them through life."<sup>16</sup> Although the events of the Quiet Revolution ended in the early 1980s, Thomson argues the social effects of it have never ceased, as they were passed down to the next generation. As the younger generation grew up with uncertainty over their social, economic and cultural positions, they passed down this worldview to their children.<sup>17</sup> These anxieties are all reflected within Québécois coming-of-age

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<sup>12</sup> Scott MacKenzie, *Screening Québec: Québécois Moving Images, National Identity, And the Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Lieve Spaas, *Francophone Film: A Struggle for Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 64.

<sup>14</sup> Lieve Spaas, *Francophone Film: A Struggle for Identity*, 64.

<sup>15</sup> Dale Thomson, "Language, Identity, and the Nationalist Impulse: Quebec," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 538, no. 1 (January 1995): 81.

<sup>16</sup> Dale Thomson, "Language, Identity, and the Nationalist Impulse: Quebec," 81.

<sup>17</sup> Dale Thomson, "Language, Identity, and the Nationalist Impulse: Quebec," 81.

films, as adolescent protagonists feel like they are trapped with an uncertain future, and feel like their parents cannot support them in locating their identities. However, Québécois coming-of-age films also capture the desire to escape these narratives and to free themselves from these dire situations.

Film scholar Peter Harcourt posits that young characters represent a turn in Québécois culture, as they are “seeking to free themselves from the inadequacy of inherited myths” of traditional Québécois narratives of anxiety and melancholia, searching for brighter, more optimistic ways to redefine the Québécois narrative.<sup>18</sup> Instead of accepting their futures as a timeline of endless deterioration, they seek to redefine their futures as a dream where the limits that Québécois society places on them do not exert as strong of an influence. Québécois sociologist Marc Molgat posits that “entry into adulthood had become a complex affair that forced youths to define themselves outside the traditional social structures that attributed identity.”<sup>19</sup> In this quest to locate their identities in an increasingly unsure political landscape, Molgat believes that Québécois youth must “restructure their social relations” and possess a “desire for greater autonomy” from existing social structures.<sup>20</sup> This desire to escape existing social structures is exemplified in *Tout est parfait*, as Josh seeks to find a new narrative by using his iPod to re-arrange the world that is melancholic and empty, for one in which he can be in control. He fills in the silence caused by his friend’s suicide with the sounds he enjoys. As he listens to his music, he transforms his room, which has become a traumatic site (as he used to spend so much time with his friend there) to a space he can enjoy. This use of personal music players in Québécois coming-of-age films adds nuance to Bull’s theory. These protagonists are not just using their personal music players to escape the ennui of the everyday; they are also using them to engage in a unique cultural practice of escapism – to imagine worlds, and thus futures, where the social, political and economic limitations of Québec do not apply.

This grappling with the future is developed in the works of Québécois sociology scholars Jocelyn Maclure and Jocelyn Létourneau. Maclure builds on Peter Harcourt’s suggestion of the younger generation embodying a possible turning point in Québécois culture. He writes that the

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Harcourt, “The Reality of Dreams: A Presentation of *l’Ange et la femme* (1977),” *CineAction* 73-74, no. 3 (June 2007): 132.

<sup>19</sup> Marc Molgat, “Leaving Home in Québec: Theoretical and Social Implications of (Im)mobility Among Youth,” *Journal of Youth Studies* 5, no. 2 (June 2002): 136.

<sup>20</sup> Marc Molgat, “Leaving Home in Québec,” 149.

current generation is growing up in environments marked by the “ambivalence of being,” or spaces wherein they feel their national identities (both Québécois and Canadian) are contested.<sup>21</sup> Due to the fact that Québécois youth continue to grapple with the social effects of the Quiet Revolution, the impacts of the economic recessions of the 1980s and 1990s, the social divisions between generations caused by the separatist movement and the increasing rise of right-wing politics in Québec, youth come to believe that their future opportunities are limited.<sup>22</sup> Because of this sense of hopelessness, some develop a sense of futurity where their identities and social positions are more secure. Jocelyn Létourneau argues that, among Québécois youth, it becomes common to search for belonging by using this space of ambivalence as one in which identity can be explored and developed. He writes that youth must find “narrative possibilities” by imagining themselves in the future, thus “reveal[ing] and reviv[ing]” their national identities.<sup>23</sup> Létourneau argues that, as the Québécois find this “non-space (*hors lieu*) of identity [within the socio-political environment of] ambivalence,” they can reach a sense of prolonged futurity.<sup>24</sup> Yet, Létourneau posits that young people do not feel they want to engage with the complex history of Québec and would rather imagine themselves in politically and socially “cosmopolitan situations,” or situations in which they can thrive without social restrictions.<sup>25</sup> Thus, according to Létourneau, Québécois youth can use their environment of political uncertainty to contemplate and re-discover their national identities, and envision a future which they have more agency over.

The popular music that Québécois youth engage with assists this futurity to be built upon. Scholar Simon Frith has argued that, as people interact increasingly with popular music culture, their identities become “mobile,” and change according to the music they listen to.<sup>26</sup> Frith asserts that, as people listen to music on a regular basis, the process of their identity formation “is best understood as a *self-in progress*,” or one where they are “experiencing [them]selves (not just the

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<sup>21</sup> Jocelyn Maclure, *Quebec Identity: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 77.

<sup>22</sup> For more detailed accounts of the recent history of economic and social divisions in Québec, see Ouellet (1991), Clift (2014) and Boucher and Noiseux (2018).

<sup>23</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for the Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Quebec*, trans. Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montréal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004), 126.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Jocelyn Maclure, *Quebec Identity*, 77.

<sup>25</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, “Remembering (From) Where You’re Going: Memory as Legacy and Inheritance,” 734.

<sup>26</sup> Simon Frith, “Music and Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul DuGay. (London: Crane Resource Centre, 2006), 109.

world) in a different way” every time they listen.<sup>27</sup> Frith thus posits that this process of using music helps people understand and re-interpret their own fluctuating identities, and can serve as a guide to make sense of volatile or changing political landscapes. Because they use music to re-imagine the world, this process of listening to music then becomes a process of cultural escapism. While Frith discusses these ideas in a British context, Scott Piroth's study finds a similar process in Québec. In his sociological study, he posits that American music (and, thus, American ideals of ambition and individuality) has a large presence in Québec. He argues that “[p]opular songs tell stories about social groups—stories that form part of a narrative that helps individuals find their place in the world and develop a political identity.”<sup>28</sup> Piroth states that “[w]hen identities are contested, as in Quebec, such narratives may be particularly powerful in shaping how an individual views the world.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, Piroth demonstrates how this practice of cultural escapism also operates in a Québécois context, and that youth often use pre-existing narratives present in American music to conceptualize the identities they wish to inhabit. Listening to music thus becomes an effective tool for Québécois youth to ponder and mediate their identities amongst this environment of ambivalence. What the personal music player then offers is a milieu for youth to make this imagined futurity more tangible. As scholars such as Bull argue, the personal music player allows for the listener to re-imagine their social and cultural environments to become more satisfying to them. In these ways, the personal music player becomes the powerful tool for Québécois youth to engage in this process of cultural escapism. They re-imagine and re-interpret their national identities, in order to develop a sense of futurity for themselves within Québec. One might argue that, within certain Québécois coming-of-age films, protagonists are often seen using American and British music in order to imagine Americanized worlds with more imagined freedoms than their everyday lives in Québec provide.

Therefore, using Maclure, Létourneau, Frith and Piroth’s ideas of cultural escapism, it becomes possible to resituate Bull’s ideas of how the personal music player is used in a specific Québécois context. Using *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, *Mommy* and *Les êtres chers* as examples, it becomes clear that the personal music player does more than provide the temporary relief from the conditions of the modern world, as suggested by Bull. Instead, it is used by these Québécois adolescent

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<sup>27</sup> Simon Frith, “Music and Identity,” 109.

<sup>28</sup> Scott Piroth, “Popular Music and Identity in Quebec,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 38, no. 2 (August 2008): 146.

<sup>29</sup> Scott Piroth, “Popular Music and Identity in Quebec,” 146.

protagonists to engage in the practice of cultural escapism, as they imagine themselves in better worlds where they are able to locate their personal and national identities and avoid the impacts of their social marginalization. As they participate in these worlds of their curated soundscape, they begin to realize the identities they want to take on in the future. In the investigation of the following films, it is clear that the personal music player is used to combat societal limitations and imagine futures beyond current limitations.

### ***C.R.A.Z.Y.***

Before entering the field of cinema with his first feature *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, Jean-Marc Vallée worked as a DJ and would spend most of the 1990s and early 2000s doing smaller video projects, such as directing music videos for Québécois musical groups. Music is very influential to his directing style, and he develops and assigns playlists to his actors in order for them to grasp their characters.<sup>30</sup> Throughout much of his work, music is consistently heard both in and out of diegesis, in order to build characters and emphasize important dramatic moments. Vallée often blends his experience as a DJ with his filmmaking, blending pop music with important climactic moments. *C.R.A.Z.Y.* uses popular English-language rock music to reflect Zac's emotions as he grows up in Québec in the 1970s.

Set in the outskirts of suburban Montréal in the 1970s, *C.R.A.Z.Y.* focusses on the life of the teenage Zac as he experiments with his emerging queer sexuality. He describes to his friends that he is “certainly unsure” of what identity he will take on as an adult. As he enters high school, he begins to suspect his queerness, but is forced to keep his desires private so as to keep up appearances for his strict Catholic family. To pursue this self-exploration, he begins to experiment with pop culture without his family's knowledge. For example, he tries on women's clothing and make-up in a scene where his parents are not in the house, in his desire to appear more feminine. However, he truly discovers his identity through his curated soundscape, thanks to his vinyl player. Zac is first presented using the device in a scene after Zac's father, Gervais, yells at him for his “strange” behaviours. Zac responds to these accusations by storming to his room and playing The Rolling Stones' *Beggars Banquet* loudly on his vinyl player. When “Sympathy for The Devil” starts to play, Zac sighs with relief, as he drowns out his father's

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<sup>30</sup> Steve Challogan. “Champion of the Disenfranchised,” *Directors Guild of America Quartely* (Summer 2019), 5.

unwanted comments with his chosen music. The film thus establishes Zac's comfort with the personal music player and his use of it to relax.

However, Zac's curated soundscape does not appear until the following scene, in which he is attending Christmas mass with his family. He is presented slouching in his seat at the end of a crowded pew. There is a preacher delivering a Christmas sermon about families coming together and uniting "in religious spirits" on this "special holiday." Throughout the delivery of the priest's sermon, he looks extremely uncomfortable with his surroundings, staring in confusion at his family, all of whom are enthusiastically repeating the words said by the sermon leader. After watching them for a few seconds, he changes his gaze to look around the church in desperation for something else to occupy his mind. The next few shots are of various other church members looking at Zac in a disapproving manner or gossiping to each other about him. Zac feels he does not belong in Church, where his non-heteronormative sexuality and gender expression will not be accepted. As the church attendees are staring at him, the film presents a few wide shots where Zac is the only one slouching and not looking forward, indicating that he does not belong to this crowd. Zac is also portrayed as out-of-place in terms of the sounds he produces, as he shifts in his seat and creates noise in an asynchronous beat to the hymn – almost as if Zac's existence in the church is an interruption of the homogeneity of this community.

Even though Zac feels uncomfortable, he has a moment of clarity, provided by his first exposure to the curated soundscape. After the sermon finishes, the priest directs the choir to start singing the Hallelujah chorus of Handel's "Messiah." Zac sits up in his seat, wanting to imagine himself elsewhere. Zac closes his eyes while the film cuts to a flashback, and recalls an earlier scene where he was listening to "Sympathy for the Devil." Zac visualizes himself lying on his bed, listening to the last chorus when the record player starts to skip. Zac does not react as the lyric of "woo-woo" repeats several times over, as he is so relaxed. Comfortably lying on his bed, he falls asleep. The flashback ends as the film cuts back to church, where he suddenly wakes up and looks around again, trying to regain his bearings. The "woo-woo" lyric is still repeating, playing in the exact same way it was in the previous shot. Only this time, people around him are singing "woo-woo" in the style of the Hallelujah chorus, replacing Mick Jagger's vocal track. Zac then realizes he is still in his dreamscape, but he is now able to imagine a more welcoming version of his church. The following series of shots indicates that those who once judged him now accept him. First, Zac catches the gaze of a boy and a girl, who both smile at him and sing

the lyric to him. Suddenly, the church choir turns to Zac, repeating the lyric while smiling and raising their arms. Next, the sermon leader looks directly at Zac and gives him a thumbs up gesture, indicating that the Catholic Church is now accepts him. Then his family turns and smiles enthusiastically at Zac as they sing the lyric. The shot then changes to a close-up of Zac's face, where he smiles widely, clapping along with the music. The rest of the church crowd turns and moves towards Zac, all smiling and singing the lyric. As everyone continues singing, the crowd all move towards Zac simultaneously, then lift their arms. Zac then begins to fly above the crowd, almost in Messiah-like symbolism. The crowd begins applauding Zac as the repeated line gets louder. Zac raises his fist in victory as he flies above the room. When he lowers, various church goers kiss him on the cheeks and tell him that he is beautiful and a "perfect human being." With the music still playing quietly, Zac wakes up in church, realizing that that he was imagining the Rolling Stones song playing instead of the actual Hallelujah chorus. The music of this scene continues into the next shot, where Zac is at his family reunion, being kissed by relatives. The music stops when he sits down by himself on the couch, with no one but his mother wanting to talk with him.

Although this scene shows Zac experiencing the curated soundscape without the personal music player present, this scene is still worth noting as it asserts that Zac can only feel comfortable by imagining himself listening to his vinyl record player. Through imagining his device playing his favourite music, he feels like he can be comfortable in a space that has typically judged him for his appearance, behaviour and sexuality. When Zac smiles in a victorious manner at the end of the scene, the film indicates that he can easily drown himself within his chosen music and re-organize his space to be more comforting to him, in a similar way that Bull suggests. However, this scene indicates that Bull's argument can be nuanced, as Zac imagines himself living in a world where he is accepted. In this scene, Zac curates a soundscape to create a space where he is beloved by the members of his community and imagines a world in which his queerness does not isolate him from the society around him. In utilizing the memory of listening to his personal music player, he imagines a world where he has a bright future – one where he can live out his fantasies.

This process of discovery is not unusual for queer Québécois youth, as Thomas Waugh writes. When addressing the queer Québécois coming-of-age narrative, Waugh explains how adolescents feel the pressure to hide their queer identities. He writes that in a Québécois context,

“pressures are [often] environmental,” referencing the presence of Catholicism in Québec and how queer people are often made to feel they do not belong.<sup>31</sup> It is important to note here that *C.R.A.Z.Y.* takes place in the late 1970s. Despite the secular forces behind the Quiet Revolution during this time, Catholicism was still deeply embedded within the province’s culture, and the need to conform to Catholic expectations was still present. Film scholar Robert Schwartzwald notes that the “montage, cross-cutting and the acceleration and slowing down of time” present in the film indicates a sense of reverie typically associated with “nostalgic and sentimental evocations of suburban life that have become so common in Hollywood cinema.”<sup>32</sup> What Schwartzwald is addressing in his overview of *C.R.A.Z.Y.* is that Zac’s dream is much like the notion that Frith and Piroth bring forth, where Québécois youth use pre-existing pop cultural narratives to begin their process of self-discovery. This process allows Zac to imagine a different version of Québec that is more socially accepting of his identity. Because Zac is living in the Montréal suburbs (an area of Québec that is heavily Catholic and socially conservative), he is not able to openly experiment with his queer desires without facing rejection from his friends and family. He thus must find a medium to imagine a future as a queer Québécois man while simultaneously suppressing his desires. This is when Zac starts to engage with the curated soundscape. In this particular scene, Zac’s gender and sexual identity do not conform to the socially conservative expectations placed on him by his family and the other church goers, and the pew he is positioned in is cramped and one where he is pressured to sing Christian hymns he does not agree with. In order to seek reprieve, he remembers the comfort he felt listening to his personal music player in his room. He takes comfort in thinking about the British rock music that populates his collection (such as Pink Floyd and The Rolling Stones) and the non-heteronormative icons that plaster his walls (such as David Bowie and Mick Jagger). He smiles when he listens to the music, begins to re-imagine the space around him and finally feels like he can be comfortable in this space that has so often limited him. When the music makes him feel confident, he starts to rise up, showing that he is re-imagining his space to better fit with his dreams of the future – one where he can be accepted by his family and his community around

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Waugh, *Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 106

<sup>32</sup> Robert Schwartzwald, *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2015), 25.

him. Thus, he is curating a soundscape where he can pursue his fantasies without judgement and live out a happy future as a queer man.

