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Hybridity Revisited: St. Michael's of Mile End¹

Abstract

St. Michael's Church in the Mile End district of Montreal offers a rich example of cultural hybridity. A close reading of the architecture and social history of the church suggests, however, the complexity of the elements and values of cultural mixing and the need for careful contextualization. The article argues that, if the term hybridity is to be useful, its parameters must be continually redefined.

Résumé

L'église St. Michael dans le district du Mile End de Montréal constitue un riche exemple d'hybridité. Un examen attentif de son histoire architecturale et sociale fait ressortir cependant la complexité des éléments et des valeurs du mélange culturel et la nécessité d'une mise en contexte soignée. L'article soutient que le mot « hybridité » ne sera utile que si ses paramètres sont redéfinis constamment.

From Mount Royal, as you look towards the north end of Montreal, you can see a broad turquoise mushroom of a dome, flanked by what looks like a minaret. Despite its size and distinctive shape, few Montrealers are able to identify the building that stands under the dome. One gray March Sunday, I tracked down the stem of the mushroom and entered what turned out to be a church. I was surprised to see the church crowded, and even more to see gaudy green lightbulbs on the altar, tracing out a shamrock and a harp. Was this an Irish church, then? The priest was reciting the Mass in a language I could not identify. Neither English nor French. When the time came for the credo, the whole congregation joined together. It was Polish. Now I noted the family groupings, the attentive children, the Eastern-bloc leather jackets and hairdos. This explained the packed church, so unusual in Quebec today. When the Poles filed out, they were replaced by a handful of parishioners for the English mass at noon. These were mostly Italians that I recognized from the local grocery store.

An Irish church in the Byzantine style, frequented by Poles and Italians, towering over a cosmopolitan and culturally diverse neighbourhood: Saint Michael's is a compelling image of cultural hybridity. It is an apt symbol of the neighbourhood itself, an urban village which is a crossroads of cultures.

The concept of hybridity has become the object of both enthusiasm and critique over the last years in the human sciences. Celebrated as the mark of new, fluid identities, it has more often been used as a positive evaluatory term than as an instrument of analysis. To what extent can terms like *hybridity*, *métissage*, *cosmopolitanism* or *creolization* account for specific transcultural encounters, the historical significance and differential cultural weightings of mixed forms? The recent *Métissages* by Alexis Nouss and François Laplantine is a symptom of this difficulty. If all the objects in the encyclopedia are “métis” (the volume contains hundreds of entries, across historical periods, artistic genres and cultures), what is the specificity of the cultural configurations which produced them? What the concept of *métissage* gains in philosophical depth, it loses in analytical precision.

The Church of St. Michael the Archangel in Mile End will allow me to investigate the messages of hybridity in the evolving context of Montreal’s Mile End neighbourhood—from the building of the church in 1915 to the dramatic changes which have occurred largely over the last thirty years. Hybridity here is not a banner but an exploratory device, a trail leading me back towards the sources of the Church’s odd mixtures and then forward to the wider field through which the cultural meanings of this object emerge today. The Church is a meeting-place of stories, a knot of questions we are invited to unravel, the opportunity to speculate on cultural identities in today’s Montreal.

An Irish Church...

Why an Irish church? This question is puzzling to today’s Montrealers who are much more likely to associate the Mile End area with immigrants from central and south Europe—Yiddish-speaking newcomers from the first decades of the twentieth century, or the Italian, Portuguese and Greek immigrants of mid-century. Few remember the Irish presence here. But in fact, when Saint Michael’s was completed in 1915, it was designed to accommodate what was to become the largest English-speaking Irish parish in Montreal at that time. Mile End around 1910 was a construction site. The city was prosperous and pushing vigorously north beyond Mount Royal park. Flats were going up with great speed along the newly created avenues of “the North End,” advancing into tracts of farmland (Germain, 93-96, Marsan). The church was to stand as the centre of a network of convents and schools, the suburban adjunct to downtown Saint Patrick’s.

The city is so forgetful. Once the Irish community began to migrate across town to the western parts of the city, few traces of the Irish remained in Mile End. The only obvious reminder is the name of the neighbourhood school, Luke Callaghan. In 1964, with the population of the parish dwindling, Cardinal Léger decreed a merger between St. Michael’s and the Polish Franciscan community of St. Anthony’s.

