

THE DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH & ITALIAN
PRESENTS

WILL STRAW

McGill University

The transnational place of Quebec in tabloid culture

About the talk: In the second half of the 20th century, Quebec was home to a rich culture of sensational newspapers and magazines. This culture included lurid news tabloids, weekly magazines full of celebrity gossip, and newspapers specializing in crimes of violence. (Collectively, in Quebec, these have been known as “journaux jaunes”, yellow papers.) As if often the case with Quebecois popular culture, these forms of print culture interwove influences from the United States and France. Like these foreign models, sensational newspapers or magazines in Quebec interwove two strands of journalistic modernity. One involved the increased use of photographic images of human faces to produce a new sense of intimacy between readers and the public figures being covered. The other was the recourse to punctual, exclamatory headlines, through which the sensational newspaper sought to shout its way into public life. While photographs of the human face strengthened the tabloid’s links to cinema, the sensational headline perpetuated some of the orality of the 19th century newshawker or the 20th century radio announcer. My talk will look at selected examples of Quebec’s twentieth-century tabloid culture, tracing their history in relation to models from France and the United States and setting them in their intermedial relations to other entertainment forms.

About the speaker: Will Straw is James McGill Professor of Urban Media Studies at McGill University in Montreal. Much of his work has dealt with the social and institutional dimensions of popular cultures in North America and in Europe. Professor Straw’s interests include urban culture and the history of print culture, popular music studies and cinema. His current research focuses on a book-length study of tabloid/scandal publications in New York in the 1920s and 1930s.

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