In this scene, Zac is engaging with his fantasies by curating a soundscape in a similar manner that Michael Bull suggests. However, because Zac is using the curated soundscape to imagine a world and future where he can be accepted by a conservative Québécois society, he is engaging with Létourneau and Maclure's notions of Québécois escapism. Within the context of Québécois coming-of-age films, the personal music player is used as a means for the protagonist to imagine a future in which they can succeed, despite the limitations that the socially conservative Québécois society places on them. Through Zac's interaction with his memories of listening to the vinyl player, he begins to imagine a world where he can feel powerful and exist as a queer adolescent despite the judgement he receives. In this particular scene, Zac uses his memories of his preferred music to re-imagine the uncomfortable space he is in as one where he can thrive. Zac is therefore using the curated soundscape to imagine a world where his queer identity can be explored in the future.

### ***Mommy***

In his earlier works, Xavier Dolan often explores the oppressiveness of Catholic Québécois society on queer and individuals with disabilities (such as the stigmas surrounding the trans community in *Laurence Anyways* [2012] or the inability for Hubert to get mental health therapy in *J'ai tué ma mère* [2009]). His films are often auto-biographical, sometimes with characters that reflect the social isolation he himself felt in his teenage years (such as his roles in *Les amours imaginaires* [2010] and *Matthias et Maxime* [2019]).<sup>33</sup> He also uses music as a way to explore themes of youthfulness and innocence, using popular English-language rock and pop music to bring forth feelings of nostalgia in his audiences and invoke sympathy for his characters. *Mommy* is Dolan's fifth film and speaks to how music and musical technology can assist a character with a disability to engage in identification, nostalgia and to imagine a different—more accepting—world.

*Mommy* follows the life of Steve and his mother, Diane. It is set in contemporary suburban Montréal. The film begins with Steve's release from an institution. As a nurse reveals

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<sup>33</sup> Dan Bilefsky, "He Wanted to Escape His Childhood. Now, It Fuels His Art," *The New York Times*, April 27, 2018, 6.

to Diane, Steve has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which occasionally causes him to have physical tics and violent outbursts. Short on financial resources and desiring to reconnect with her son, Diane decides to have Steve leave the institution to live at home with her. Although Steve and Diane have an awkward reunion, as it is inferred that a lot of time has passed since the two were together as a family, they eventually reconnect. Steve admits to Diane that he often feels that adults do not understand him and the way that he acts, leading him to feel that he will always be perceived as childish by the ableist world around them. This concern is manifested as Steve and Diane take the bus home, and Steve makes faces at others waiting for the bus in order to establish a connection with them. Steve looks visibly dejected when people on the bench look disgusted by his behaviour or move away in discomfort. As Steve and Diane walk back to their home, Steve admits to Diane that he wants to change himself to “be better” for his mother and provide the both of them a happy life, where no one will judge them. This ableist alienation of younger characters is common in Québécois film, as explained by film scholar Bill Marshall. He writes that in Québec, “childhood and adolescence are confronted with grids of authority imposed by the state.”<sup>34</sup> Marshall describes how the state ignores those who live outside the margins, which leads these individuals to seek spaces of their own where they can exist without being stigmatized by the unforgiving society around them. This notion is evident in Steve’s character, as he claims he wants to find a new identity to live free of the regular ableist judgement he faces. Steve’s quest for his identity is one he must take by himself, as Diane has been absent from Steve’s life for a long period of time and has not provided him with a role model or any version of authority. Throughout the next few scenes, Steve attempts to find this freedom by going through boxes of his old things in his home, trying to find objects that comforted him in his childhood. In combining Marshall’s notions of ableism in Québec with Létourneau and Maclure’s practice of cultural escapism, it can be argued that Steve is seeking an identity for himself where he is in control of his behaviours.

In a scene where Steve is left home alone, he experiments with his identity without Diane seeing him making a mess and being disruptive. He is in his own room, blasting music out loud on his family’s stereo. He dresses himself up in a brightly coloured shirt, opens the blinds and smiles as he dances around his room, indicating he is finally comfortable. Eventually, Steve finds his old Walkman when rummaging through a box of his childhood objects. He goes

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<sup>34</sup> Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 145.

through a box of old tapes, looking excited about the fact he can take his chosen music with him as he re-discovers his identity in the outer world. Through the Walkman, he finds a space in which he will not be stigmatized, as suggested by Marshall.

Steve is next seen skateboarding while nodding his head to Counting Crows' "Colourblind." The song is played at full volume with no static or tinny quality to the sound. This clarity and depth infers that – sonically speaking – the audience is being transported directly into Steve's curated soundscape. The film cuts to a shot where Steve is skateboarding down a suburban street. As the second verse of the song plays, Steve is dancing wildly and moving his hands in a fashion that indicates he is imagining himself moving trees that are in his way. The following lyrics are heard, indicating Steve's feelings of discomfort fading away:

I am covered in skin  
 No one gets to come in  
 Pull me out from inside  
 I am folded and unfolded and unfolding.

These lyrics and Steve's motions suggest that he is using his curated soundscape to re-shape his environment with the beat of the music. However, this moment demonstrates how Bull's theory functions in non-labour contexts, suggesting the personal music player's potential to transcend ableism. Steve's movement in this scene also suggests that he is using music as a means to curb his harmful behaviours and as a means to calm his tics. In previous scenes, his physical tics are framed as arrhythmic and spontaneous, making those around him uncomfortable. With the help of his Walkman and his curated soundscape, he feels he can control his behaviours. This curbing of behavior is seen when Steve drops his skateboard and dances with shopping carts in an empty parking lot, slowing his motions down to sing loudly with the song. Eventually, the film frames him as dancing along to the music, where each motion is in time with the beat. Once he is in perfect time to the song, he yells the lyrics "I am ready and I am fine" in a loud, victorious manner. In declaring these lyrics to the world of his curated soundscape, he is proclaiming that he has found an identity he is happy with, away from the "grids of authority" described by Marshall.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Steve uses his curated soundscape as a

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<sup>35</sup> Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema*, 145.

means of controlling his own behaviours to accord with the social expectations of the environment he is in, while simultaneously using music to become more comfortable with his unfamiliar environment. Thus, it is clear that Steve uses his curated soundscape as a means to control his physical tics, and to become more familiar with an environment that constantly regards him as abnormal.

Thus, Steve uses his Walkman to engage in a unique practice of bodily escapism, as he uses the curated soundscape to explore a world in which he can be socially accepted. As Steve explores his unfamiliar environment, he curbs his harmful behaviours in time with the music, discovering a world in which he does not face ableism. He then imagines himself as belonging to a society that would typically reject him based on his disability. Therefore, like *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, *Mommy* suggests that the initial use of the personal media player works in a fashion that works differently than what Michael Bull suggests. This scene from *Mommy* indicates that the personal music player assists in helping Steve escape to a world in which the physical tics of his disability can be controlled, and he can be socially accepted by those who have previously rejected him. Thus, the personal music player is used in this film as a means for its protagonist to engage in the practice of locating a space – a curated soundscape - in which the protagonist can move freely, not out of step with society, as Marshall suggests. As Steve finds a space where he can locate his identity, he is participating in the Québécois cultural practice of escapism, as suggested by Létourneau and Maclure.

### *Les êtres chers*

While Vallée and Dolan eventually both received contracts to produce films in Hollywood, Anne Émond has remained in Québec and focusses her attention on telling stories of Québécois protagonists and their struggles. Her early short films often play with the boundaries between surreal and the real, showing characters who imagine fantastical worlds, but very much remain in Québécois socio-economic circumstances. She often creates dialogue that relies heavily on silence and the unspoken, showing characters feeling social isolation and being unsure of how to express themselves to others. *Les êtres chers* is her first feature film and is

often considered an autobiographical work, as it recounts the story of a patriarch's suicide, which Émond experienced when she was seventeen.<sup>36</sup>

*Les êtres chers* follows the lives of David and Laurence Leblanc, a father and daughter who both experience depression and use the curated soundscape as a means of coping with their mental health issues. While David engages with the curated soundscape in an interesting and noteworthy manner, this project will focus on the character of Laurence, as she uses her personal music player as a coping mechanism against her depressive episodes.

Laurence is first presented as a teenager struggling to find her own identity in a world of “nothingness and nothing happening.” She lives in an unnamed rural Québec town with David, her mother, Marie, and her brother, Fred. In a series of silent shots indicating the delapidatedness of the buildings of the town, the film pays close attention to the fact that resources such as food in this rural town are low, and there are very few places to gather socially. These shots also indicate a feeling of social isolation, as each building is separated by vast fields. The silence accompanying these shots also displays a lack of communication between the town's residents. Québécois film scholar Andrée Fortin notes that in films set in the Québécois countryside, younger characters feel they have no opportunities, as there are no jobs or places to socialize.<sup>37</sup> There are no places for adolescent characters to envision their futures and discover their identities. Fortin also notes that there are no places for child characters to get help if they are having issues, as those resources are only located in city centres in Québec.<sup>38</sup> Thus, children in rural spaces must find ways to internalize their emotions. Laurence feels this isolation as she enters her teenage years, feeling there is nowhere to express her insecurities, and no resources to help her deal with her depressive episodes.

The film channels Laurence's insecurity through her dependence on cassette tapes. She is first presented in a backyard shed, smoking marijuana with her boyfriend, Antoine. She is closing her eyes and telling him about the imaginary meadow of flowers she is envisioning, with the sound of Blind Melon's “No Rain” playing in the background on full volume, drowning out their dialogue. When they have finished their session, Laurence grabs her cassette tape and puts

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<sup>36</sup> Tristan Malavoy. “Anne Émond: La mort fait partie de la famille,” *L'actualité*, 17 November 2015. <https://lactualite.com/culture/anne-emon-d-la-mort-fait-partie-de-la-famille/>. Translated by author.

<sup>37</sup> Andrée Fortin, *Imaginaire de l'espace dans le cinéma québécois* (Québec City: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2015), 78. Translated by author.

<sup>38</sup> Andrée Fortin, *Imaginaire de l'espace dans le cinéma québécois*, 79. Translated by author.

it back in her Walkman. Antoine then walks Laurence home, as Laurence confesses that she loves to use music to “design her world” the way she wants it to be. In this moment, the film establishes Laurence as a character who relies on sound as a means of recreating her world to best accommodate what she needs.

The film visually portrays Laurence’s curated soundscape in a later scene, when she gets in a fight with her mother after leaving the house without permission. When Marie confronts Laurence about her behaviour, Laurence yells that no one else understands the emotional pressures that she is under, and that she “feels sad all the time.” Her family look at her in confusion and remain silent as Laurence reveals her insecurity. Feeling alienated from a family that does not understand her depressive episodes and feeling she has nowhere to turn, she proceeds to run to her room. Laurence sinks into her bed, indicating to the audience that she is experiencing a depressive episode. In order to stop herself from crying, she muffles her face in a pillow. In a close-up of her face, she drops the pillow and closes her eyes. The following shot indicates that time has passed, as she is now sitting up with her headphones on as she cradles her Walkman close to her heart. The song she chooses to listen to is “Angeles” by Elliott Smith. Laurence is no longer crying but breathing in time to the beat of the song. The song quality is loud and clear, indicating that the audience is hearing what Laurence is hearing, and that we have entered her curated soundscape. During the acoustic guitar break between the third verse and the third chorus, the plucking of the guitar strings is played with some reverberation effects on each note. The following shot is from Laurence’s point of view, as objects in her room begin swaying as if they have become animated to the beat of the song. The camera turns to Laurence as she smiles. This effect lasts only three seconds, before Laurence gets interrupted by her father David as he enters her room and starts to talk to her about the argument. The volume of the song is significantly reduced and the visual effects stop, suggesting Laurence has returned to reality. David and Laurence then discuss the notion of using music as a means of coping with reality, and how music plays a huge role in “calming life down when it gets too loud.” Laurence tells David that music makes her feel that she is “not alone” and that she feels like she “belongs somewhere” when she is listening to her cassette tapes. She also suggests that she feels like she always wants to listen to music, as she likes how calm it makes her. David says that “being alone with the noise” can help when life becomes too stressful, and that Laurence should do it as often as she can.

In this scene, the film asserts that Laurence uses sound as a means of relaxing the effects of her depressive episodes. When she enters her curated soundscape, she silences the overwhelming stress she feels, using Létourneau and Maclure's practice of cultural escapism to feel as if she can re-imagine her world to one where she is in control of her emotions, and that her depressive episodes do not alienate her from her family. This is immediately apparent in the wornness of her tape, as well as her positioning of the Walkman close to her heart, helping her calm down her breathing. However, in observing her facial expression when she re-arranges her room and in her discussion with David, it is clear that she discovers the control that her curated soundscape provides her and enjoys re-arranging her world when it becomes difficult to cope. Québécois scholar Mercédès Baillargeon suggests that depression and ennui are common themes in recent Québécois films, and that many directors choose to dramatize the process of working through depressive episodes through the medium of surrealist escapist fantasies.<sup>39</sup> Baillargeon also writes about how young Québécois characters develop these imaginary worlds to "lock [themselves] up in [their] self-involved projections," where they can imagine themselves in better situations where they are in control of their tumultuous emotions, and where their desire to be understood for who they are does not alienate them from larger society.<sup>40</sup> As the imagery of Laurence's curated soundscape suggests, Laurence uses her personal music player as a means of escaping to a world in which she can re-arrange and control the objects around her, thus also controlling the moods she experiences, in much a similar fashion as Baillargeon describes. In her discussion with David, it is clear that Laurence uses her personal music player to evoke social belonging when she feels alienated from her family. When Laurence re-arranges her space to the beat of the song she loves, it is as if she is transporting herself to a world where she is in control of her surroundings and where she belongs. Therefore, as Laurence alludes to in her conversation with David, she is able to locate an identity of who she wants to become – a version of herself who is able to cope with her depressive episodes, and not feel isolated from her family.

Thus, *Les êtres chers* establishes that the personal player is not just used by Laurence as a means to temporarily escape everyday life when it becomes too noisy, as Bull has suggested.

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<sup>39</sup> Mercédès Baillargeon, "Cinéma indé et esthétique de l'ennui dans le renouveau du cinéma québécois," *Contemporary French Civilization* 44, no. 2 (January 2019), 201. Translated by author.

<sup>40</sup> Mercédès Baillargeon, "Romantic Disillusionment, (Dis)Identification, and the Sublimation of National Identity in Québec's "New Wave": Heartbeats by Xavier Dolan and Night #1 by Anne Émond," *Québec Studies* 57, Special Issue: Bubert Aquin et les médias (Spring-Summer 2014): 183.

Rather, in combining Baillargeon's notions on how Québécois characters cope with depressive episodes with Létourneau and Maclure's practice of cultural escapism, it is clear that Laurence uses her curated soundscape to calm down overwhelming feelings when they become too stressful for her to handle and escape to a world where she is in control of her emotions, and not alienated from her family.

### **Conclusion: The Curated Soundscape**

Through examining how the curated soundscape is used in many Québécois coming-of-age films, it is clear that the personal music player allows these protagonists to escape by re-arranging their environments to better suit their goals of avoiding societal judgement and being in control of their identities. However, in looking specifically at the power they feel once they engage with their curated soundscapes, it is clear that these Québécois adolescent protagonists use these devices differently than Bull's argument that the personal music player is used to avoid the alienating conditions of labour. It is evident that these Québécois adolescent protagonists use the personal music player as a means to curate a soundscape; however, this curated soundscape allows these protagonists to engage in Létourneau's and Maclure's practice of cultural escapism, as they each get away from their various social pressures. They imagine a more optimistic world, as well as the identities they would like to take on in the future. What these three case examples suggest is that the personal music player is not simply used by these protagonists to re-arrange environments in an everyday fashion, but to allow them to use selected tracks to help them escape their oppressive social conditions, giving them the ability to curate and control their surroundings to best suit their social needs as they come-of-age.

From the analysis conducted on these scenes, it is apparent to see how these Québécois adolescent protagonists first engage with their curated soundscapes. Through selecting their desired tracks, they discover the potential available within their imaginary worlds. But what happens when they decide to revisit these worlds, wanting to further curate their ideal futures? At what point does the curated soundscape become an uninhabitable territory? The following chapter will examine how contemporary Québécois coming-of-age films demonstrate the ways in which these same protagonists further curate their soundscapes to imagine Americanized and cosmopolitan futures, and how each curated soundscape becomes ultimately unsustainable.