How does a city remember? The list of things forgotten in Mile End is rich and colourful. Just blocks away from St. Michael's there was once a Crystal Palace, built in honour of the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1865, and a major railway station, with trains leaving for all the big cities in Canada. There are no traces of either structure today. Not so many years ago, the storefronts of the neighbourhood were covered with Greek, Yiddish and Hebrew script. These inscriptions have now been erased, sponged out by Law 101. In a short time: the work of centuries.

Yet the neighbourhood is not lacking in memories. The Jewish community has left behind monuments and institutions that fuel a busy nostalgia industry. It is not so much the buildings themselves as the work of writers like Mordecai Richler, A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, Shulamis Yellin and others that sustains historical memory. Where are the Irish writers who would have given us a permanent memory of their world around St. Michael's church? Their words would have served the function of the figures originally embossed on Saint Michael's roof—shamrock-like shapes in green and white that suggested the identity of the church. These disappeared when the roof was repaired. The church is now an enormous cipher, a question mark on the horizon of the city.

...In the Byzantine Style

The pamphlet published to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of St. Michael's parish (founded in 1902) is expansive in praise for the "superb temple which flings its mosque-like dome to the skies" (*St. Michael's Church*, p.12). The parish was indeed proud of its "headquarters," not only "the most artistic and the most original in a city noted for the magnificence of its places of worship" but "one of the most interesting of ecclesiastical buildings in the Dominion, and the first Church in Canada in the Byzantine style" (p. 12).

Why the Byzantine style? The author of the pamphlet suggests that the choice was made under the influence of Pope Pius X (1903-1910), who actively promoted early Christian styles. Pope St. Pius X is known for his role in reviving Gregorian chant; his love for early architecture can be traced to the same enthusiasm for early forms.² He advocated a return to the mystery and purity of the primitive Christian church. The symbolic dimensions of this choice seem obvious: the Byzantine style reaches back to the purer faith of the very first days of the Church, as well as to the oriental roots of Christianity. Byzantium is the midpoint between East and West, the encounter of opposing and yet reconciled traditions. With the neo-Gothic vogue on the wane in the early years of the new century, new styles were needed. The neo-Byzantine style—which gained some currency throughout North America—would recall the spiritual truth of the Church, as well as its universality.

But what was true at the turn of the century remains true today. The author of the pamphlet complains that the average worshipper does not understand the “surpassingly lovely and symbolic” qualities of the structure (p. 14). And even though the Byzantine style is now more familiar in North America, confusion is increased by the fact that the style is used not only for churches but for mosques and synagogues as well. Byzantium remains mysterious—it spills across categories that are usually recognizably secure. Caught between two strongly defined moments in European history, the fall of Rome, the beginning of the Renaissance, the Byzantine Empire is situated, for us, in an in-between historical space. The empire at its most extensive makes a neat circle around the Mediterranean, just jumping part of the coastline in France and Spain. Its centre is at the mouth of the Bosphorus, Europe’s periphery, the starting point of Asia. The Empire extended east and west, from Antioch in the East to the pillars of Hercules. What are we to make of the ring around the Mediterranean, drawing together East and West, hemispheres of the world we have been taught to consider separate? Byzantium is a dark stain, bleeding across the boundaries that frame the landscape of European history.

Saint Sophia in Istanbul played a special role in influencing the church’s architect, Aristide Beaugrand-Champagne (1876-1950). When it was first built in 537, Saint Sophia was admired for the perfect harmony of its proportions but also admired for the technical feat of its construction, the enormous dome that seemed to be floating in the air, suspended from the skies and filled with light. “Rising on high into the boundless air,” says a poet of the time, “the great helmet enfolds all on every side, just as though the radiant heaven had become the church’s covering” (Milburn, p. 184-6). The dome of Saint Michael’s was also considered an architectural feat, using reinforced concrete for the first time in Quebec to sustain an enormous surface. The area under the vast dome is free of pillars.

