**ABSTRACT:** Over a period of twenty-seven years (1978–2005), Amos Gitai directed a trilogy dealing with the cultural, political, and social consequences of the renovation and redesign of the same house located in Jerusalem. We consider intermediality an interesting way of looking at this corpus of nonfiction films. This way of thinking offers a framework to help us come to terms with the conditions of the possibility of living a shared experience. The purpose of this paper is to explore this trilogy as an intermedial milieu. We seek to understand: What sets this milieu in motion? What mediations are staged by Gitai in these three films? The study of the trilogy itself and of the “blockages” that we see taking shape in it led us to use another expression than “living together” that could render conceptually the limits and frictions staged in the films. The term “co-existence” seems to us to be more appropriate to account for the aspects evoked by Gitai in the *Bait* trilogy.

**OVER A PERIOD OF TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS (1978–2005),** Amos Gitai directed a trilogy dealing with the cultural, political, and social consequences of the renovation and redesign of the same house located in Jerusalem. We consider intermediality an interesting way of looking at this corpus of nonfiction films. We would like to begin by defining what we mean by intermediality. Indeed, we are members of the Montreal School of Intermediality, which corresponds to a very specific perspective developed over the past two decades. In other
places, such as universities in Europe and the United States, intermediality is often understood as an aesthetics-based perspective that focuses on the study of the circulation of forms from one medium to another.\(^1\) Sometimes intermediality is also conceived as a way to look at the technological dimensions of a media issue.\(^2\) In Montreal, we work mostly on notions of milieu, mediality, and living together.\(^3\)

This means that the Montreal School of Intermediality is aiming less at the study of media in and of themselves, but rather of media as a way of dealing with political issues. The notion of “politics” should not be confused with the defense of a political line. It is a question of focusing on the political, that is, on the organization of conditions for living together.\(^4\)

Eric Méchoulan, one of the founders of this school, states, “Intermediality is interested in everything that allows beings, things, techniques, institutions to be attached to situations; it is, in my [his] opinion, all these ways of creating links that constitute the object of intermedial investigations.”\(^5\) This implies that intermediality is not only focused on technical objects or by the relation between these kinds of objects and cultural and political institutions. On the contrary, this approach is concerned with the role of individuals and social groups. Johanne Villeneuve, who is also one of the founders of this approach, explained, “Should we not then take the problem head-on, by linking the materiality of human mediations (the media, but also the technical devices) to the ideal of mediation, which consists of ‘living together’?”\(^6\)

This way of thinking offers a framework to help us come to terms with the conditions of the possibility of living a shared experience. Two concepts are key to the Montreal School: milieu and mediality. In simple terms, a milieu may be seen as a sociocultural situation which encompasses both beings’ way of life and their relationship with technical objects. It can be defined as the combination of a time, a space, an individual or sociocultural group, and one or more technical objects. Such a definition corresponds to situations that are very limited in time (an interview led by a film director, for example) as well as to phenomena that are common over several centuries (the evolution of our way of speaking to each other in recent centuries, for example). It also makes it possible to apprehend milieus at both the micro level (a conversation by a group of people) and the macro level (the transformation of an entire society). The medium can be as

---

simple as a glance exchanged between two people and as complex as the set required to shoot a movie. For mediation to take place, it is relevant to consider the elements that set the milieu in motion. It is therefore less a question of objects than of operations, processes, and dynamics. If we take the example of the shooting of nonfiction film sequences, what animates the milieu could be as simple as a question asked by a member of the film crew or a gesture made by a protagonist. On a more theoretical level, it is then a question of understanding proxemics issues as well as linguistics and discursive interactions from a historical, anthropological, and even philosophical point of view. Mediality is therefore constitutive of observed phenomena. In other words, there is no situation without mediation. There is no “living together” without the creation of something that is placed between the various elements of the situation.

We should now specify, and this is particularly relevant to the study of Gitai’s cinema, that a milieu can be located in such media as films, exhibitions, and art performances.

In these types of case studies, researchers from the Montreal School of Intermediality focus on the staging of “living together.” The theoretical issue is therefore less on the media side, considered for its own sake, than on the side of the effects of media processes on the life of the group of people being filmed. Sometimes, it is even possible to go further and consider that it is not so much the staging of “living together” in these films that interests the researchers, but rather considering the movie as traces of a process that took place between the film crew and the group of people being filmed. It is the sociocultural situation (a milieu of durations, spaces, social actors, and media devices) that is the focus of the intermedial investigation. It is a way of putting the question of creation back into the social landscape by asking how this type of process affects those involved in the sociocultural situation being investigated. It is from this shift, from a study of forms of creation as representation, to a consideration of their production in the public space, that intermediality is conceived. In this way, the study of media can also be used for political reflection. Intermediality, then, allows us to surpass the study of media in and of themselves by considering how the concept of milieu can help us define the political—namely, how we live together.

**THE BAIT TRILOGY AS AN INTERMEDIATE MILIEU**

We consider the intermedial perspective particularly relevant when thinking about the *Bait* trilogy. The purpose of this paper is, first of all, to explore this trilogy as an intermedial milieu.