## Chapter 2: The Breakdown of the Curated Soundscape and the American Dream in Québec

*“I want to be just like everyone else!”*

*“Thank God you never will.”*

- Zac talking with his neighbour, Madame Tupperware, in *C.R.A.Z.Y.*

### Introduction

In the coming-of-age film *Sonatine* (dir. Micheline Lanctôt, 1984), both protagonists, Chantal and Louise, are homeless. As they wander downtown Montréal, they share their dreams of eventually becoming wealthy and part of the cultural elite of the city. When they see an item they want in a department store, or hear a song they enjoy, they pull out their Walkman and record their visions of the future. Film scholar Joseph I. Donohoe argues that the Walkman is “[i]nstrumental” to their coming-of-age journey, as he contends that the film’s plot relies heavily on the female protagonists’ ability to “later play back and fanatisiz[e]” these memories, as they re-visit and re-experience their favourite imaginary moments.<sup>1</sup> Through interacting with their Walkman, both Chantal and Louise are able to replay tapes (and therefore, memories), in which they manufactured social belonging.

As the previous chapter has explored, this use of a personal music player to develop such a vivid imaginary space is common within Québécois cinema. When the listener uses their personal music player, they actively re-interpret their stressful daily environments to imagine what I have termed a *curated soundscape* (or, a re-imagined space that is more in-tune with their thoughts and ambitions than immediate “reality”). While scholars such as Michael Bull illustrate the soundscape as a positive tool for each listener to engage with feelings of social belonging and freedom, *Sonatine* does not display Chantal and Louise continuously enjoying their interactions with their curated soundscapes. Instead, as Donohoe maintains, the Walkman

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph I. Donohoe, “Teaching Quebec Film: Reflections of An American Academic,” *Cinémas* 7, no. 3 (March 1997): 174.

“reinforce[s] the fragmented grasp of things implicit in their passionately incomplete vision.”<sup>2</sup> Both protagonists realize that their tapes cannot provide them with regular, long-term comforts. Through frequent interaction with their soundscapes, they are eventually reminded that their dreams are unattainable in the Québec they exist within, and that being homeless will continue to alienate them from the rest of Montréal society that they aspire to belong to. Feeling like they have no other option, they commit suicide at the film’s conclusion. Film critic Michael Dorland posits that through this act, both Chantal and Louise become “sacrificial offerings to [...] the great machine” that is the unforgiving Québécois society.<sup>3</sup> In 1984, the inability for the younger generation to seek long-term happiness was present in coming-of-age films.<sup>4</sup> While the dire economic situation that Chantal and Louise grapple with was caused by a combination of factors (such as the economic recession of 1983, changes in labour divisions in the public sector and increasing industrial competitiveness in Québec),<sup>5</sup> there are many similar themes still present in contemporary Québécois coming-of-age films.

The previous chapter of this project examined the first stage in the coming-of-age process within Québécois cinema, investigating how the protagonists in contemporary Québécois coming-of-age films develop curated soundscapes through their personal music players to re-imagine their socially oppressive realities in contemporary Québec. Through this curation, they create illusory worlds in which they can manufacture social belonging and overcome social stigmas. This chapter will take the same three films and explore what happens as these protagonists further curate their soundscapes, reaching a point where they confuse the social rules of both worlds, and realize that the curated soundscape has become an unsustainable fantasy. It will first take up and expand Bull’s description of the soundscape. It will then examine what causes these dreams to become fraught, through considering Québécois cosmopolitanism and the American Dream in Québec. Finally, this chapter will investigate the complex bind that each protagonist experiences when they feel like they must recreate and re-visualize their identities and their futures with the help of the curated soundscape, but they realize that their curated soundscape cannot provide them with the social comforts they thought it would, leading

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph I. Donohoe, “Teaching Quebec Film: Reflections of An American Academic,” 175.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Dorland, “*Sonatine*,” *Cinema Canada* 110, no. 1 (September 1984): 11.

<sup>4</sup> Other coming-of-age films of this era include *Les bons débarras* (dir. Francis Mankiewicz, 1979), *Mario* (dir. Jean Beaudin, 1984) and *Bach et Bottine* (dir. André Melançon, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the Québécois economy during the 1980s, see Sarah A. Stevens (1996).

them to feel socially isolated. As this analysis will prove, the dire social circumstances of *Sonatine* are just as prevalent in *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, 2005), *Mommy* (dir. Xavier Dolan, 2013) and *Les êtres chers* (dir. Anne Émond, 2015). While Chantal and Louise faced the challenges of being economically poor young women in a bourgeois Montréal, *C.R.A.Z.Y.*'s Zac faces homophobia as he grows up in the suburbs with deeply Catholic neighbours, *Mommy*'s Steve encounters ableist discrimination as he grows up in council housing in urban Montréal, and in *Les êtres chers*, Laurence faces depression in rural Québec where she cannot express her feelings. While their social backgrounds may be diverse, what brings each of these marginalized characters together is their use of their personal music player to curate a soundscape of a better imagined Québec.

### **Curated Soundscapes and Social Belonging**

Michael Bull writes that the personal music player is most often used by listeners as a source of temporary relief, when the listener is overwhelmed by their external circumstances. He writes that the personal music player is used in settings where the listener wants to “re-organize, recreate and therefore aestheticize [uncomfortable and noisy] spaces” (e.g. a noisy subway commute, a monotonous office cubicle, etc.).<sup>6</sup> He argues that from the second that the listener chooses to pick up their personal music player to the second they put it down, they have the ability to “micro-manage their experience,” fulfilling “their desire for empowered and uninterrupted control over their daydreams.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the personal music player provides users the ability to interact with their imaginary worlds through the curated soundscape at any point they desire.

Bull also suggests that, when the listener desires to engage in extended listening of their desired tracks, they further shape their curated soundscapes to be more in tune with their desires. As the listener returns to their music and their pre-existing curated soundscapes, they construct “two worlds” where one is the curated soundscape, existing “in the head of the user with its own rearrangement of the [listener’s] senses,” and the other is the material world with a “different arrangement and often different sense of time and movement attached to it.”<sup>8</sup> Bull argues that the

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London: Berg, 2015), 39-40.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 54.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (London: Berg, 2000), 80.

listener becomes “isolated” inside the world of the imaginary, while using the personal music player to feel like they belong to the broader social whole.<sup>9</sup> He employs cultural theorist Theodor Adorno’s notion of *we-ness* as he describes this process, writing that, while the listener is engaging in their imaginaries, they simulate a sense of social belonging by imagining that they are part of a social whole, or social group. This sense of *we-ness* can be seen in *Sonatine* as Chantal and Louisette replay moments and songs in order to imagine that they are part of the social elite. Bull writes that even though this act of listening is a solitary process, a sense of Adorno’s *we-ness* is met through the re-imagination of spaces to be more socially accommodating for the listener. They feel like they are part of a welcoming imagined community where they are accepted. Bull builds on this idea, writing that “the greater the craving for solitariness the greater the fear of being socially isolated. This contradictory desire for privacy and fear of social isolation is resolved by the use of [the personal music player].”<sup>10</sup> The curated soundscape then “becomes a substitute for community, warmth and social contract.”<sup>11</sup> Building on Adorno, Bull contends that these curated soundscapes allow users to feel like they belong to a community, without having to subscribe to the set of rigid social standards. With this feeling of social connection, users subsequently keep returning and further developing these curated soundscapes to best suit their dreams.

Bull argues that, as the listener further develops their soundscapes, they begin to become dependent on the process of escapism, wanting to increasingly tune into their soundscapes. He writes that, because the listener continues to engage with the curated soundscape, the personal music player replicates “the user’s desire for social attachment, thereby creating new forms of experiential dependency within the emancipatory desires of the user.”<sup>12</sup> However, Bull contends that, since the listener engages further with these curated soundscapes, they remain acutely aware of the two separate worlds they are inhabiting. Thus, they remain in conscious control over their soundscapes. In understanding how the social realities of Québec leave these adolescent protagonists no option but to engage with their dreams via the curated soundscape, it becomes evident that socially and economically oppressive environments cause these soundscapes to become unsustainable in the long term. While these protagonists originally set out on the course

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City*, 129.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City*, 123.

of the Québécois cultural escapism that Jocelyn Létourneau and Jocelyn Maclure have suggested, fully succeeding in this practice eventually becomes unattainable as their real circumstances do not permit them to actually thrive in the material world.

### **Cosmopolitanism and the American Dream in Québec**

Jocelyn Létourneau argues that dreaming of a “cosmopolitan” world is a cultural practice that is necessary for Québécois people to re-write their futures.<sup>13</sup> “Cosmopolitan” is here defined in reference to a specific body of Québécois literature. Philosopher Jean-François Caron has defined cosmopolitanism as “the idea that the flourishing and development of moral finalities of humankind depend largely on a national culture that must universalize itself on the rest of the world.”<sup>14</sup> To rephrase, Québécois cosmopolitanism refers to the notion that the most recent generation of Québécois society must move past its national history spotted by tragic events to build a world where the identity of any person will be accepted. Létourneau suggests that this type of social dreaming is commonplace amongst the younger generation of Québécois youth, and they do so to move past a bleak, melancholic history in favour of one where they have a greater chance to thrive in a new, redefined nation. However, Létourneau believes that getting too involved in these cosmopolitan fantasies can cause “withdrawal and self-absorption,”<sup>15</sup> within its people, as they become too involved in their own narratives of succeeding in a better future and begin to ignore the current social injustices facing the province. In order to thrive, Québécois youth must thus “translat[e] and transmit historical experience”<sup>16</sup> of the stereotypical provincial narratives of historical tragedy in order to move into a better future.<sup>17</sup> Thus, they must use the imaginary to contemplate their histories and find ways to improve upon current social inequities. However, both Caron’s and Létourneau’s ideas harken back towards the Quiet Revolution, and do not acknowledge that there several cultures existing within Québec, and thus several histories to translate. Thus, this notion of Québécois cosmopolitanism must be updated

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<sup>13</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for the Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Québec* trans. Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 12. It should be noted here that Létourneau speaks generally about all Québécois people needing to partake in processes of social dreaming. While his ideas are useful, alternate readings of social dreaming in Québec exist. Authors such as Green (2001), Carasthatis (2013), Clarke (2018) all explore how diverse social groups take part in social dreaming differently.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-François Caron, “Rooted Cosmopolitanism in Canada and Quebec,” *National Identities* 4, no. 4 (December 2012): 351.

<sup>15</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for the Future*, 129.

<sup>16</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for the Future*, 125.

<sup>17</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for the Future*, 125.

for the twenty-first century. As an alternative to cosmopolitanism, contemporary Canadian film scholar Rob Benvie talks about a certain “punk” sensibility that exists within contemporary Québécois cinema, where “[n]ostalgia is boring, self-aggrandization via hackneyed sentiment to be held in contempt. Against these pressures, the punk appoints itself the future, a point of nullification so a new history can be forged.”<sup>18</sup> As Benvie suggests, cosmopolitanism must be updated to the present day, as young generations are desiring to forget past national traumas, and absorb a collective “punk” sensibility.<sup>19</sup> In order to update this idea to the contemporary era, it is worth examining the prevalence of the American Dream in Québec, specifically in Québécois filmmaking. The American Dream is broadly defined by cultural scholar Lawrence R. Samuel as the “continually rising expectations (that tomorrow will be better than today), the entrepreneurial spirit, the sacredness of home, the seductiveness of wealth, the pressure to succeed” and most importantly the “perverse fascination with ‘hope’ and ‘change,’ and the belief that ‘anything is possible.’”<sup>20</sup> While it can be seen throughout American history, this definition can be especially applied to a time in American history after President Barack Obama’s election, during which a collective and national sense of “hope and change” was being enthusiastically taken up by wide swaths of American people. Samuel believes that The American Dream is intrinsically attached to capitalist endeavour and an unsustainable consumerism.<sup>21</sup> It is especially promoted in moments when the nation is dealing with crisis, such as the subprime-mortgage crisis and financial meltdown of 2008.<sup>22</sup> This notion of renewed hope being present in times of crisis is also present in a Québécois context, as its people grappled with the social impacts of the Quiet Revolution and two failed referenda. Québec scholar C. D. Rolfe writes that after the two failed referenda, the younger generation felt a sense of renewal in national identity. Rolfe posits that “[g]one is the old introspection, gone the old self-containment, the inevitable by-products of defeat and domination subsequently nurtured by an xenophobic church.”<sup>23</sup> Rolfe argues that, instead, contemporary Québécois youth have a renewed interest in “ethnic diversity,

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<sup>18</sup> Rob Benvie, “Make It Dangerous: Canada’s Punk Sensibility,” *Canadian Notes & Queries* 99, no. 1 (May 2017): 39.

<sup>19</sup> Rob Benvie, “Make It Dangerous,” 37.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence R. Samuel. *The American Dream: A Cultural History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press. 2012), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence R. Samuel. *The American Dream: A Cultural History*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence R. Samuel. *The American Dream: A Cultural History*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> C. D. Rolfe, “The Québécois, America, Americanness, and Americanization,” *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 1992): 146.

transculturalism, new experiences [and] new aspirations.”<sup>24</sup> He then proceeds to reference Cedric May’s interpretation of the Jacques Poulin novel *Volkswagen Blues*: “after two centuries of exile, the Québécois have begun to feel the old American Dream. It should follow that, since a society’s notion of the past informs its [future, it] is a rather exciting one and they want to be part of it.”<sup>25</sup> In summary, contemporary Québécois youth do not have a collective interest in revisiting Québec’s melancholic history, full of trauma, xenophobia, homophobia and gender discrimination. Instead, this generation of youth would rather pursue the American Dream as a proxy for living in a world borne of the ideal that anyone can succeed, regardless of their individual identities.

Québécois film scholar Karine Bertrand also develops ideas of the American Dream in Québec. She writes that this adopted sense of hope is prevalent in the most recent generation of young Québécois directors. Bertrand argues that directors absorb and adapt this desire for independence from a melancholic tradition in their cinematic works: “the cinematographic landscape of Quebec never stops evolving, offering its audience new spaces for reflection [...] the gaze focused on itself and on the world is more universal in scope.”<sup>26</sup> Following Rolfe and Bertrand’s ideas, it is clear that the American Dream in Québec is much like the definition of cosmopolitanism, updated for the current generation. It can be defined as the desire of the younger generation to fit in in a world that is increasingly accepting of gender, sexuality, cultural identities. Their vision for the future of Québec is much like Samuel’s vision of the promise of the American Dream: they want to develop a world where the youth will feel social belonging; they want to create a world where their social marginalization, social oppression and political uncertainty will cease to exist; and they want to ultimately be able to locate their identities as they enter adulthood.<sup>27</sup> Through their pursuit of this dream in Québec, they desire to escape worlds that are increasingly socially unaccepting to ones in which they can thrive and feel they belong, despite their marginalization.

Due to their capacity to allow users to re-imagine their environments, the personal music player and the curated soundscape are ideal tools for marginalized youth to connect themselves

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<sup>24</sup> C. D. Rolfe, “The Québécois, America, Americanness, and Americanization,” 147.

<sup>25</sup> C. D. Rolfe, “The Québécois, America, Americanness, and Americanization,” 146.

<sup>26</sup> Karine Bertrand, “De Gilles Groulx à Jean-Marc Vallée: Transnationalisme, Américanité et Territoire dans le Cinéma Québécois,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 49, no. 1 (February 2019): 82. Translated by author.

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence R. Samuel, *The American Dream*, 5.

to this idealized whole. It would then follow that the personal music player and the curated soundscape would allow Québécois youth to engage in their pursuit of the American Dream in Québec. However, Zac, Steve and Laurence each discover that their dreams often become increasingly difficult to attain, as they start to confuse their “two worlds.”<sup>28</sup> As these protagonists frequently re-visit their curated soundscapes, they begin to further develop visions for the future that they cannot realistically achieve. While the reasons why these protagonists cannot achieve their goals can be attributed to a number of different socio-political factors, I argue that the contradictory promise of the personal music player also prevents them from achieving their goals. They are given the means to fantasize about their futures and locate their identities with the personal music player and the curated soundscape. However, these characters cannot materially alter the socially regressive environment in Québec.

Québécois sociologist Scott Piroth looks at the dangers of consumption of popular American music by Québécois youth, writing that “the (sometimes) fictional individuals whose stories are told in songs often serve as role models for how real individuals should act.”<sup>29</sup> Here, Piroth is suggesting that the increasingly popular Anglocentric music can help Québécois youth locate where they want to belong as they become adults. However, Piroth believes that Québécois youth cannot use this music to accurately locate their identities as they enter adulthood, as he adds that “[w]hen [national] identities are contested, as in Quebec,” such narratives can be especially misleading when used for the individual to develop their worldview.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Piroth acknowledges that Québécois youth often fall into the danger of believing that they can achieve any dream they want, without remembering the social conservatism that is so commonplace within Québec. Létourneau speaks to this by arguing that youth are too invested in creating their own individualistic “re-writings of the country,” where they choose how they shall define themselves, disregarding the nation altogether.<sup>31</sup> In writing this, Létourneau posits that there is a danger in cultivating these dreams too much, and there stands a risk of the Québécois individual becoming too attached to these cosmopolitan, Americanized dreams, forgetting that they exist in a Québécois sphere. Québécois philosopher

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City*, 80.