But what is most remarkable about Aristide Beaugrand-Champagne’s “replica” of Saint Sophia is this. When Constantinople fell to the Ottomans on May 23, 1453 Mehmet II converted the church into the Mosque of Aya Sofya, putting up a temporary wooden minaret which was replaced in later years by tall permanent minarets at the four corners.³ These delicate minarets, an afterthought, are now the very source of Hagia Sofia’s dignified and expansive beauty. The pencil-shaped towers at the four corners of the building counterbalance and set off the weighty roundness of the church. When Beaugrand-Champagne used Saint Sofia as a model, he took the church and minarets together as his source. His inspiration was not just a church, but a building where Islamic and Christian features were fused. A church with a minaret?

It is difficult to imagine what Aristide Beaugrand-Champagne had in mind when he sent out this mixed message. Beaugrand-Champagne was a well-known figure in Montreal cultural history—a teacher, landscape architect and passionate amateur historian. His most popular architectural

design is radically different in style and sensibility from St. Michaels. This is the Chalet on Mount Royal, built in 1932, an elegant and warm construction of stone and wood, much loved by Montrealers. His lifelong quest was to prove that the actual site of the Iroquoian village of Hochelaga was in the current city of Outremont. He wrote numerous articles on Iroquois culture in *Les Cahiers des Dix*, the journal of a circle of Montreal intellectuals. Could Aristide have anticipated the increasingly mixed character of the neighbourhood?

Prominent on the Montreal horizon, Saint Michael's is a monument whose meaning is still difficult to interpret. The church recalls the turbulence of past ages, the acts of violence through which sacred sites are appropriated by the victors—the Roman and then the Christian appropriation of Egyptian temples, the Moslem takeover of Hindu sites in India. The monuments of conquered peoples are not destroyed, but “converted” symbolically to serve their new rulers. In the case of Saint Sophia and its copy, Saint Michael's, the melding of religious symbols—the church with minarets—becomes a powerful new symbol of its own, a hybrid which looks forward to a time of reconciliation. The recycling of architectural styles continually reactivates new meanings. Today the coupling of Christian and Islamic references is especially provocative. The minaret of Saint Michael's is no longer an isolated sign of Islam in the city—the sight of mosques is now becoming familiar, whether it be in Park Extension or outside the city in the suburbs. And so the church today points to the intermixing of histories which were once very distant, but which today inhabit the same territory, add to the repertoire of proximate differences that make up a cosmopolitan city. The church joins a new network of references, enters a new history, as it becomes an ever more familiar sight, printed on T-shirts that celebrate the recently discovered neighbourhood pride of Mile End.

The church also speaks of the optimism of a city entering the twentieth century, responding to massive waves of immigration. The very size of the church is a gesture of hope. If Pope Pius X wanted the church's Byzantine style to speak of the universality of the Catholic church, however, he would be disappointed today. The Byzantine style hardly evokes the nowhere-everywhere of universality. What the church tells us about is particularism. It is the materiality of the church that is impressive, its enigmatic foreignness.

Entering the Church

The interior design of the church is the work of Guido Nincheri (1885-1973). Nincheri was an Italian immigrant who became the most famous church decorator in Canada, especially known for his stained glass windows. Nincheri produced thousands of windows and decorated many of the most important churches in Montreal, including Saint-Viateur d'Outremont, Saint-Léon of Westmount, and among his rare profane

settings—the Chateau Dufresne (Labonne). Like many elements of Montreal's cultural history, Nincheri and his work are only recently being rediscovered by professional and amateur historians. As a beneficiary of contracts granted by the Catholic church for many years, as the painter of the notorious fresco portraying Benito Mussolini in the Nostra Donna de la Difesa church, Nincheri was very much a popular and populist artist. Much of his work today seems stereotyped and naive. However, there are aspects of his work which are provocative and astonishing—most notably the “Fallen Angels” in Saint Michael's church.

Among Nincheri's realizations, the decorations of St. Michael's are outstanding in their vividness and sensuality. Here are particularly evident the influence of the English PreRaphaelites—in the depiction of women's bodies and in the deployment of angels' wings. Botticelli and Michelangelo are also suggested in some of the women's heads or the muscle-bound bodies of the damned (Labonne, p. 36).