---


8 It is a way, for us, to keep up the work initiated during the cycle of conferences, “Amos Gitai: Regards singuliers sur une pratique pluriel,” [Amos Gitai: Singular perspectives on a plural practice], organized at the University of Montreal in 2015 and published in a special issue of the online review *Hors Champ,* “Amos Gitai,” ed. Rémy Besson and Claudia Polledri (2016).

9 To explore this issue further, we also have to consider the fact that the images shot by Gitai are used outside his own films. They are the object of reworking by the director himself. His images are included in installations, exhibitions, and plays, as will be the case for *Bait* at the Théâtre de la Colline in 2023. On the spatialization of Gitai’s cinema, see Miriam De Rosa, “Dwelling the Open: Amos Gitai and the Home of Cinema,” in *Film and Domestic Space. Architectures, Representations, Dispositif,* ed. Stefano Baschiera (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 188–209.
We will then seek to understand what sets this *milieu* in motion. What mediations are staged by Gitai in these three films? What ways of “living together” or co-existing do these films show?

The main mediation, which sets the house in motion from the 1978 film, is the men working on the building site. Indeed, the representation of the building site, or rather of the building sites found throughout the trilogy, constitutes one of the trilogy’s central visual motifs. The building site is the place where the transformations of the house are in progress. In the first film, it is the place where social roles, cultural affiliations, and discourses are formulated. It is through the staging of the construction site that the viewer has access to the vision of the protagonists. In this regard, we should also recall Gitai’s words in an interview with Serge Toubiana about the relationship between architecture and cinema: 10 “Let us say that architecture becomes the metaphor of the relations between Israelis and Palestinians in the late seventies.”

This relationship is central to both Gitai’s biographical and cinematographic career—and a “junction point” of this trilogy. 12 In fact, the construction site is thus the *milieu* through which the film is constructed. It is through the representation of the construction site that the trilogy stages a form of “co-existence” between the different actors. This “co-existence” is not something announced by a voice-over; rather, it is performed through the work and constructed by means of the image.

This leads us to ask the following: How is this construction of co-existence staged? First of all, we notice that it does not involve the staging of a dialogue. The interviews are almost always one-to-one. There are no real exchanges between Israelis and Palestinians. This construction does not involve the physical movement of the protagonists, either. They very rarely share the same setting. Palestinians and Israelis rarely appear in the same shot inside the construction

---

10 In this regard, see in particular, *Architecture in Israel: Conversations with Amos Gitai*, 2013, video.


12 This subject is also present in his work outside of the trilogy alone. See, for example, *West of the Jordan River* (2018).
site (29:37 and 29:58). It is more a question of the editing of the 1978 film. The film is built on the principle of alternation between the words of the Palestinians and those of the Israelis. We will come back to this later.

Another form of co-presence is proposed by the relationship between the images and the (screen) voices. Let us consider the following example: The speech of the economist Haïm Barkaï accompanies the image of the stonecutter at work (look for it around 4:30); then again the offscreen voice of the entrepreneur Ben Menashe corresponds to the labor of the workers on the screen (16:16). It is above all through the editing gestures of the film that the co-presence manifests itself. This is a productive way of observing an articulation between the workers’ gestures and the film’s creative gestures.

In the second film, *A House in Jerusalem*, the viewer’s eyes are opened to the neighborhood of the “house.” The construction site is no longer only that of “the house”—we see other construction sites around it. The second subject of the film is the city of Jerusalem. As Barbara Mann explains, this film also “explores the heaviness of Jerusalem stone and what it means to get caught beneath that weight, trapped by history.”

The city of Jerusalem, which appears several times on the screen, leads us to consider a particular sequence that takes place, this time in the archaeological site in the heart of the Old City. This long sequence (23:30–32:07) includes several speeches. First, we have the Palestinian worker Taïssir Abou Halef, followed by a young Jewish woman, and finally a second Palestinian worker. The “co-presence” between the Palestinian workers and the two young Israelis (a young woman from Pennsylvania and a young man who only appears in the image), is created by means of the camera and, more precisely, by a pan shot. As Mann explains: “In-motion long shots are especially beloved of Gitai. According to the director, they deliver something essential about modern experience: the technique captures a ‘broken’ and ‘fragmented’ reality, the condition of “uprooting, migration and exile” characterizing contemporary societies with temporary residents.” But in this case, through this panning effect, the

![FIG. 2. House: The speech of Haïm Barkaï.](image)

---


14 Ibid., note 1. Gitai’s quotations are from an interview with Norma Klein.
operator manages to “hold together” the protagonists in the same spatiotemporal space without bringing them together. The movement of the camera plays an essential role in the creation of a form of co-existence that is constructed precisely by the gesture of cinematographic creation.