<sup>29</sup> Scott Piroth, “Popular Music and Identity in Quebec,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 38, no. 2 (August 2008): 146.

<sup>30</sup> Scott Piroth, “Popular Music and Identity in Quebec,” 146.

<sup>31</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for the Future*, 123.

David Seljak echoes this idea, writing that “in the context of internationalism and globalization, young Quebecers have adopted a new cosmopolitanism marked by individualism, materialism, and utilitarianism.”<sup>32</sup> Both Létourneau and Seljak imply that younger generations of Québécois youth are placed in a complex bind, where they pursue this American Dream in Québec by redefining past narratives and pursuing goals of economic and emotional happiness. Yet, they must not fall too much into the trap of individualism. In studying how Zac, Steve and Laurence each attempt to realize their goals in the curated soundscape and then recognize that their goals are unattainable, I believe it is possible to analyze how the contradictory nature of the curated soundscape manifests within the contemporary Québécois coming-of-age film. By examining these protagonist’s relationship with the personal music player and their curated soundscapes, it will become apparent that they can never achieve the dream of the curated soundscape. The remainder of this chapter will investigate how each character curates their soundscape to match the identity they aspire to take on in the future and how they eventually become lost between the “two worlds”—imaginary and material.<sup>33</sup> It will conclude by analyzing how they each experience a moment in which they realize that their goals eventually become unattainable, and their curated soundscape unsustainable.

### ***C.R.A.Z.Y.***

As Zac becomes older and deals with an increasing need to hide his identity, he becomes dependent on his soundscape as a means of escaping to a world of queer experimentation. Zac realizes that his queerness does not conform to the expectations of those around him and that the only way he can engage with his queerness is through his curated soundscape. Thus, whenever Zac becomes stressed by his inability to express himself authentically, he responds by using his vinyl player as the device to connect him with his dream world where the social consequences of his queerness do not apply. This notion is present in many points of the film where, when his family argues with him about a variety of quotidian issues, Zac retreats to his room and slams the door behind him, playing music loudly. While these scenes show that Zac escapes stressful circumstances by listening to music, the film also reveals Zac’s dependence on his curated

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<sup>32</sup> David Seljak, “Truth, Relevance and Social Transformation in Québec,” *Theoforum* 45, no. 2 (August 2014): 320.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City*, 80.

soundscape in a scene in the middle of the film. In this scene, he uses his curated soundscape to avoid heterosexual peer pressure and imagines himself as David Bowie, the androgynous, free-spirited icon of English-language rock music. After an uncomfortable sexual experience with one of his close female friends, he plays a David Bowie album and escapes into his curated soundscape. When the needle drops, he adjusts the volume knob as high as it can go. He lies on his bed, and smokes marijuana. Suddenly “Space Oddity” plays loudly, with some static quality. As Zac smiles and stares at the ceiling, the visual of his bedroom changes along to the beat of the song. Zac’s bedroom warps and he is left floating within it. The static quality is now gone, the speed of the song slows down and the bass notes become heavier, reflecting Zac’s calmness as he enters the soundscape he has created. After ten seconds of warped imagery, the scene changes to Zac imagining himself smiling suggestively at a man and a woman on the side of a pool, moving to the rhythm of the song. The film then cuts to show Zac smoking and drinking wine with the man and woman, as he continues to mouth the lyrics. As the song reaches its chorus, the volume becomes louder and Bowie’s voice becomes distorted. Suddenly, the camera cuts to Zac dancing in his room, as he sings along. Here, Zac dons a lightning bolt on his face. In making himself up in this fashion, he is mimicking Bowie, a performer famous for his androgyny and queer expression. He nods at himself in the mirror, indicating to the viewer that he is - at last - satisfied with his appearance. The soundscape sequence ends when Zac’s brother, Antoine, returns home to Zac dancing alone in his room in front of a window where neighbours have gathered to mock him. Seeing the crowd of people gathered outside their house, Antoine runs inside and grabs him by the shoulder, confronts him about how “idiotic” he looks dancing by himself. Once Antoine pushes Zac on the floor, Zac looks up and realizes in horror that he is no longer in his private soundscape. When Zac notices that his neighbours are teasing him for dancing in front of the window, he knows that is not just because of his dance moves. They are teasing him for the expression of his queerness. Zac hides under the window and slumps in embarrassment.

As evidenced in this scene, Zac uses the vinyl player to curate a soundscape that is in tune with his needs as a queer adolescent in a strict Catholic society. Although he is using British music to engage with his dreams, the vision he creates reflects a globalized, Westernized and Americanized version of affluence and performativity. As he interacts with this soundscape, he takes control of his image and imagines himself amongst a more privileged class that accepts

him. This dreamscape therefore operates in a similar manner to the soundscape he develops during the Christmas mass scene in the church (where he imagines himself rising up above his peers to the tune of the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for The Devil"). However, this scene, with an extended interaction with his vinyl player, makes clear that Zac is engaging with a specific persona he wants to become – one that matches the ideas of freedom that David Bowie represents. As the scene suggests, in adopting the persona of the androgynous singer, he imagines himself being admired by those around him. Thomas Waugh argues that in Québécois cinema, queer characters often imagine "yet another Foucauldian heterotopia," or, an imaginary place where they can engage with their queer fantasies.<sup>34</sup> Létourneau acknowledges the dangers of Québécois youth imagining themselves as specific British/American archetypes when he discusses how younger generations form their identities. He writes "lacking responsible vision(s), the people, fed on rumours, platitudes and clichés spread by the media and rabble-rousers of all kinds, absorb a repertoire of representations that sap their political imagination and historical consciousness."<sup>35</sup> Thus, Létourneau argues that there is a significant danger of the Québécois pursuit of the American Dream.<sup>36</sup> Létourneau believes that a Québécois person following the life of an American (or in this case, British-American) celebrity is abandoning their Québécois origins in the first place. Therefore, it is clear that Zac experiences a paradox in his coming-of-age journey. As he uses the personal media player, he curates a soundscape and a persona which will allow him to explore his emerging queer sexuality and express his desire for social acceptance. However, his engagement with dreams still does not allow him to entirely escape his oppressive social reality.

As the scene ends, Zac realizes that his curated soundscape is at odds with his material world, and that his peers will never accept him in the way he imagines they would. When his brother grabs his shoulder, pulling him out from his imaginary world, Zac sees the group of people judging and mocking his behaviours and realizes that he has just outed himself. He begins to cry as he realizes that the persona he wants to become will socially isolate him from the

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Waugh, *Romance of Transgression In Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 106.

<sup>35</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for the Future*, 66.

<sup>36</sup> While *C.R.A.Z.Y.* is set in a pre-referendum era, Létourneau believes that the fall into Americanization in Québec is a gradual process that was occurring before the referendums and was only exacerbated by increasing divisions in political discourse, starting with the early events of the Quiet Revolution. Thus, I believe that this American Dream is still present and is worth discussing in the context of this film.

Québécois reality he lives in. As he ducks from their view, he becomes painfully aware that his dreams of self and social acceptance will never come true for him, as it is premised on fantasy, rather than reality. Instead of allowing Zac to feel like he can thrive socially and pursue his dreams, Zac realizes that the curated soundscape does not always function to help him visualize his future and the location of his identity as an adult. His existence as a queer adolescent will always leave him at odds with the conservative Québécois society around him. Instead of providing a social contract of belonging, Zac's curated soundscape has left him isolated. As his neighbours mock him for his behavior, he realizes that he cannot pursue his dream of becoming the persona he imagined he was. He must remain within the confines of his own Québécois life.

### *Mommy*

Once Steve uses his soundscape to feel comfortable in his unfamiliar environment, he begins to want to better himself for his mother's sake. He claims that he wants a full-time job to buy her "nice things." Steve's desires for normalcy extends to his wish to be educated, as he tells his mother that he really wants to "be like a normal kid" and enter the public school system, implying that he wants to be part of a system that would typically reject him based on his disability. Steve's desires to better himself coincide with his meeting of Kyla, a neighbour and retired teacher who eventually agrees to tutor Steve. Through their tutoring sessions, Steve finally feels like he could have a future ahead of him as a "normal kid." Just as the audience gets to experience Steve's curated soundscape and see Steve as a "normal kid," they learn that his progress exists solely within his curated soundscape and that the freedom he experienced is only temporary.

The audience understands that Steve is dependent on his soundscape in order to feel confident in himself in a world that consistently judges him for his behaviour. After a positive tutoring session, Steve rushes to his room to grab his Walkman and prolong his sense of positivity and optimism, in a similar way that Michael Bull describes. Steve looks out his kitchen window, puts his headphones on, and inserts a worn cassette tape in his Walkman. In an earlier scene, Steve acknowledges that this tape allows him to feel confident. When Steve presses the play button, Oasis' "Wonderwall" begins to play as he closes his eyes and smiles. The music sounds as if it is non-diegetic. The quality of the bass notes is rich, and the vocal track is loud and clear. Thus, it becomes apparent that the audience is entering Steve's curated soundscape.

The scene then shifts to Steve imagining a curated dreamscape of various life events involving him, his mother and Kyla, played in the form of a montage. He imagines himself succeeding as Kyla teaches him a variety of lessons such as mathematics, how to dance and how to shave his beard. He imagines his mother feeling happy as she receives praise and tips at her job as a cleaner. He then pictures Kyla overcoming her stutter and feeling physically comfortable at last. In the pre-chorus of the song, Steve is shown riding a skateboard by himself and smiling. After the chorus ends with the line “you’re my wonderwall” and takes a three-second rest, Steve reaches out towards the boundaries of the camera frame and pushes open the film’s aspect ratio (from 1:1, to become 1:85.1). The final scene of this montage arrives at the same time as the second chorus, which becomes louder than the rest of the song. This scene portrays Steve, Diane and Kyla running down the freeway. While Kyla and Diane are on bicycles pedaling quickly and smiling at Steve, Steve is driving a shopping cart and throwing produce at oncoming cars, yelling “I am free!” with the same sense of victory that Oasis’s Liam Gallagher sings “maybe you’re gonna be the one that saves me.” He throws the produce to the beat of the song. The audience’s glance into Steve’s soundscape ends as the song does, returning to the kitchen where Diane and Kyla are preparing dinner while Steve completes his homework. Diane then receives a knock on the door from a stranger. He presents her with a letter and tells her that she has been served with a lawsuit. Diane, panicked, opens the letter and scans it. The camera quickly changes to Diane’s point-of-view, confirming that her son has been violent to another child recently, and that the family is pressing charges. Diane, knowing that Steve is happy with the recent progress he has made, hides the letter in a drawer and returns to the kitchen.

Much in the same way that Zac uses his personal music player to imagine himself as David Bowie, Steve develops his curated soundscape and imagines himself as the “normal kid” he desires to be, and someone who is not judged for his behaviour. Even though Steve is also using British music to envision his curated soundscape, he is imagining a globalized and Americanized version of affluence and success in his life in Québec. Thus, like Zac, he uses his soundscape to imagine himself fitting into a society that so often judges him for his disability. He curates a soundscape where – in the case of this scene – he can act in a delinquent manner without being reprimanded by his mother or any other authority figure. In other scenes of the film, Steve occasionally reacts to stressful situations he cannot control through violence, directed both at himself and others. However, as he engages with the persona of the “normal kid” in his

dreamscape, Steve is seen using his energy to dance in a manner where he is in total control, and everyone surrounding him is supporting him. This scene also presents how Steve uses his imagination, playing life events in the style of a montage, showing his progress at a relatively fast pace. The fantasy of his belonging in institutions such as school, and completing rites of passage such as shaving demonstrates Steve's desires to be accepted into society despite his disability. Bill Marshall discusses how Québécois youth with disabilities are often represented in the media as "permanent children," reflecting a judgmental Québécois society that believes these individuals should be socially isolated from the rest of society.<sup>37</sup> Québécois film scholar Heinz Weinmann builds on this idea when discussing films made about children in Québec, writing that "we believe that children pass through infancy - an age where people do not speak - eventually to become adults who can voluntarily tell society who they are - there is a space between these where these children can exist too."<sup>38</sup> According to Weinmann, this imaginary space is one where children with disabilities can belong to a neurotypical society, existing outside of their marginalization. Weinmann writes that this space can become crucial for these Québécois youth to imagine better futures, as "it allows people to escape the prison of reality - their own [Québécois] reality."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, in combining Marshall's and Weinmann's ideas, Steve's extended dependence on his curated soundscape shows his need to imagine a world in which he can be accepted for his disability, and ultimately achieve bodily autonomy. When Steve reaches out and pulls open the aspect ratio, he is establishing that he is controlling the world around him. As he expands the film's aspect ratio, he materially alters the world that has constantly restricted him and his bodily movements to grant himself more space to exist.

While *C.R.A.Z.Y.*'s Zac uses the soundscape as a space to explore his class and sexual identity, *Mommy*'s Steve uses it to imagine a world free from social stigmas where he can be accepted. What both characters are doing is using their imagined personas to take part in the American Dream within a Québécois context. Steve develops his persona within his curated soundscape to imagine that he is just like everyone else, and that he has just as many opportunities as other children his age do. In this particular scene of *Mommy*, it is clear that Steve relies on his personal media player as a means to control his violent behaviours, and to

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<sup>37</sup> Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 143.

<sup>38</sup> Heinz Weinmann, *Cinéma de l'imaginaire québécois: de La petite Aurore à Jésus de Montréal* (Montréal: l'Hexagone, 1990), 37. Translated by author.

<sup>39</sup> Heinz Weinmann. *Cinéma de l'imaginaire québécois*, 111. Translated by author.

adjust to the ableist society around him. When he puts on his set of headphones to listen to the cassette of songs that he has selected, his face relaxes and he begins to smile. Steve absorbs the lyrics of “Wonderwall,” and uses these ideas to assist him in believing that he can counteract any obstacle in his way of being a “normal kid”:

And all the roads that lead you there are winding  
And all the lights that light the way are blinding  
There are many things that I  
Would like to say to you but I don't know how  
I said maybe, you're gonna be the one that saves me  
And after all, you're my wonderwall.

Evident in these lyrics is the notion that one person is going to save the narrator from all their problems. In the rapid montage of Steve progressing through different life events, leading up to the moment in which he changes the aspect ratio, Steve is essentially experiencing the American Dream in Québec. He is disregarding his traumatic past of judgement and stigma and imagining a future in which he can fully thrive. This freedom is also seen when he runs down the freeway in a shopping cart yelling and moving his limbs in a wild manner, while cars and people pass him without stopping to judge him. However, it is clear by the end of the sequence that this dream only exists in Steve’s mind, as the film confirms that he is still acting violently towards other children his age. The actions that Steve performs in his soundscape are incredibly real to him, as he notes in a later scene when Diane eventually confronts him about the letter. Steve denies that he is aggressive and says that imagines himself “getting better.” After his argument with Diane, he is seen putting on his headphones again and pressing them close to his ears, in an effort to seal out the noise he does not want to hear. There is no sound coming out of his headphones. Steve then begins to scream, and tears begin to form. Here, Steve is attempting to return to the world of his curated soundscape but knows that he must face up to the consequences of his actions in his reality. He then realizes that his reality will always be one that does not accept him as a person with a disability, and he will always be judged by the Québec society around him.

In this scene, it is clear that Steve uses his soundscape as a means of dealing with the fact he has violent tendencies and wants to escape to a world without social stigmas or societal judgement. As he pushes away the black bars at the edge of the screen that were once limiting him, he exercises control over the aspect ratio to the beat of the song, while also asserting physical autonomy. Here, it is clear that the soundscape allows him to believe he can exist freely in a world where he is not constrained for his behaviours. The curated soundscape therefore becomes a world where he can create a version of himself fitting in the mold he desires, simultaneously screening out the societal judgment he faces on an everyday level. As his mixtape allows him to regularly interact with this sense of freedom, he returns and further curates his soundscape (as evidenced by the tape's worn condition). However, Steve faces the contradictory nature of the curated soundscape when he eventually loses track of what is occurring in his soundscape versus what is occurring in his reality. As Steve presses his headphones against his ears, he realizes that the dreams he has curated have isolated him from the real world around him. His Québécois reality will always be socially oppressive and unforgiving, and he can never re-capture the joy he experienced while listening to Oasis' "Wonderwall."