Nincheri was given the contract to decorate the church some ten years after the structure was completed in 1915. Many of the features of the decoration (frescoes and stained glass windows) seem to clash with the church's interior architectural components: the rows of Romanesque windows ringing the cupola, the four Moorish balconies looking down from the dome. The windows are entirely unconventional for a church. Neither geometric decorations nor the usual Biblical scenes, they are flaming, oversized flowers. The glare of the morning light brings out the brash orange and green of the Art Deco style petals that take up half the side walls. The colour scheme contrasts violently with the more modest blue and red painted motifs in the church, the huge prisms of flower pulsing aggressively against the tiny detailed patterns.⁴

Saint Michael looks down from the very centre of the dome. The great warrior angel stands, young and blank-faced, with his foot on the neck of the dragon. He is a bland figure, especially in contrast to his enemies—who are astounding. They are painted in Art Deco peacock and gold on the sides of the dome, about mid-way between ceiling and floor. Eight gorgeous figures are crumpled into the shapes of falling angels. They are going down, head first, in a flurry of wing and robe, gossamer capes flying, their muscled backs exposed. By their grace, by their artful tumbling, they far outdo the stolid Michael. They are sexualized beings, their bodies a glorious torment of conflicting signs.

Nincheri seems to be inspired by the daring forms of the church. His decorations are especially fanciful, in comparison with his work in other churches. At the same time, his work disregards many of the imposing architectural features of the church. Rather than blending in with the oriental theme, the painted frescoes and stained glass windows struggle against it. There is no sense of unity, no quiet harmony. Hybridity seems to have dissolved into disorder. Nincheri seems to be contributing his own

willful version of stylistic hybridity—a mixture closer to heterogeneity than to the artful combination of forms. This heterogeneity is echoed by the proliferation of images throughout the church.

Churches can be “kataphatic” or “apophatic,” says Margaret Visser. (Visser, p. 172) They rejoice in the stimulation of visual imagination or they deliberately choose to encourage the emptying of the mind. Saint Michael's, like most parish churches in Quebec, belongs to the first category. It has a rich panoply of saints, its own variegated collection chosen from among the thousands of possible candidates, “fellow Christians,” says Visser, “who are thought of as ready and willing to offer inspiration, support, company, a sense of history, and even simple narrative interest and variety, if it is desired.” The lined-up figures of the saints in churches, Visser suggests, form a kind of procession, “both of the living and of the lined-up-and-remembered dead,” a process which recalls “the continuous but itinerant character of Christianity. The Church is experienced as a huge crowd of people, past as well as present, on the march, pressing on towards the day when God's kingdom will reign upon earth” (p. 173).

There is a special connection to be drawn between the archetypal journey of Christendom and a church such as Saint Michael's. Most of the church's parishioners are immigrants, more or less recent. Their saints have also travelled to join them in this new land. And, once established here, these saints serve as conduits back to the stories and histories of each community. In Saint Michael's we find Saint Patrick and Saint Anne, Saint Peter, Lawrence, Agnes, Saint Anthony, Theresa of Lisieux, Saint John the Baptist, San Marziale, Our Lady of Czestechova and Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish Franciscan worker priest executed at Auschwitz. Most of these are stand-up models except for Our Lady of Czestechova, an icon, a relic of Byzantium and a reminder of pre-Christian days, it is said, when pagan goddesses guarded holy sites. Kolbe is depicted in an oil painting, hand on heart, in tones of dark brown and sepia, sitting without frame on the altar dedicated to the parish war dead of 1939-1945, bringing a note of dark intensity to these side alleys of the church, ledges strewn with candles, fake flowers, greeting cards or crucifixes deposited *ex voto*, the bric-a-brac of piety.

Each of these saints carries a history, making the church an intersection of narratives, each telling of the pathos of migration. These migrations tell of the catastrophes of history, the Irish famine, the forced migration of the peasantry of southern Italy, the dramas of Communism and its struggles with the Church in Poland. Together, they speak of the mixed languages of this neighbourhood, which is a traditional buffer zone between the French and English sectors of the city, a zone which has experienced successive waves of immigration, each one leaving behind fragments and traces as yet more recent newcomers arrive. Can we imagine the dissonance of their

stories recited in chorus? We would hear a fabric of strange harmonies, an echo of the voices outside, the soundscape of the neighbourhood.