### *Les êtres chers*

As Laurence gets older, she enjoys being alone more often, and invests more time into curating her soundscape. The film acknowledges that her talks with her father do not happen as often as they once did, and Laurence internalizes more of her emotions and does not speak as often at family dinners. No one in her family wants to confront the taboo that is Laurence's mental health issues, so she retreats to her Walkman. In scenes where Laurence is overwhelmed by feelings of stress or sadness, she often takes off on her own on the highway with only her Walkman in her hands. In a deleted scene where she feels particularly upset at the dinner table after a depressive episode at school, the film only shows her family's unphased reactions as she runs outside, her Walkman in hand. Here, the film acknowledges that she is interacting with her curated soundscape but does not portray Laurence's interactions from her perspective. Because her family are not taken aback when Laurence runs away, it is evident that Laurence uses her Walkman to escape on a regular basis, when situations become too much for her to control.

However, Laurence's soundscape does not always work for her when her daily life becomes extremely stressful. This is evident in a scene where she witnesses her boyfriend Antoine suffering from a sudden and violent episode of schizophrenia. This scene occurs when she and Antoine are taking the bus to school. Antoine looks tired and upset, and Laurence asks if he is alright. He responds that it is "too loud," even though the sound on the bus is minimal, with only the vehicle's engine and low-level chatting audible. After some conversation, Antoine collapses on the floor and starts screaming incoherently. Laurence yells for the bus driver to stop and get help as other students start gasping loudly in panic. The next shot is quiet, with only the sounds of Elliott Smith's "Angeles" playing in the background. We see Antoine getting pulled away by two paramedics into an ambulance as he kicks and attempts to resist them. Laurence is standing in front of the ambulance, with both their backpacks, frozen in place. The music bleeds into the next shot and becomes even louder, showing Laurence running alone on the highway and crying. Antoine's breakdown has caused her to enter a massive depressive episode, and the only way she knows how to control it is through listening to her Walkman and retreating into her curated soundscape. In previous scenes, Laurence uses her curated soundscape to control objects around her in the attempt to calm her depressive episodes. However, after the incredibly stressful events of Antoine being taken away in front of her, she cannot control her soundscape in a similar fashion. There are some warped visual effects used on the clouds above her, indicating that she is trying to control her soundscape but failing. For thirty seconds, she continues listening to the music and attempting to connect with the same lyrics she once thought were so powerful:

Picking up the ticket shows there's money to be made  
Go on, lose the gamble that's the history of the trade  
Did you add up all the cards left to play to zero  
And sign up with evil Angeles?  
I can make you satisfied in  
Everything you do  
All your secret wishes could right  
Now be coming true  
And I'll be forever with my poison arm.

As the song ends, she stops in the street and wails. Her father David comes up behind her and catches her as she falls down, hugging her and telling her that “it will be alright.” David catches her, Laurence takes off her headphones, knowing they cannot help her in the same way they once did. The sound becomes profoundly quieter, while visual effects in the clouds become harsher and visually unpleasant. Laurence admits to David that she never wants to become isolated from the world in the same way that Antoine has, and that she has no idea what to do now that he is gone.

Like Zac and Steve, Laurence uses her curated soundscape to control her inner emotions and present herself to society in a certain way so that she will not receive judgement. Laurence lives in an extremely rural community that expects her to be, as her grandmother phrases it, always “mentally happy with herself.” As this quotation infers, there is a lack of resources in her isolated town and the fact that she cannot communicate her feelings with her family add to her alienation. Laurence is not able to seek support in those around her to help her with her depressive episodes, and she must internalize her emotions by using her curated soundscape as a means to control the noise around her and to control herself. With the help of her curated soundscape, she feels as if she can overpower her feelings of depression and appear “normal.” As Zac and Steve have done, she too uses her curated soundscape as a means of exploring her version of the American Dream in Québec. Laurence’s dream is to become a person who lives in a world in which she is always in control of her tumultuous and overwhelming feelings. She fears being isolated, so she uses her curated soundscape to appear as “normal” as possible.

However, this desire for social belonging becomes extremely difficult for Laurence when Antoine is taken away. As this scene details, Laurence is confronted with the notion that she is not in control of her soundscape, and it begins to haunt her. When she is seen running down a straight road alone for thirty seconds, she is accompanied by the sound of Elliott Smith’s “Angeles” playing clearly at full volume, as if the audience is hearing the same sounds she is. However, over the course of this shot, the audience becomes increasingly separated from the world of Laurence’s soundscape. She is trying to connect with her dream world in which she can control everything around her but struggles to find the sense of control she once possessed. She cannot reshape her environment to make her feel like she can control her depressive moods. The use here of Smith’s “Angeles” serves as an important metaphor for the failure of Laurence’s American Dream in Québec. Elliott, the singer-songwriter of the late 1990s/early 2000s,

famously struggled with depression and channeled his feelings into his songs. In “Angeles”, he writes about the constant gamble he experiences as a person with depression. He painfully goes through each day never quite knowing whether he will “succeed” or “fail” into a depressive episode.<sup>40</sup> Smith’s eventual suicide causes the song to have a tragic meaning. The song’s use in this film therefore indicates that Laurence feels like she is gambling in the same way that Smith had in her battle to overcome her depressive episodes and become a neurotypical person. Although this song used to make her feel relaxed and in control of her emotions, it has become “poison,” as the lyrics allude to. The song now fails Laurence, and plays as she experiences a depressive episode, acting as a cruel reminder that she has lost control over both her emotions and her soundscape. Now that Antoine is gone, Laurence is left in a position where she has no one she feels she can talk to, and she must live in an extremely rural area with nowhere to go, and no outlet for her tumultuous emotions. Québécois film scholar Andrée Fortin speaks to this struggle felt by Québécois youth living in rural spaces, and how they feel stuck in both time and space. She writes “[t]he suspension of time manifests itself at the same time by a failure of the past and a failure of the future; the characters must compose in this in-between.”<sup>41</sup> She then adds that, for these characters, “[i]t is impossible to reproduce the lifestyle and development model hitherto favored.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, as Fortin explains, it is impossible for Laurence to attain her American Dream in Québec, never finding the social belonging she so desires. She feels like her curated soundscape helps her to imagine a world and a future in which she can appear “normal,” but she eventually realizes that she cannot become a neurotypical person in the way she desires, as the social world of Québec is socially regressive and unforgiving, and she cannot find a way to overcome her depressive episodes without support. As she breaks down in her father’s arms at the end of the scene, she realizes that her personal music player and curated soundscape will never work for her in the way she wishes. As the lyrics of “Angeles” reminds her, she must find other ways to find her future identity.

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<sup>40</sup> Barney Hoskyns, “Shooting Star: Elliott Smith,” *Uncut Magazine*, November 1, 2004, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Andrée Fortin, *Imaginaire de l'espace dans le cinéma québécois* (Québec City: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2015), 77. Translated by author.

<sup>42</sup> Andrée Fortin, *Imaginaire de l'espace dans le cinéma québécois*, 77. Translated by author.

**Conclusion: Contradictory Soundscapes in Québec**

In analyzing how Zac, Steve and Laurence all realize the contradictory nature of their curated soundscapes, it is clear that the curated soundscape provides a tragic incongruity with the socially oppressive political landscape of Québec. As these films detail, these protagonists are placed in social positions where they cannot act out their dreams, and the only way they can feel they have a bright future ahead of them is to dream it for themselves. It is clear that the only way these adolescent protagonists feel they can escape social marginalization socially and engage with their dreams is to retreat into the curated soundscape. In spending an extended amount of time curating their soundscape, these protagonists begin to feel that there is a possibility of finding the social connection through becoming specific personas they imagine for themselves. However, each protagonist eventually reaches a point in which their soundscapes and their actual lives have become blurred. They ultimately realize that the dreams they have curated in their soundscape cannot exist in the social reality of Québec.

So far in this project, I have analyzed these films by looking at how the personal music player and the curated soundscape functions in the Québécois coming-of-age film. Using the same three examples, we are still left with questions about how these films end. What happens to Zac, Steve and Laurence after they abandon their curated soundscapes? The next and final chapter will observe the endings of each film and look at the various ways that the curated soundscape returns for each of these characters, even after they have abandoned their personal music players.

### Chapter 3: Coming-Of-Age in Contemporary Québécois Cinema

“Life works that way. We deal with it. That’s the order of things.”

- Diane to Steve in *Mommy*

#### Introduction

In the first chapter of this project, I examined how the personal music player grants adolescent protagonists within three Québécois coming-of-age films the ability to curate soundscapes. Through this curation, they re-imagine their unfavourable Québécois social circumstances. In the second chapter of this project, I looked at how these curated soundscapes fall apart within each of these films, as each protagonist attempts to strive for a future of acceptance and social belonging that can never be realistically achieved. Eventually, these protagonists realize the worlds without social restrictions they imagine in their curated soundscapes cannot survive within an exclusionary material context of Québec. In this final section, I will analyze the conclusions of each of the films, in order to examine the final stage in these protagonists’ journey to come-of-age. Here, I will observe how each protagonist copes without their personal music player. Each protagonist must grapple with a different and uncomfortable soundscape – that of silence – which forces their coming-of-age journeys to conclusions that they did not initially desire. Thus, through an analysis of the portrayal of silence and sound in the conclusions of *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, 2005), *Mommy* (dir. Xavier Dolan, 2013) and *Les êtres chers* (dir. Anne Émond, 2015), I will argue that the journey taken by these adolescents through sound is representative of a unique coming-of-age process, whereby the protagonist must sacrifice their fantasies for the sake of familial acceptance. It is important to acknowledge here that this chapter focuses solely on the coming-of-age journeys shared by these three protagonists, and there are several other coming-of-age narratives present in Québec.<sup>1</sup> However, the distinct ways in which silence plays a key role in the conclusions of the three films merits exploration.

#### Defining Silence

Michael Bull writes about the jarring sensation that is experienced by listeners when they disconnect with their soundscapes. He explains that, as users interact with their curated

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<sup>1</sup> For other coming-of-age narratives, see Deerechild (2016), Mugabo (2018), Pires (2019).

soundscapes more often, they become “dependent” on these curated soundscapes “to obtain a certain ‘fix,’” or a sense of comfort from using their music to re-imagine their circumstances.<sup>2</sup> Bull writes that, without their personal music players, users start to feel “lonely”<sup>3</sup> and “distan[ced],”<sup>4</sup> or uncomfortable with the noises around them. He describes that “with the ears open, sounds flood into the subject body – sound is intrusive, physically and cognitively.”<sup>5</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa also writes that the personal music player acts as a wall of defence between the user and the world around them, adding that as users engage with their personal music players, they become part of their bodies. He writes: “The [W]alkman works not as a prolongation of the body [...] but as a built-in part or, because of its intimacy, as an intrusion-like prosthesis. The [W]alkman holder plays the music and listens to the sound come from his own body.”<sup>6</sup> Later, Hosokawa adds that when the “Walkman intrudes inside the skin, the order of our body is inverted, that is, the surface tension of the skin loses its balancing function through which it activates the interpenetration of Self and world: a *mise en oeuvre* in the body, through the body, of the body.”<sup>7</sup> Hosokawa maintains that the Walkman then transforms the body of the individual listener. In this process, the device is used to maintain the body (and the mind’s) harmony. Hosokawa warns that “[e]ven when one switches off, or leaves [the Walkman] behind, theatrical effects are still active.”<sup>8</sup> Hosokawa then warns that, even though the listener becomes disconnected from their personal music player, they continue to feel its absence through their reconnection with their social environments. In the case of these Québécois coming-of-age films, this disconnection is felt through the protagonist’s interaction with the soundscapes of silence. However, as this chapter will explore, the silence that these protagonists feel is not just symptomatic of their loss of the personal music players, but representative of larger social issues.

To many sound scholars, silence represents a larger concept than simply the absence of sound. Sound scholars Ed Pluth and Cindy Zeiher believe that silence can be defined as a social condition and “not an impossible object.”<sup>9</sup> In stating this, Pluth and Zeiher posit that silence is

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (London: Berg, 2000), 153.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London: Routledge, 2015), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, "The Walkman Effect," *Popular Music* 4, no. 1 (January 1984): 176.

<sup>7</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, "The Walkman Effect," 176.

<sup>8</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, "The Walkman Effect," 179.

<sup>9</sup> Ed Pluth and Cindy Zeiher, *On Silence: Holding the Voice Hostage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 30.

not an object that exists in opposition to sound, but rather a condition that is brought about by deeply embedded social hierarchies that divide marginalized classes from those in dominant positions of power. The social hierarchies of silence are also present in an essay by sound scholar Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb, who argues that silence operates as an indicator of the formation of identity, as it teaches us where our social boundaries lie.<sup>10</sup> She adds that silence creates social boundaries between people, as it is a “locus where *power* can take root,” and that, oftentimes, people do not dare to cross our social boundaries by speaking up about the injustices perpetuated by groups in higher social standings.<sup>11</sup> Thus, silence does not solely operate as the absence of sound; it should also be understood as a social condition that marginalizes certain groups, while maintaining the power of others.

In cinematic terms, silence can operate as a means of indicating social inequalities between characters, where some characters possess agency over their social circumstances while others do not. Film scholar Reni Celeste writes that silence “creates an atmosphere of vertigo” for audiences by removing the sounds that help situate characters within time and space.<sup>12</sup> This silence can aid in creating “a continuity of discontinuity between one environment and the other,” in effect isolating a character from their social circumstances.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it can be inferred that, when a character is placed in total silence, it often reflects a loss of agency over their social condition, and an inability to relate to their new, unfamiliar environment. I suggest that, when a character who has been surrounded by sound is suddenly enclosed in total silence, they lose their ability to mark their position in space and temporality. As they do this, they also lose their ability to gain social mobility.

Nowhere is this cinematic vertigo more evident than in these three examples of the Québécois coming-of-age films I discuss. In combining Bull and Hosokawa’s arguments with those of Celeste’s, it is possible to argue that the inability of the protagonists to connect with their curated soundscapes and their being forced into silence reflects the social inequities they face. It is therefore worth assessing the role that silence plays within a specifically Québécois context.

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<sup>10</sup> Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb, “Silence and the Imperatives of Identity,” in *Silence: The Currency of Power*, ed. Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb (London: Berghan Books, 2006), 36.

<sup>11</sup> Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb, “Silence and the Imperatives of Identity”, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Reni Celeste, “The Sound of Silence,” 117.

<sup>13</sup> Reni Celeste, “The Sound of Silence,” 117.

### Silences in Québec and the Québécois Coming-of-Age Film

In a Québécois context, silence plays an important role in the development of the individual character in relation to their socio-political environment. Québécois philosopher Nicolas Langelier writes about the various ways that silence manifests in Québec, from the Quiet Revolution to the present day. He argues that silence is currently present in Québec as social groups with power avoid mentioning systemic social inequities in order to remain in power. Langelier posits that “[s]ilence is tantamount to denying the very humanity of certain individuals, by dispossessing them of their voice, leaving room for lies and hypocrisy.”<sup>14</sup> He furthers this idea in referencing the works of feminist essayist Rebecca Solnit, when he writes “[s]ilence is the ocean of the unsaid, of what cannot be spoken, what is repressed, erased, not heard.”<sup>15</sup> Langelier defines this silence by pointing out different ways that it manifests in Québec (through the provincial government’s indifference to Indigenous peoples, its need to deny its past political failures, its refusal to acknowledge the rise of racist, far-right online groups, etc.). He posits that silence is perpetuated by the ruling classes, as “seeking refuge in silence” has become “a very tempting solution” for the privileged to avoid political problems facing the province.<sup>16</sup> As they continue to ignore the need to directly address these issues regarding power and equity, they choose to maintain their class positions, while forcing others to continue to exist in marginalization. An example of Langelier’s ideas in practice can be seen in *Trois histoires d’Indiens* (dir. Robert Morin, 2014) through the character of Shawn. Shawn uses his iPod to listen to classical music, attempting to avoid the sounds of machinery in the community he lives in. While Zac, Steve and Laurence enjoy the privileges of escaping while listening to music, Shawn cannot, as the various sources of noise pollution that surrounds him (through construction machinery in his community, trucks that pass him on the highway by his community, hydropower equipment that surrounds his house, etc.) are too loud and all-encompassing in his daily life, and he cannot find an escape. In this example, it is clear to see that for more privileged white groups in Québec to live in relative peace through silence, barriers must be drawn, and noise must be made in marginalized Indigenous communities such as Shawn’s.

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<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Langelier, “Les sortes des silences,” *Nouveau Projet* 1, no. 1 (September 2017): 20. Translated by author.

<sup>15</sup> Nicolas Langelier, “Les sortes des silences,” 21. Translated by author.

<sup>16</sup> Nicolas Langelier, “Les sortes des silences,” 20. Translated by author.

Useful as it is, Langelier's analysis of how social groups with power in Québec are complicit in silence does not focus on the effects of silence on younger and marginalized generations. In order to study this silence, it is worth considering what academics write about the process of coming of age in Québec, and how these ideas are seen in the three protagonists studied in this project. Québécois literature scholar Michel Biron argues that the only way that a young and marginalized person can adjust to a society that does not favour them is to give in to the "inexplicable barrier of solitude"<sup>17</sup> that is the "temptation to fade."<sup>18</sup> Biron defines this action as the intentional decision to quiet one's own disregarded voice, in favour of appearing to fit into the larger "silent" social class. Although Biron groups all young and marginalized people in Québec into one whole,<sup>19</sup> the notions of silence as a barrier that cannot be overcome can be seen in the conclusions of these three particular films. For younger characters such as *C.R.A.Z.Y.*'s Zac, *Mommy*'s Steve and *Les êtres chers*' Laurence to succeed, they must not make noise about their oppression and, instead, find ways to quiet their own voices.<sup>20</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau also speaks about this notion in his book on Québec youth, in which he states that youth have a different interpretation of Québec's provincial motto *je me souviens* ("I will remember"). Létourneau writes that younger generations often interpret the phrase as "I do not remember," in which they mean to say, "I am bothered by the question [of constantly being bombarded by older generations to talk about Québec's melancholic history]."<sup>21</sup> Létourneau believes they feel this way because the current generation operates in "survivance" mode, as they must "evolve and survive as a distinct group as different individuals living in a disassembled, hostile Québec."<sup>22</sup> While Létourneau's definition of "survivance" would differ if it were applied to Indigenous

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<sup>17</sup> Michel Biron, *La conscience du désert: essais sur la littérature au Québec et ailleurs* (Montréal: Boréal Presse, 2010), 82. Translated by author.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Biron, *La conscience du désert*, 83. Translated by author.

<sup>19</sup> Québécois coming-of-age experiences differ for other marginalized groups. The experiences of these characters vary quite differently to those of the violent institutional silencing of Black and Indigenous youth. For alternate readings of institutional silencing in Québec, see Lavigne (1997), Hargreaves (2017), Jahangeer (2020). For alternate accounts of voice and coming-of-age narratives in Québec, see Popkin (2007), Decock (2012), McKegney (2014).

<sup>20</sup> Michel Biron, *La conscience du désert*, 85. Translated by author.

<sup>21</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *Je me souviens? Le passé du Québec dans la conscience de sa jeunesse* (Montréal: Groupe Fides, 2014), 44. Translated by author.

<sup>22</sup> Jocelyn Létourneau, *Je me souviens*, 43-44. Translated by author.

groups, the need to adapt to an unforgiving society is a sensation undoubtedly felt by many Québécois youth.<sup>23</sup>

This impossibility of entering adulthood without sacrifice is elaborated upon by film scholar Christian Poirier in his book about Québécois identity politics, the social imaginary and cinema. He writes that this generation of Québécois youth has “*un manque de (re)pères*” (or, a lack of parenting and a formal process of becoming), meaning that Québécois youth often feel like they have no roots and, thus, no futurity within Québec.<sup>24</sup> They must find their own ways to overcome individual roadblocks, without the help of their parents, previous generations, or history as a whole. Québécois scholars like Heinz Weinmann believe this lack of parental guidance to be symbolic of the province’s troubled relationship with its colonial roots, as they have been “orphaned” by both the French and English colonists that once lived there.<sup>25</sup> Film scholars such as Morgan Charles translate this idea into contemporary cinema, by discussing the most recent trend of “orphan cinema,” or films that examine how child characters are often left abandoned by their parents and the Québécois state. Charles believes that the notion of the Québécois child being completely “orphaned” is one that does not grant agency to the child themselves. Weinmann’s argument assumes that the character of the child is one who gives in entirely to the needs of the parent/state, and subsequently loses all control over their own future.<sup>26</sup> Thus, within the Québécois cinematic imaginary, these children are constructed as martyrs, who must be sacrificed in order for homogeinic Québécois society to understand its social inequities.<sup>27</sup> Charles believes that, in Québécois cinema of the twenty-first century, this vision of “orphan cinema” has changed, as the child is presented with some social agency. In the conclusions of these films, the orphan character makes a decision to move themselves into the future without any help from their families or the state, even if it is a decision they are not happy

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<sup>23</sup> It must be noted here that “survivance” also refers to the Indigenous process of overcoming historical trauma. See Vizenor (2008).

<sup>24</sup> Christian Poirier, *Le cinéma québécois: À la recherche d'une identité?*. Vol. 1. (Montréal: Presses de L'Université de Québec, 2004), 207. Translated by author.

<sup>25</sup> Heinz Weinmann, *Cinéma de l'imaginaire québécois: de La petite Aurore à Jésus de Montréal* (Montréal: l'Hexagone, 1990), 2. Translated by author. For a more developed account of early orphan cinema between 1942-1953, see Christine Tremblay-Daviualt’s *Un cinéma orphelin: Structures mentales et sociales du cinéma québécois, 1942-1953* (Montréal: Editions Québec/Amérique, 1981).

<sup>26</sup> Morgan Charles, “Coming of Age in Quebec: Reviving the Nation’s “Cinéma orphelin,” *Nouvelles Vues* 12, no. 1 (November 2018): 3.

<sup>27</sup> See *La petite Aurore: l'enfant martyr* (dir. Jean-Yves Bigras, 1952), *Les bons débarras* (dir. Francis Mackiewicz, 1979), *Léolo* (dir. Jean-Claude Lauzon, 1992), etc.

with.<sup>28</sup> In this process, the child must find a way to sacrifice their own visions of the future in order to become an adult in Québec. In the films studied in this project, this decision is seen in the attenuation of their own desires for the sake of their families. Francophone studies scholar Amy J. Ransom echoes this idea, as she believes that the only way Québécois youth can move towards the future is to make a decision to change their habits, their routines, and their lives dramatically; she argues that this would allow them “to leave the stagnant, stalemate situations in which they had been existing, to embrace life and all that it offers.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, Létourneau and Ransom argue that Québécois youth must find ways to survive and adapt to the social regression of the post-referendum environment — sacrificing their own needs to achieve social agency. Giving into the “temptation to fade” can then be defined as the ways that youth silence their own voices and desires. In diminishing their own voices, they must find ways to adjust their own behaviours to an inhospitable society.

To synthesize these ideas, it is possible to connect social conditions of silence in Québec with studies of the personal music player. In combining Bull’s and Hosokawa’s notions of the personal music player with the various notions of silence as a social indicator of social division and tragedy, it can be understood that the loss of the personal music player symbolizes the loss of agency. Synthesizing this idea with those of Langelier, Biron, Létourneau and Ransom, it can then be understood that these Québécois adolescent protagonists face an insurmountable literal and figurative silence once they have lost their personal music players, which leads them to find ways to reconnect with sound. However, in order to do so, they must find ways to give in to what Biron terms their “temptation to fade,” compromising their desire to have agency and live with their social marginalization with the need for social belonging.<sup>30</sup> The following analysis will survey the various ways these characters cope with silence.

Through breaking down the ways that each film represents this silence, I will continue to analyze how the protagonist ends their silence by making a decision to diminish their own desires. They realize that, in order to come-of-age in Québec, they must make a compromise between their happiness and that of their family members. In order to escape living in a world

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<sup>28</sup> Morgan Charles, “Coming of Age in Quebec,” 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Amy J. Ransom, “Deterritorialization and the Crisis of Recognition in Turn of the Millennium Québec Film,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 2 (April 2013): 180.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Biron, *La conscience du désert: essais sur la littérature au Québec et ailleurs*, 83. Translated by author.

where the silence is overwhelming, they realize they must make sacrifices to live in a world that will consistently judge their statuses, appeasing their families as they choose to fade into the whole. In performing this act, they are able to find ways to reconcile the silence and the intergenerational trauma between them and their families. It is in abandoning their dreams of society accepting them for their marginalized statuses and choosing to pursue their goals that they are able to survive.

### ***C.R.A.Z.Y.***

After the incident where Zac listens to David Bowie's music and accidentally reveals himself to his neighbours, Zac's world suddenly becomes quite silent. After he faces the embarrassment of his neighbours mocking him, he becomes worried about letting anyone else see him as he truly is at the risk of letting down his family and making himself vulnerable to those around him. Shortly after this scene, the film jumps forward in time to the 1980s, when Zac is twenty years old. He lives a very quiet life, where he goes to great lengths to stop talking about what he feels and only expresses himself in an overtly hetero-masculine style. He wears eyeliner and his brother's army jacket, but in a punk fashion that emulates the heteronormative masculinity of figures like Johnny Rotten or Joe Strummer. This Zac hardly engages in dialogue, and he seldom listens to music. He is only seen listening to a Billy Idol vinyl record out loud when his girlfriend suggests it. His record player is seen collecting dust. At this point in the film, it is clear that Zac is living in an uncomfortable silence, after he abandons his vinyl player. While he used to engage with his queer fantasies through his soundscape, he finds it difficult to express himself in the "real" world where he risks being judged for his behaviour. He internalizes his emotions out of fear of judgement and performs heteronormative masculinity as a barricade to anyone coming too close to him. The agonizing silence Zac experiences worsens in the scene of his brother's wedding, where Zac's brother catches him being intimate with a man and tells their father. When Zac's father finds out and banishes him from the family, Zac is left in a new territory of literal and figurative silence.

The following scene encapsulates Zac's inability to connect with the silence between him and his family, as represented through its jarring use of sound. As Zac wanders the streets of Montréal at night, sounds are used to show that Zac has lost his sense of agency, and that he is desperate to find a way to reconnect with sound and feel in control of his experience as he once

did. The scene begins by showing him stumble through the same streets he used to ride through on his bicycle earlier in the film (when he was listening to his portable radio and imagining a curated soundscape of himself being intimate with an unnamed boy while visiting his sexually adventurous cousin). While his curated soundscape used to help him feel like he was in total control of his experience as he cruised through these streets, he now feels lost, as reflected in the film's use of sound. He winces as cars rush by him, honking. The sound of the wind has become quite loud and sharp as snow blows in his direction. When he finds a phone booth, he trips as he picks up the phone. He yells "hello" a few times in a distressed manner as the dial tone gets louder. The dial tone eventually silences Zac's voice completely, and he hangs up the phone and collapses in the street. When Zac closes his eyes after collapsing, the world suddenly becomes silent, as all the noises fade out. Zac has become so overwhelmed by the silence between him and his family that the sounds of the world have become too loud. Zac's inner monologue plays in the form of narration and demonstrates that he is unsure of where to go next now that he is truly alone. This moment reflects Langelier's version of the tragic silence in Québec. Since Zac has nowhere to turn, no one to speak to, and thus no way to figure out how to move forward into the future, he is left alone in the soundscape of silence.

As shown in these scenes of *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, Zac is facing a silence much like these sound scholars have described. After engaging so closely and so intensely with his curated soundscape and his vinyl player, Zac faces the loss and the uncomfortable silence that Bull and Hosokawa describe. Without his personal music player, Zac must re-engage with his socially oppressive Québécois reality that consistently judges him for his sexuality. This silence manifests through the standstill that Zac and his family face. Neither party wants to acknowledge Zac's queer sexuality and they rely on the soundscape of silence in order to maintain social boundaries, as well as the reproduction of the heterosexual and Catholic family unit. Feeling like there is no other course of action to pursue, Zac believes that this silence between him and his family is insurmountable. Desperate to reinstate his relationship with his family and end the silence between them, he makes the decision to silence his own desires and conform to his family's expectations of him. Thus, Zac gives into Michel Biron's notion of the "temptation to fade."

After a trip of self-discovery in Jerusalem, Zac finds Patsy Cline's album, *Crazy*. It is an album that reminds him of his childhood and the kind of records that his dad used to play during family Christmases, so he decides to give it to his father in order to repair their relationship.

However, when Zac returns home, he does not come back to happy, welcoming arms. Zac's family are coping with the hospitalization of his older brother, Raymond, after a drug overdose. Zac's family have reached a point where none of them want to talk about their emotions, and only speak about their issues in private confessionals at church. However, when Zac and his father are alone, Zac's father admits that he did not want Zac to end up as he did. In an attempt to repair their strained relationship, Zac gives the Patsy Cline album to his father, saying it reminds him of their family dynamic. Although his father initially rejects it, he knows that this is Zac's attempt to end the silence between them and reconcile. When Zac's father finds out about Raymond's eventual death, he hugs Zac, admitting that "he's all he has left", breaking down in tears. As he watches his father fall apart in front of him, Zac looks upset. He knows that his father is ashamed of his sexuality, but his admission of needing a son causes Zac to feel the pressure to change the way he performs his identity. In order to keep his family together, he must go along with his conservative Catholic family's expectations of him. In an epilogue scene, Zac admits that his father eventually acknowledged his queer identity, but only after ten years of avoiding the topic, and Zac having to remain in the closet. Although this film ends with Zac's father eventually acknowledging his sexuality, I argue that this conclusion has a note of tragedy, as Zac had to repress his true identity for an extended period of time.

*C.R.A.Z.Y.* concludes with Zac's decision to end the silence between him and his family by sacrificing his desire to exist as a queer man in Québec. Morgan Charles writes that the ways families act as a roadblock for teenage protagonists is representative of the nation's unwillingness to acknowledge their future. She writes, "[w]ithin the 'nation' of the family, uncertainties regarding the fate of cultural memory and futurity can be articulated through the complex and often fractious relationship between the past (as represented by parents) and the present (as represented by the child) as she or he moves into the future."<sup>31</sup> The way that Zac chooses to overcome the silence caused by this fractious relationship is by giving into Michel Biron's "temptation to fade," sacrificing his own dreams and desires of existing as a queer man in Québec in order to appease his family and continue his relationship with them. He does so with the Patsy Cline record, by offering it as an olive branch to his father. When he gives it to his father, he effectively signals that his relationship with his father is more important to him than his desire to live as an out gay man. Thus, Zac makes the decision to repress his sexuality, in

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<sup>31</sup> Morgan Charles, "Coming of Age in Quebec," 18.

order to give his father the close father-son relationship that he desires. Zac's decision also allows him to have a relationship with his family and move towards the future as their son. He knows it will take him an extended period of time to live as an out queer man and will suffer because of this. Yet in hiding his identity, he is able to fit into his family's social expectations of and to find social and familial belonging. His coming-of-age story thus surrounds his decision to sacrifice his own needs in order to become an adult in Québec.

### ***Mommy***

While the silence represented in *C.R.A.Z.Y.* is literal, the silence in *Mommy* operates both literally and metaphorically. The silence that both Steve and his mother face is one in which they choose to avoid talking with each other about important issues facing them both, by drowning themselves in noise. Although this appears to be oxymoronic, sound scholars such as Gerald Sider argue that noise can be a form of silence, as it is used by those in dominant positions of power to keep those who are socially marginalized in isolation from each other.<sup>32</sup> Film scholar Claudia Kotte notes this idea in her analysis of *Mommy*, writing that a cacophony of sound helps to develop a world where social taboos (regarding society's mistreatment of people with disabilities and economically marginalized people, etc.) are in place, as its characters are overwhelmed by noise which they feel powerless to stop. She posits that, from the very first scene (in which Diane, distracted by her radio, crashes her car), *Mommy* "bombards us with acoustic sensations that deflect attention from the actual action and make it impossible to focus on any sound in particular."<sup>33</sup> Developing her argument, Kotte also notes that these characters use sound as a means of self-isolation, rather than collectivity. She writes that "[I]stening to Die and Steve's interaction and their incessant cursing [...], one feels one is immersed in a soundscape rather than listening to an actual conversation."<sup>34</sup> In previous chapters, we have already seen that Steve uses his Walkman to control the noise of his world and his behaviour, and imagine himself as the "normal" kid he desires to be. However, the silence that he and his mother experience becomes much more pronounced after Steve is disillusioned with his curated

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<sup>32</sup> Gerald Sider, "Between Silences and Culture: A Partisan Anthropology," in *Silence: The Currency of Power*, ed. Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb (London: Berghan Books, 2006), 154.

<sup>33</sup> Claudia Kotte, "Fast and Furious: The Sound and the Fury in Xavier Dolan's *Mommy*," *French Forum* 44, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 322.

<sup>34</sup> Claudia Kotte, "Fast and Furious," 325.

soundscape (when he realizes that he will always exist as a person with a disability in a judgemental society). This reality becomes too harsh for Steve, and he attempts to ignore the consequences by acting like everything around him is fine. His mother also engages in this fantasy, as she desires for her son to do well against a world that so often judges and isolates him. Thus, Steve and his mother act as if their lives are going on as usual (moving up in their social lives and finding happiness), while they both know there is an elephant in the room regarding Steve's behavioural issues, and how he will not be able to thrive in an ableist society that does not accept him. However, neither of them wants to acknowledge this and both continue to pretend everything is normal. In keeping this taboo (and, thus, the silence between them) alive, he and his mother begin to rely on a chimera of happy memories, re-experiencing them through the medium of noise. In doing so, they begin to build barricades of silence to distract themselves from their issues, and this silence between them only continues to grow.