Not all the saints have the same status. There are the “national” saints, Saint Patrick, Saint Jean-Baptiste. Saint Michael is of course the titular saint and Saint Francis reminds us that the church is now run by a Polish Franciscan community. What of San Marziale? He is a visitor, brought to the church in 1968 because the Italians of the neighbourhood had no church of their own. San Marziale is the patron saint of the village of Ischia sull’Ionio, in Calabria. He was ordered from Italy, and flown over by airplane by a group of fourteen men—*il Comitato*—including Rocco who is the owner of Café Olympia (known as Open da’ Night), the now cultish Italian café on the corner across the street from the church. They obtained permission from Saint Michael’s (with an agreement to hand over the collection gathered at special masses) to place him in the church. He stands in his glass case, a painted Roman soldier, waiting for his yearly procession on the shoulders of his *paesani* from Calabria. He has a certain Italian elegance to him, the shine of lacquer brightening up the painted colours of his tunic, his knee-high boots, the palm fronds he carries in his hand. For many years there was a bicycle race to accompany his feastday and the neighbourhood would wake on Sunday morning to a swarm of buzzing, as the bikes raced by, taking the corner at a synchronized tilt.

The home-made races are over now. Each year the crowds dwindle, the ancient musicians are more wrinkled, their step a little less martial as they balance their antique brass instruments. Still rows of women, dressed in black, walk slowly behind the saint, arms joined, singing their shy hymns. And every year the priest stands on the balcony of the church, with the odour of sausages wafting up from the pavement, to tell of the story of a young Roman soldier who became a martyr.

... In a Culturally Diverse Neighbourhood

Mile End has always been a place of passage, a stopover on the way to better things. The name probably refers to the distance of a mile which separated Sherbrooke street, the northern limit of Montreal in the 18th century, from Mile End Road, today’s Mont-Royal avenue. Like its counterpart in London, Mile End is a border area. The neighbourhood occupies a space between the two dominant identities in Montreal, the Anglophone west and the Francophone east. It is an in-between space, a no man’s land, a territory of uncertainty in a city where identity counts.

Salman Rushdie says of Bombay that it is a “city of remakes” (Rushdie, *Moor’s Last Sigh*, p. 187). We could say the same of Mile End, that it is a neighbourhood of makeovers. As each new wave of immigration washes over the plateau, it refashions the features of the neighbourhood in its own image. There were once some sixty synagogues in this neighbourhood, and the episodes of their transformation over the course of almost a century

chronicle the destiny of public architecture (Bronson, 2002). The transformations are diverse: the small synagogues have been turned into alternative venues like a mime theatre, a yoga centre or evangelical churches; the larger buildings taken over by other immigrant religious groups, Russian Orthodox and Ukrainian, some welcoming a number of religious groups in succession. Previous religious symbols, like carved Jewish stars, are sometimes ignored, sometimes awkwardly transformed. While some changes are congruent, esthetically or culturally, others are distressing. One synagogue has become an apartment building, the large noble edifice punctured by tiny square windows and ringed by the gruesome, coloured panels of 1950s balconies.

While St. Michael's church dominates the landscape of Mile End, two other structures compete for symbolic importance. Consider the Collège français on Fairmount street, two blocks down from St. Michael's. The Collège français was once the Bnai Jacob Synagogue, a distinguished and beautiful building. During the 1960s, the Collège français bought the synagogue and covered its front with a new facade of yellow bricks. The brick and glass frontage of the college hides the face of the synagogue, leaving in view only the top fringe, with its scroll of Hebrew letters, squaring the graceful curve of the building. This defacing is a product of the era of what was known as "urban renewal" of the 1960s—a period when history was disregarded in the name of a brash sense of entitlement on the part of urban authorities and property owners. The Jewish past of Mile End was ignored, the brick and stone put to better use. The crude treatment of the Bnai Jacob Synagogue was compensated, years later, by the respect given to the recent renovation of an Anglican church on Park avenue. When this building was deserted by its Anglophone parishioners in the 1990s, it was transformed into the local municipal library, the wooden beams and commemorative windows gracefully integrated into the building's new functions.

These three buildings are all hybrids: each combines disparate cultural and architectural elements. Yet each delivers a different message. St. Michael's uses exotic forms of cultural difference in an attempt to neutralize the power of specificity. If its aim was to promote universality, its function today is to draw attention to the diversity of cultural mixings that now prevails in the neighbourhood. The current facade of Bnai Jacob was designed to express the opposite intention. It does not express the accumulation of identities but rather the desire to cancel out competing identities. The facade is a blatant expression of disrespect, the product of a period which saw a great deal of reckless demolition across Montreal. Bnai Jacob stands as an example of architectural profiteering, the spoils of the vanquished passing to the victors. As for the Anglican church, it represents the contemporary form of recycling, where the religious elements of the building's past are neutralized. The Anglican identity of the church is de-fused, and it is the pure esthetics of the past which remain. The library

recalls not the specific identity of the previous occupants but rather the vocation of the church. No longer the home of a single community, it is now a place for a new community to gather.

As landscapes thicken with history, we are increasingly aware of the overlay of meanings left by a succession of stories and languages. The natural horizon, the architecture of cities, and the literature we read: all are marked by competing voices. To walk the city streets is to hear these conversations, to be attentive to the alliances and frictions they produce.

Inter vs. Trans: La fête de la Saint-Jean

At the very foot of St. Michael's church, the Fête de la Saint-Jean is celebrated in Mile End every year. For some twenty years now, each 24th of June, the festivities take on a special character in this neighbourhood. Why? Because it was here that it first became possible to celebrate Quebec's national day on the basis of a new kind of allegiance.

When the Mile End celebration was inaugurated in the 1980s, it represented a new way of celebrating Quebec nationalism. From this site, within a multiethnic neighbourhood, it was possible to send a new kind of salute to the Quebec collectivity—one that flouted both the traditional Anglo boycott of June 24 and the exclusivism of traditional nationalism. It is both fitting and ironic that this celebration originated in a neighbourhood where French-Canadians had always lived (for many because of the proximity of large clothing factories) but whose presence was not very visible.

The celebration usually follows the same plan. In the late afternoon there is family entertainment, often folkdancing groups. Then there is a meal where you get to fill your plate with a selection of ethnic foods—African meatballs, fried food from the Caribbean, Indian rice dishes, etc. This is classic multiculturalism, diversity on display. Each kind of food is labelled by its origin, represented as “typical” of the group it represents. You have your culture, I have mine, but on this special occasion we'll share. When I fill my plate with a selection of national foods, I become a cosmopolitan freed from the bounds of my singularity. But tomorrow morning will find me back at my own cultural breakfast table.

Later in the evening there will be dancing to Latin or African beats of fusion music. Here the multicultural model breaks down, differences melding one into the other. If multiculturalism treats cultures as autonomous and closed, distinct, recognizable as spectacle and as objects of consumption, the music speaks of mixture. It is closer to the identities of the spectators. In fact, many of the participants in this festival will have difficulty identifying themselves within one single cultural frame.

Multiculturalism suggests that cultures live in peaceful coexistence and tolerance, egalitarian pluralism, tolerance and mutual recognition. In a hybrid regime, on the other hand, cultural traits enter into modes of

circulation, interaction and unpredictable fusions. Identities are set into motion. Hybridity signals the beginning of an era where the prefix used to describe cultural relations passes from “inter” to “trans.” Commerce between cultures is not of the order of exchange, but of interpenetration and contamination. How to account for today’s increasingly complex forms of cultural contact and forms of identity?

The vocabulary which has been available to describe cultural contact has, until recently, been limited. *Acculturation* and *assimilation* are mirror images (negative and positive) of the same process: the loss of distinctive cultural traits to a host culture which is assumed to remain intact and stable. *Hybridity*, *créolité*, *métissage* refer to forms of mixing, each recalling a vexed history, where cultural mixing has been associated with a legacy of violence and racism. Increasingly used to refer to the changing character of Quebec society, these terms are also unsatisfactory for the way in which they conflate process and result. We need to distinguish the ways in which identities come together, the values that these fusions represent, the different forms they take.