The tying together of noise and happier memories is a common theme throughout *Mommy*. Kotte notes that sound and music are used in the film to “mark [moments] of nostalgia,” and that there are several moments within the film where this notion appears.<sup>35</sup> This combination of sound and nostalgia is seen previously, in how Steve uses his personal music player to engage with his memories of who he was before he was institutionalized. It is also apparent in the CD that Steve's father made for Diane, titled “DIE+STEVE MIX 4EVER,” which Steve and Diane return to often in the film to discuss the happy memories of Steve's father when he was still alive and their family was together. Director Xavier Dolan has previously spoken about how he chooses the music for his films, often connecting music and memory. He remarks that “there is a silence and there is an anxiety” to his works, and that the way characters often resolve this is through engaging with music and their memories.<sup>36</sup> Dolan has stated that he consciously picks songs that will make his audience feel nostalgic in the same way his characters do. He says “[w]hen compiling the soundtrack for *Mommy*, [he] chose songs that would summon memories in the audience.”<sup>37</sup> He argues that his works draw audiences to consider questions such as, “What bar were you at the first time you heard [Oasis's] ‘Wonderwall’? Who were you kissing? Was it

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<sup>35</sup> Claudia Kotte, “Fast and Furious,” 328.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Knegt, “Xavier Dolan Gets Respect,” *Film Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (Winter 2014): 34.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Knegt, “Xavier Dolan Gets Respect,” 34.

prom night? Were you the queen?”<sup>38</sup> It is precisely through this sonic nostalgia that the film demonstrates the growing silence and isolation between Diane and Steve.

This silence grows between the three characters in the following scenes, and their isolation eventually culminates in a scene in which Diane goes on a date with Paul, a lawyer, to attempt to convince him to defend Steve’s case. Kyla and Steve accompany them on the date to a karaoke bar, unaware of Diane’s intentions. Diane and Paul are getting along well and having a great conversation. When Steve tries to interject by talking about his memories with Diane, Diane rejects him. Kyla attempts to console him by encouraging him to go up and sing. Steve tries to convince Diane to go up with him and sing a song his father liked (Andrea Bocelli’s “Vivo Par Lei”) but is also rejected. Paul tries to get him to sing Survivor’s “Eye of The Tiger” (like, as Paul puts it, “a real man” would). Steve, enraged that Paul is monopolizing his mother’s attention, goes up and sings “Vivo Par Lei” alone. His voice is off-key, but the passion in his delivery is palpable. The audience, upset over the song choice, begin to yell homophobic comments at Steve. More and more crowd members begin to yell at him, sonically overwhelming Steve. Feeling isolated and alone from all the noise, Steve attacks one of the aggressive crowd members with a shard of broken glass and then attempts to slit his throat. As Kotte notes, “Steve’s cracked voice is no longer encouraging sociability and community, but one that goes unheard, a symptom of helplessness and powerlessness.”<sup>39</sup> This moment thus represents how Steve becomes silenced by the world around him. Later, Steve and his mother argue with each other about the evening; they both yell, and Diane says she wants to move towards the future and have “all the good things” they talked about when listening to the “DIE+STEVE MIX 4EVER” playlist, but cannot when Steve makes everything about himself. Unable to make peace without screaming at each other incoherently, the two part in different directions with each character left alone in silence. After this scene, all three main characters are all aware that Steve will become overwhelmed by society’s judgement and continue to act out aggressively when it rejects him. Unsure of what to do next, each character surrounds themselves in total silence.

Although the film positions the karaoke scene as the point in which Steve is flung into unfamiliar circumstances, the moment where Celeste’s tragic silence plays out is a scene in

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Knegt, “Xavier Dolan Gets Respect,” 34.

<sup>39</sup> Claudia Kotte, “Fast and Furious,” 329.

which Kyla, Diane and Steve take a road trip. After the events of the karaoke scene, Diane and Steve eventually reconnect when they decide to focus on rebuilding the past that they once had. They fill their days with noisy activities, such as going to malls and having house parties. In filling their space with literal and figurative noise, they in fact repress the inevitable. After many noisy scenes, the audience is presented with a quiet one of Steve, Kyla and Diane on their road trip, all looking out the window in silence. Suddenly, the camera cuts to a wide shot of the car driving over a bridge. The 1:1 aspect ratio then becomes 1:85.1 again (as it did in the Wonderwall sequence), as the film plays Ludovico Einaudi's "Experience" in a non-diegetic manner. The film then cuts to a scene where Kyla and Steve are playing tag in a forest, while Diane watches them from afar. She closes her eyes and then imagines a sequence of events, similar to the earlier scene in which Steve engages in his curated soundscape to Oasis' "Wonderwall." Diane imagines Steve graduating high school, Steve getting into university, an older Steve moving away and starting a family, and a scene in which an older Steve, Kyla and Diane play cards together and laugh. She finally conjures a scene from Steve's future wedding. While all of these visuals are initially in time with the song, they become un-syncopated, stressing Diane out. Eventually the room begins to spin out of control. Diane's daydream ends as Steve reminds her that she is driving a car, and she is stopped at a green light. She and Steve exchange a look, with both seeming to acknowledge that they need to confront this silence. Diane then turns into a hospital and parks the car. Nurses are seen coming to the car as Steve begins to look very anxious. He asks both his mother and Kyla what is happening, beginning to yell and kick in rage. They both do not answer, refusing to meet Steve's eyes as he looks at them in desperation. As Steve sees the nurses getting closer to the car, he gets out and starts to run away, eventually getting restrained by them. They start to guide him into the hospital, as Steve calls out for his mother, yelling at her in anger. Kyla covers her mouth, unsure of how to react. Diane only responds by crying "Steve, please" in tears. As Steve gets dragged further from both Kyla and Diane, his voice begins to fade. Diane and Kyla look at each other and try to speak. However, Diane is too upset to say anything, and Kyla's stutter prevents her from finishing her sentence. The trio of characters have now acknowledged the fact they must contend with Steve's behaviour, but the silence between them is larger than ever, as each character does not know how to make things better again.

In the film's final scene, Diane and Kyla say goodbye to each other, as Kyla plans to move away. During their conversation, Steve calls Diane's phone, and leaves a message that indicates that he is going to give into Biron's "temptation to fade." He is in a straitjacket, in a dark room, and a security guard holds the phone for him. He has calmed down, likely sedated, and tells his mother that he loves her, and he promises he will get better in the institution. He tells her he likes "the quiet" of the new place, that he is feeling a lot better and that it was probably the best choice to send him to the institution, as his "shitty actions" have caused too much damage back at home. His final words to his mother are that he hopes they will talk soon, and that he will always be there to support her. Like Zac, Steve ultimately chooses a relationship with his parents over pursuing his own goals and ambitions. After the security guards remove him from the room where he is making the phone call, and take off his strait jacket, Steve pushes the guards back violently and runs away from them. He quickly looks at the camera as the first two lyrics of Lana Del Rey's "Born to Die" are heard:

Feet don't fail me now  
Take me to the finish line.

Steve then runs ahead towards a window at the end of the hall, before the film enters the credits. The ending of the film is left open for the viewer to consider whether this is Steve's attempt at running away from authority towards freedom, or his suicide attempt. I believe that this symbolizes Steve's figurative suicide, as the film acknowledges that his freedom in imagining a future for himself will always be limited, and the only option Steve has left is to silence his own voice.

In this final scene, Steve acknowledges the silence between he and his mother and gives into Biron's "temptation to fade" by accepting the need to remain in the institution, away from the public. When he runs away from the guards, the film acknowledges that he still has violent outbreaks. However, he wants to end the silence between him and his mother by remaining at the institution and doing what he can to improve there. As previously established, the world that Steve lives in is extremely ableist and constantly judges him for his behaviour. It is Steve's decision to call his mother and acknowledge his own problems that causes them to speak again. In making this decision, he ends the unbearable silence of not knowing how to talk about his own

problems, and restarts communication with his mother. In the meantime, Steve's acknowledgement of his "shitty actions" causes him to realize that he will never be able to achieve his dream of becoming the "normal kid" he wants to be. Steve sacrifices his own dreams of eventually fitting into the world in the way he wants to in order to end the silence he has created with his mother. Much like *C.R.A.Z.Y.*'s Zac, *Mommy*'s Steve is a protagonist who, after having enriching experiences with his personal music player, faces an overwhelming silence that socially isolates him. Like Zac, Steve sacrifices his own goals and ambitions in order to appease those around them and be able to interact with sound in the way he once did. In making the decision to give into Biron's "temptation to fade," Steve is able to find a way to reach adulthood, even if it is not in the way he desires. His coming-of-age journey thus surrounds his decision to silence his own voice by remaining at the institution his mother sent him to. In self-imposing limitations on his own body, Steve believes there is a chance that he will "get better" for his mother (and thus the ableist society around him) who does not have the resources to best help him. However, he also knows that he may not achieve this goal. While the film does not directly depict Steve's suicide, it can be inferred from the final scene that he has given up on his goals of becoming "normal." As Del Rey's song suggests, Steve's desire to get past the "the finish line" suggests that he wants this period of self-imposed limitation to end. He can dream of potential freedom, but he knows he cannot reach it as the ableist society shackles him to his body/mind, and his body is one that is "born to die." In the decision to commit this offscreen suicide, silence his own voice and sacrifice his dreams of becoming the "normal kid" he wants to be, Steve eventually fades into the expectations Québécois society has on people like himself.

### *Les êtres chers*

After Laurence deals with the aftermath of her best friend, Antoine, being taken away by paramedics, she feels like she has no outlet as she deals with her depressive episodes. Her curated soundscape has failed to help her control her emotions, and as her outer social life becomes more tumultuous, she feels she cannot adjust. After Laurence breaks down in her father's arms as the film demonstrates the fallibility of her curated landscape, the film jumps forward in time to when Laurence is an undergraduate student. Laurence is surrounded by silence as she further isolates herself from her family, not wanting them to see her in a vulnerable position from her depressive episodes again. She attends university in Montréal, where she

channels her feelings into poetry. Apart from one public reading in which she shares a love letter to Antoine, she does not share her poems, and refuses to let her family see how she feels. She lives in an apartment with her new boyfriend, who also encourages her to talk about her feelings, which she often refuses to do. She attempts to deny her emotions totally, putting her into a silence with her loved ones, and with herself. Her father continually tries to give her some advice about adulthood, but she often disregards it. In an exchange between Laurence and her father after he attends her poetry reading, it becomes clear that they have not talked in a while, and that what used to be comfortable conversations between the two have become awkward, with Laurence clearly embarrassed about revealing her depressive feelings to anyone. Even though she often rejects him, David is often seen calling and writing to Laurence, supporting her as she talks about her everyday activities. What the film establishes in this moment is that, after her experience realizing that her curated soundscape does not always work (causing her to show her vulnerability to her father), she rejects many ways of engaging with her feelings. If she does talk about her feelings, it is in her journal where she writes her poetry, or in small doses when she phones David. Keeping her vulnerabilities to herself has become difficult for Laurence, as the film represents in moments where she is alone. In a scene after she avoids talking about her workload with David on the phone, she is alone in her apartment, sitting on the balcony. The sounds of cars rushing by and soft speaking can be heard. Laurence looks off into the distance, as the sounds go silent. She wants to cry here but is doing everything she can to stop it. After a few seconds of silence, Laurence begins to feel like she can control her emotions again. As she goes through this, a quiet electronic keyboard score comes in, but the sounds of the cars and the pedestrians talking are completely gone. In this moment, the film directly ties Laurence's interiority with the silence she is facing. She cannot engage with her Walkman again in the same way, she cannot talk with David or her boyfriend, so she is stuck in a deafening silence as she deals with her tumultuous emotions.

This silence becomes worse after David commits suicide. The film does not represent the moment in which Laurence learns about her father's death over the phone but shows her as she returns home to be with her mother, Marie, and her brother, Fred. The film portrays her arrival home with only a quiet keyboard score and no one speaking. The film then shows a montage of events in which Laurence and her family prepare for the funeral. Marie helps Laurence with her dress, while Fred greets people at the funeral. In these moments, none of the

characters speak to each other, and only make eye contact. As the family leaves the funeral, they all look in separate directions, holding each other's hands without talking. This moment in the film is scored with an acoustic guitar, playing an echoed melody of Gilles Vigneault's "J'ai planté un chêne" (played earlier in the film by David). As the guitar melody reaches the chorus, the film cuts to a close up of Laurence, who is contorting her face to hold back her tears. As Laurence holds back her emotions, the song fades into silence. Marie and Fred turn to acknowledge others attending the funeral. Laurence then walks away from the chapel alone for three seconds, in total silence. Sociologist Ken J. Christiano notes that, although suicide is taboo across many cultures, it holds a specific type of taboo in Québec, as Catholic traditions deem it to be an irreparable sin. Christiano notes that the Church has a "near total presence" within Québécois families and "[t]hrough its teachings it shaped family forms and disciplined personal habits."<sup>40</sup> Once one member deviates from these habits and commits suicide in the way David has, the family itself "collapses" as it must grapple with their sin.<sup>41</sup> In keeping silent, each family member of Laurence's avoids talking about the sinful nature of David's actions. What this sequence establishes is that Laurence feels like she is totally alone in Celeste's and Langelier's version of silence, as she feels she cannot speak about her emotions or talk about this traumatic event with her family. As she walks away from the Church and her family alone, this scene reinforces the generational trauma that Laurence has experienced in keeping divisions from her family, feeling that she cannot turn to them for help.

Film critic Zoé Protat extends this idea and cites generational trauma as the reason why Laurence feels so unsupported. She writes "[t]he silences [in this film] are also, sometimes, very significant. These silences are those of family secrets, because each lineage has its dramas which define, shape, elevate or destroy individuals."<sup>42</sup> Thus, Protat believes that silence is reflective of the fact that previous generations are not equipped to talk about issues such as depression, and that staying in silence is the way to keep up an appearance of normality in Québec. Director Anne Émond has spoken about her choice to include silence as a plot device, to indicate the tragedies that come with suicide, and the loss of an emotional support system in a Québécois

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<sup>40</sup> Kevin J. Christiano. "The Trajectory of Catholicism in Twenty-First Century Quebec" In *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholicism Since 1950 in the United States, Ireland and Quebec* ed. Leslie Woodcock Tenter (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007): 58.

<sup>41</sup> Kevin J. Christiano. "The Trajectory of Catholicism in Twenty-First Century Quebec", 58.

<sup>42</sup> Zoé Protat, "L'amour des siens: Les êtres chers d'Anne Émond," *Ciné-Bulles* 33, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 28. Translated by author.

context. In an interview with *L'actualité* magazine, she has said “often when we talk about suicide in a book or a film, we associate it with a specific motif. A separation, a bankruptcy... I wanted to talk about these [Québécois] cases, quite frequent, that we simply cannot explain.”<sup>43</sup> In stating this, Émond acknowledges that there is lack of a discussion that comes with suicide in Québec. Thus, she recognizes that family members are often left unsure of how to explain it when it occurs, or how talk to each other about their emotions. Thus, Laurence is not only caught in an insurmountable silence due to her own vulnerability, but also trapped in a silence because she is trapped in a society that is unaccepting of her dealing honestly with her emotions. As Laurence walks away alone, she realizes that she cannot grapple with her depressive episodes in her current environment.

The film then jumps forward in time again, to when Laurence goes to Barcelona to get away from the stress she is facing at home. Like Zac in *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, Laurence leaves the country in order to try and find meaning for herself outside of her oppressive Québécois circumstances. She is first seen walking down the streets of the downtown area, enjoying the various sounds she hears. The film demonstrates this through the use of the first-person point of view, where Laurence quickly looks around, absorbing the many sounds around her. She looks at a church as bells ring, then she changes her gaze to other pedestrians as they have conversations nearby, then she glances at an outdoor produce market opening up for the day. As she takes in all these sounds, Laurence can finally connect with a soundscape again, and no longer has to reside in silence. This culminates in Laurence going to an all-night beach party with some locals, where she becomes overwhelmed by the sounds around her. As she dances with people on the beach, the camera focuses on her dance moves. The electronic house music is loud, and has a steady beat that Laurence synchronizes her movements to. However, as the song continues, the bass notes become more pronounced, drowning out the treble melody. Laurence looks a little afraid but continues dancing. Suddenly the song starts slowing down in an uncomfortable manner, making Laurence’s dance moves out-of-sync. Suddenly, the same warped visual effects appear on screen, as they did in her curated soundscape, albeit this time in an uncontrolled, visually unpleasant manner. Laurence’s overconsumption of sound has now begun to haunt her, as her interaction with the electronic dance music is eerily replicating her curated soundscape in a

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<sup>43</sup> Tristan Malavoy. “Anne Émond: La mort fait partie de la famille,” *L'actualité*, 17 November 2015. <https://lactualite.com/culture/anne-emon-d-la-mort-fait-partie-de-la-famille/>. Translated by author.

frightening way. Panicked and overwhelmed by sounds, Laurence quickly leaves the party and returns to the hostel where she is staying. She knows that she cannot remain in Barcelona, continuing to ignore her depressive episodes.