One of the overarching questions of our time is how to account for new forms of cultural contact and interaction. When different realities came together, what kind of shapes did they produce? How durable is this new formation? What kind of terms could be used to describe the couplings, fusions, interpenetrations which come about as a result of cultures, languages and individuals meeting in the space of cities? To engage with the complexities of contact is to explore the “fractures and entanglements” asymmetries, ethics, histories, interdependencies, distributions of power and accountability” (Pratt, p. 33), which play themselves out in intercultural interactions.

Cosmopolitan cities offer models of interaction which are different from those imposed by national frames. To choose the neighbourhood as a frame for analysis is to propose a different map, a crisscrossing of motives and desires, a continual flow of cross-cultural traffic.

In Montreal, Mile End now represents a neighbourhood of old immigration. The neighbourhood is increasingly gentrified, its population more and more professional. This is but one of the many changes occurring very rapidly in a newly prosperous city, where construction is booming and renovation rampant. The edges of the city, once ragged and disheveled, have become neat, smoothed into parks and condo developments. Many neighbourhoods are far more varied and mixed than Mile End. Large communities of immigrants have moved to the suburbs, and there are important groups of East Asians on the West Island, for instance, and many immigrants living on the South Shore. For sheer heterogeneity of immigrant groups, you must look to Park Extension or to Côte-des-Neiges, rather than to Mile End.

Still, hybridity lives in a heightened form in Mile End. Hybridity is not only a feature of the architecture—it exists on many planes: in mixed affiliations and loyalties, in imaginative creations, in the languages which circulate on its streets. If a neighbourhood can be said to have a sensibility, then Mile End's has to do with polyglot interaction, passage and exchange. While French is increasingly the language of public communication, the filter through which the public world is accessed, English and other languages are commonly heard on its streets. The culture of the neighbourhood takes shape through this movement across languages. To live in Montreal is to experience a double consciousness. All language is shadowed by another tongue, haunted by another code beneath or beyond the language one speaks. Translation becomes the active principle through which we can understand cultural mixing. Writers have put translation to use, opening up new paths across the city, finding stimulation in this contact. But translation often exceeds its conventional role and expands into forms of creative interference. Translation gives way to hybrid forms of communication, writes new chapters in the city's social history.

These forms of hybridity and translation are inscribed in the memory of the neighbourhood, its historical consciousness of marginality (Germain, 2000, p. 246). Cosmopolitan consciousness is sustained by a set of practices and symbols—the celebration of the Saint-Jean, the many religious buildings “in transition” (Bronson), the memories contained in St. Michael's Church. But will the neighbourhood forget, as the city continues to evolve? Like any hybrid assemblage, these memories and their symbols have provisional meanings, continually open to reinterpretation.

Notes

1. With thanks to Kevin Cohalan, for years of enthusiasm and generous information-sharing, and to Robbie Schwartzwald, for this particular instance of encouragement among many others. This article is a development of ideas introduced in my *Hybridité culturelle*, Montréal, Île de la tortue, 1999.
2. Cohalan refers to Pius X's papal decree of November 22, 1903 on Sacred music and his encyclical on Pope Gregory the Great, *Iucunda Sane*, which appeared four months later, March 12, 1904. See http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_12031904_iucunda-sane_en.html.
3. This is how Rowland Mainstone (*Hagia Sophia*, Thames and Hudson, 1988) describes the process of conversion: “The initial adaptation probably involved little more than the removal of the principal Christian liturgical furnishings, their replacement by a mihrab and mimbar oriented towards Mecca, and the construction of a temporary wooden minaret. The cross over the dome was replaced by a crescent ... Externally the silhouette was progressively changed in later years by the building of tall permanent minarets in the four corners ... By the early nineteenth century most of the high-level mosaic figures in the nave had been painted over, large square panels bearing Arabic inscriptions had been hung against the faces of the piers, and the richest colour must have been that of the prayer rugs which covered the whole floor. The light from these lamps, the vastness of the space under the dome, and the strange effect of the skew alignment

of the prayer rugs and furnishings and the rows of the turbaned congregation were what most impressed the few non-Muslims who then gained admittance.” (pp. 11-12)

4. There is some possibility that Aristide was himself responsible for the stained glass windows. Kevin Cohalan found a sketch of the window design on the back of one his architectural drawings.

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