It is here that Laurence experiences a revelation that brings about her decision to give in to Biron's "temptation to fade." When hastily packing up her things, she finds a note that was left by her father in her diary. In the note (which is read by David in voiceover, above the sound of crashing waves), David talks about how proud he is of Laurence, and how he knows she deals with tumultuous emotions. He tells her to always find ways to keep in touch with her friends and family, as they will be the most important thing to her as she gets older. He also tells her to find ways to confront her emotions by herself, as family and friends "will not understand" how she feels and "cannot help her" in the way she would desire. He compels her to find ways of compartmentalizing her own feelings, citing the example of how he used to use cassette tapes of duck calls in order to drown out his sadness and interiorize his emotions. Laurence is overwhelmed by this note and smiles between tears. She returns home to her family, ready to start a discussion. While Marie and Fred want to talk about Laurence's trip, Laurence knows that she must acknowledge the taboos surrounding her father's death and her emotional episodes and, in doing so, break the silence between her and her family. She cannot risk talking too frankly, as David has told her she must find ways to interiorize her emotions in order to keep her family together. So, Laurence chooses to revisit memories of her father with her family. She and her family talk openly for the first time about David's death, and how much they miss him. Laurence does not acknowledge her own depression as she focusses on making plans to keep her remaining family together. Laurence eventually decides to stay with her family. Later, Laurence sits down with her family and plays one of David's cassette tapes out loud to listen to together. She closes her eyes as her mother puts her arm around her. The sounds of duck calls bleed into the next shot, where Laurence imagines herself and David walking on a beach together, both of them smiling. David eventually leaves her behind to walk by herself. Laurence then starts walking forward alone. Her smile fades, and she looks into the camera for a few seconds before the credits roll.

Laurence's coming-of-age story is thus similar to that of Zac and Steve, as Laurence has to find means to adjust to the silence between herself and her family, and ultimately sacrifice her own dreams of fitting in and publicly acknowledging her marginalization in order to

reconnect with her family and become a mature adult, moving towards the future. Without her curated soundscape to help her, Laurence does not want to reveal her vulnerability to the world. She becomes overwhelmed by the silence she has created between herself and her loved ones, and this only worsens after David commits suicide. At this point in the film, not only does Laurence have to face the silence of her depressive episodes, but also the silence caused by the taboo of suicide in Québec. Laurence attempts to overcome this silence by travelling to Barcelona and interacting with various sounds there. However, she realizes that the overconsumption of sound has become an untenable method of dealing with these silences. When Laurence finds the note from her father with advice on how she should live her life, she knows that the only way she can start a discussion with her family is to give in to Biron's "temptation to fade" and interiorize her own emotions. When she listens to her father's cassette tapes with her family, she has a vision where she leaves her family behind and walks forward alone. In this scene, the consequences of Laurence's decision become very clear. By choosing to interiorize her own depressive episodes, she regains contact with her family. However, she knows that she must always grapple with her depressive episodes on her own. Laurence's coming-of-age story is thus one where she sacrifices sharing her depressive episodes, in order to keep her family together. In deciding to put her family's happiness before her own, she is able to start a discussion with them, and become a mature adult who walks forward into adulthood.

### **Conclusion: Coming-Of-Age in Québec**

Perhaps the model of coming-of-age in Québec can be best summed up by Québécois film scholar Mercédès Baillargeon, who writes that, for Québécois youth, "both individual and national identities being nothing more than fantasies [are] constructed through a contradictory process of (dis)identification."<sup>44</sup> In defining what she means by (dis)identification, she posits that Québécois youth must forget their desires in order to be part of a social reality that remains unaccepting of their individual identities. Baillargeon says this is present in contemporary Québécois filmmaking, as "[t]he constant oscillation between an inward and an outward looking gaze in [contemporary Québécois filmmaking] underscores this new generation's desire to be

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<sup>44</sup> Mercédès Baillargeon, "Romantic Disillusionment, (Dis)Identification, and the Sublimation of National Identity in Québec's "New Wave": *Heartbeats* by Xavier Dolan and *Night #1* by Anne Émond," *Québec Studies* 57, Special Issue: Bubert Aquin et les médias (Spring-Summer 2014): 192.

part of something bigger while reasserting a fundamental insecurity at the heart of their individual and collective identities.”<sup>45</sup> From the analysis done in this chapter, it is clear that, for each of the three protagonists, this insecurity manifests in the form of silence. In the conclusions of each of these films, each protagonist faces what seems to be a tragic and insurmountable silence after they abandon their personal music players, much like the silence as described by Bull, Hosokawa and Celeste. This silence is only worsened and perpetuated due to the various social inequalities each protagonist faces, and the lack of support they receive from their families and social networks. For Zac, it is homophobia and the dominance of Catholic belief that creates a silence between him and his family, who cannot accept Zac for his authentic queer self. For Steve, it is the judgement of an ableist society that causes a silence between him and his mother, who is unsure of how to help Steve become the “normal kid.” For Laurence, it is a neurotypical society that does not acknowledge mental health issues, which brings about a silence between her and her family, and causes her to abandon her wish to overcome her depression. Each protagonist realizes that music is not enough to help them pursue their escapist fantasies; they become incredibly overwhelmed by the silence they face, and must find means to regain the ability to interact with sound. However, they each come to realize that, in order to reconnect with the world around them, they must find ways of silencing their own dreams and ambitions and give into Biron’s “temptation to fade.” In sacrificing their own dreams of being accepted by an unforgiving society, they are able to re-connect with their families, and move towards a future with them. As Baillargeon later notes, this allows them to discover a “(post)national identity” in Québec.<sup>46</sup> This identity is one where “closeness that is impossible to attain,” suggesting that the only ways youth can come-of-age is to quiet their own voices, and fade into the noise of a socially unaccepting Québec reality.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Mercédès Baillargeon, “Romantic Disillusionment,” 192.

<sup>46</sup> Mercédès Baillargeon, “Romantic Disillusionment,” 173.

<sup>47</sup> Mercédès Baillargeon. “Romantic Disillusionment,” 173.

## Conclusion: Personal Music Players, Curated Soundscapes and Coming-Of-Age in Québec

Glancing backwards through this thesis, it is clear that the personal music player is significant beyond the scope that Michael Bull suggests. Bull is correct to propose that the personal music player allows listeners to re-organize and re-imagine the sites of their everyday experience. However, he seems to posit that the curated soundscape provided by the personal music player is strictly temporary. Bull conceives of this device as one which fills up dead air in the listeners' daily lives, briefly changing irritating noise into enjoyable music. In fact, I argue that the personal music player and the curated soundscape can operate on an extended basis, where the listener can continue building and developing their curated soundscape. My MP3 player operated as an aperture that changed how I perceived the world around me. In this way, my experience closely matches Shuhei Hosokawa's description of the Walkman (as described in the second chapter). To reference a quote I mentioned earlier, Hosokawa writes that the "Walkman effect" (or how the body reacts to the Walkman's presence), feels like a "prolongation of the body", where in extended listening, the "walkman intrudes inside the skin, the order of our body is inverted," and the "Self and world" division becomes blurred.<sup>1</sup> In the act of listening, "the body is opened; it is put into the process of the aestheticisation, the theatricalisation of the urban - but in secret."<sup>2</sup> Thus, Hosokawa argues that, as the listener engages with the Walkman on an extended basis, the latter becomes so attached to the listener that it becomes part of their body. It gives them the ability to see the world differently, to aestheticize and theatricalize their daily lives. This process of theatricalization, Hosokawa describes, occurs almost indefinitely. He adds that "[e]ven when one switches off, or leaves it behind, theatrical effects are still active. The show must go on till the death of the gadget-object."<sup>3</sup> Thus, Hosokawa posits that the soundscapes the listener curates can last indefinitely (or until the death of the object). Hosokawa demonstrates the shortcomings in Bull's understanding of the personal music player, and I extend this idea by considering national identity.

The analysis done in this project is not an exhaustive investigation of how the coming-of-age experience is represented in contemporary Québécois cinema. While this project has

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<sup>1</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, "The Walkman Effect," *Popular Music* 4, no. 1 (January 1984): 176.

<sup>2</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, "The Walkman Effect," 176-177.

<sup>3</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, "The Walkman Effect," 177.

contemplated the experiences of queer, differently-abled and neuro-diverse protagonists, it only accounts for white, mostly male Québécois experiences. Further, the futurisms discussed in this project are based on interpretations of futures and futurity from mostly white, Québécois male academics. In further developments of this project, Afrofuturisms and Indigenous futurisms would need to be explored, especially in the context of Québécois filmmaking portraying the experiences of Black, Indigenous and diasporic youth. These visions are present in the works of younger filmmakers such as Jeff Barnaby, Martine Chartrand and Xioadan He, and merit further academic exploration. However, this project does begin to inquire into how national identity and social marginalization change the way that individuals interact with their personal music players. It has done so by studying the experiences of protagonists in a number of contemporary Québécois coming-of-age films.

In the selection of films used in this thesis project, the personal music player represents the coming-of-age process for the current generation of Québécois youth. As explored throughout this project, the social and political turbulence in Québec since the mid-twentieth century (a result of events including the Quiet Revolution, The October Crisis and the two failed independence referendums) has left youth in positions where they cannot easily overcome social inequities. In the introduction and first chapter to this project, I explained how the current generation of youth have difficulty thriving economically and socially. In the second chapter of this project, I explored how they cannot abandon the province's narrative of the past and cannot reinvent the future completely in order to make it easier for themselves to thrive. In the final chapter of this project, I examined the literal and metaphorical role that silence plays in Québec, and how younger generations feel they cannot overcome the social barriers as imposed by those in positions of power. *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, *Mommy* and *Les êtres chers* all feature protagonists who experience these difficulties. These films focus on how their social marginalization causes them to experience difficulty living within an unaccepting Québécois society. Each protagonist responds to this judgement by turning inwards and using their personal music players to curate a soundscape through which they can re-imagine these unsettling spaces of experience to accord more with their inner desires.

These protagonists utilize their personal music player to engage with their favourite albums, playlists and songs, to imagine their goals unfolding in front of them. In the first chapter of this project, I examined how the personal music player takes on an important role as the films'

protagonists begin to discover their identities as emerging adults. Not only do these protagonists personalize and privatize their music libraries, but they begin to invest more time in self-reflection. They close their eyes, they press their headphones against their ears, they start to dance. As they begin to connect with their music, their imaginations unfold in front of them in the form of Bull's curated soundscape. As each protagonist engages with their curated soundscape, they begin to see the goals they want to pursue, the people they want to become. When they finish listening to music and return to their realities, they realize that they want to be able to become the people they were in their curated soundscapes. In *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, Zac wants to become an out queer man, free to express himself without fear of reprisal from his conservative neighbours. In *Mommy*, Steve wants to be able to exist without judgements and restraints often imposed on him by the ableist society around him. In *Les êtres chers*, Laurence wants to be able to express her feelings, without worrying about the taboos surrounding mental health issues in the rural community she lives in. With the help of the curated soundscape, each protagonist becomes fully aware of their desires, and wants to keep engaging with them as they listen to more music. Through the curated soundscape, they are afforded freedom of self-expression.

Even with the freedom that the curated soundscape provides them, each protagonist eventually experiences a moment of realization in which they recognize that they cannot achieve the goals they thought they could, and that they can never escape the social judgement that their marginalization brings upon them. In the second chapter of this project, I studied how each protagonist uses their personal music player frequently and intensely, that they have begun to curate their fantasies. I then explored the ways in which the curated soundscape becomes unsustainable for each listener, as they realize their imagined futures can never exist in a judgemental Québécois society. In the case of *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, Zac interacts with his queer desires by imagining himself dancing suggestively with a man and a woman within his curated soundscape to the songs of David Bowie. However, he accidentally exposes himself to his neighbours as he dances in front of his window and realizes that he will always be judged for his queerness. In *Mommy*, Steve turns to his curated soundscape much more frequently, recognizing his goal to be accepted for his disability and to be accepted into public school. However, he soon realizes that the progress only existed in his head, and that he can never achieve societal acceptance in the way he imagines. In *Les êtres chers*, Laurence imagines a world in which she is in total control of her surroundings, including her own emotions. However, after she has a large depressive

episode as a result of her friend's hospitalization, she cannot use her curated soundscape to control her emotions as she once was able to, and realizes that she cannot continue using the curated soundscape to curb her depression and must find other means of existing as a person with depression in her rural society. As she realizes this, one of her favourite tracks, Elliott Smith's "Angeles" plays in a haunting manner. From these three examples, it is clear that the curated soundscape becomes unreliable for each protagonist to realize their dreams, and they must find ways to survive in a society that will continue to judge them and treat them as "abnormal." In other words, they must abandon their personal music players and find other means to enter adulthood.

Without the presence of their personal music players, each protagonist faces a silence which is uncomfortable and seemingly insurmountable. This silence manifests as a stalemate of communication with those around them, as each protagonist feels they cannot be who they desire to be, and also cannot talk to their family members as if everything is normal. Each protagonist comes to realize is that, in order to come-of-age in Québec, they must quiet their own voices, giving into Michel Biron's notion of the "temptation to fade," or, the need to soften one's social differences in order to appear "normal" in the dominant cultural whole.<sup>4</sup> Each protagonist then reverts to keeping their family units together and keeping their lives as "normal" as possible; they thus decide to quiet themselves and their own desires to be accepted by society. In making this decision, they are able to overcome the silence, and reinstate communication with their families. In *C.R.A.Z.Y.*'s conclusion, Zac faces a silence between him and his father after his father discovers his queerness. After some soul searching, Zac decides that a relationship with his father is more important than being an out queer man, so he decides to suppress his sexuality for ten years in order to maintain a relationship with his father. In *Mommy*'s ending, Steve and his mother face a silence after they both realize that Steve cannot belong to the ableist society around him. After violent episodes at a karaoke bar and a hospital, Steve realizes he must acknowledge the silence between him and his mother by agreeing to remain in an institution until he gets better. Steve sacrifices his desires in order to isolate himself and keep his relationship with his mother alive. In *Les êtres chers*, Laurence faces a silence when she does not want to appear as vulnerable and cuts off communication with her family. Following her father's suicide

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Biron, *La conscience du désert: essais sur la littérature au Québec et ailleurs* (Montréal: Boréal Presse, 2010), 82. Translated by author.

and a trip to Barcelona, Laurence realizes that she must not speak about her emotions and instead be there to support her mother and brother. In making the decision to silence herself, Laurence is able to keep her family together. Thus, these three films posit that the only way for the Québécois youth to overcome the silences they experience is to silence their own desires to differentiate themselves. In this action, they are able to reconcile the communication issues they have with their families, and thus, older generations of Québécois people. Instead, they choose to blend themselves in with the whole of the Québécois society that has previously judged them. In this decision, they open lines of communication with their families, and feel like they belong to a larger whole, even if it is not the ones they initially desired. These films then argue that, in order to come-of-age in a judgmental Québécois society, these characters must quiet themselves and their desires in order to fade into the homogenous whole.

What the analysis of these three Québécois coming-of-age films demonstrates is that the personal music player is not just a device to fill in dead space temporarily. It can be a device that helps the listener aestheticize their daily lives and discover their fantasy-scapes. My analysis questions the role that national and social identity play in this aestheticization. The personal music player not only acts as a device to aestheticize, but also assists youth in realizing their national and social identities as they enter adulthood. In summary, the use of the personal music player in these films highlight the ways in which Québécois youth become aware of the social effects of their marginalization and the reasons why they diminish their own voices. Thus, in these films, to come-of-age in Québec involves a compromise of one's own desires with the need to find a place within the larger society.

As I bring this project to a close, I cannot help but think how present this idea is within the lyrics of Arcade Fire's *The Suburbs* – the album I enjoyed so much as a teenager. In “Modern Man” the Butler brothers sing together:

So I wait in line, I'm a modern man  
 And the people behind me, they can't understand  
 Makes me feel like  
 Something don't feel right [...]  
 In my dream I was almost there  
 And you pulled me aside and said you're going nowhere

They say we are the chosen few  
But we're wasted  
And that's why we're still waiting.

In these lyrics, there always remains hope of a collective teenage rebellion, but the overwhelming necessity to conform to social expectations remains just as strong as it ever was.

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