As in the previous film, in *News from Home*, the representation of the construction site appears several times. The last of these representations is probably the most important for our purposes. While in the foreground, in Claire’s “house,” a *sukkah* is being built for the Sukkot celebration (1:09:49–1:10:10), the image also opens up to the construction sites of the houses that surround it. In fact, we see the camera zooming in on the construction site (1:10:38) from the hut that is being built in “the house,” where a piece of fabric remains visible on the left side of the frame. In doing so, the image symbolically manages to hold together the two different “constructions”: one symbolic, that of the shack linked to Jewish tradition, and the other real, built with the contribution of Palestinian labor. Once again, it is through the image that links are made, through a framework that “holds together” instead of excluding.

After the notion of a construction site, the intermedial perspective leads us to consider another case: the links created between the different houses represented. Indeed, although the trilogy deals with the history of a particular house, the films propose a kind of circuit through several houses. The film thus reports on the movements of the film crew during the shooting. It is then a matter of drawing up a sort of “cartography of the shootings,” as Laurent Roth did in his documentary *Haifa la rouge* (2020), and of the movements of Gitai and his team during filming.

![FIG. 3 and 4. *News from Home*: the sukkah and the building site.](image-url)
One could then say that the film constitutes the trace of these movements. These changes of location in the film can be interpreted as the creation of links between the different realities experienced by the protagonists. That is to say, the filming before and the editing afterward create a network of relations linking spaces that are both close and distant.

“The house,” which originally belonged to Dr. Mahmoud Dajani, located at number 14, Dor Ve-Dorshav Street in the Moshava Hagermanit (literally, “the German Colony”), is undoubtedly the place from which the three films develop. However, in the first film, Gitai chooses not to limit himself to Jerusalem. He shoots a long tracking shot from a car in the refugee camp near Yatta Hebron in the West Bank. He thus symbolically represents the villages from which the Palestinian workers come. This is the first of a series of trips that will take Gitai to the Palestinian Territories and Jordan.

In the second film, Gitai moves on from the house to the neighborhood, leading the film crew to enter not only “the house” currently owned by Claire Cesari, but also that of the neighbor, the Belgian Michael Kichka, and of an Englishman also living in the neighborhood. In contrast, several sequences of the same film take us to East Jerusalem, specifically to the house of Mahmoud Dajani’s nephew, Raji Dajani, interviewed with his daughter, Naïr Dajani. We find them nine years later in *News from Home*. And it is in this last film that the spatial horizon widens further.

This idea was present in the conception of the film. In a note of intent that is currently in the archives, Gitai explains:

> The camera prepares a construction based on editing rather than a sequence shot approach. In this sense, it will be different from the approach taken in *A House in Jerusalem*, where the fragments were brought together by the movements of the camera. In this film, editing will produce a way of associating and linking fragments of memories and biographies. How can we associate fragments of stories that are not linked by geographical proximity? How can we create this sensation of quest, of research, and of suspense in a certain way?

This enlargement is a continuation of the clues laid down in the first film of the trilogy and some of its protagonists, but also of the history of the Dajani family. First, the search for the stonemason leads him to al-Walaja, a Palestinian village in the West Bank. The project also takes Gitai to Amman to visit another member of the Dajani family, Hadji Ali, and then back to al-Walaja, with Abu Mahmoud, nephew of the stonemason Mahmoud Said El Ar, whose sequence opens the film and the trilogy.

In addition to the spatial enlargement produced by the last film, there is a temporal enlargement due to the editing. Indeed, if in *Bait* the editing contributes to the staging of the notion of co-existence in the present, the second and especially the third film put in relation extracts of the previous films. The oldest films become archival material for the production of the most

---


16 “La caméra prépare une construction basée sur le montage plutôt qu’une démarche de plans séquence. Dans ce sens, ce sera différent de la démarche adoptée dans *Une maison à Jérusalem* où les fragments étaient réunis par les mouvements de la caméra. Dans ce film, le montage va produire une façon d’associer et de relier des fragments de mémoires et de biographies. Comment associer des fragments de récits que ne relie pas une proximité géographique? Comment créer cette sensation de quête, de recherche, et de suspense d’une certaine façon?” Amos Gitai Film Archive at Stanford Libraries, Special Collections & University Archives, call number M2266, box 8, folder 5, item: Des nouvelles de la maison.
recent ones. This is another way of creating links, allowing us to observe how this same co-existence unfolds over time. The trilogy thus stages the evolution of relations between social-cultural groups between 1978 and 2009.

Let us take another example. The first sequence of News from Home is a reprise of the opening sequence of Bait. It is introduced by cartoons and a commentary that introduces the viewer to the origin of the film.

The floor is given to the Palestinian worker, the stonecutter Mohammed Said El Arj. The narration continues in the present, still at a construction site, where we meet another Palestinian worker: the nephew of the stonemason, also from al-Walaja. We then find Mohammed Said El Arj. He himself returns to the shooting of Bait, which has become a part of his own personal history. This example clearly shows one of the challenges of this editing work: to link the stories of the characters through extracts from different films, that is, to return to the past in order to follow the traces in the present.

As we follow the work of the montage from one film to the next, what does this tell us about this notion of co-existence? A crucial sequence from the second film can be taken as a case study. It is the return home of Raji Dajani with his daughter, Naïr, which speaks to the nature of the film as a milieu. This sequence relies not only on two parts of the film, but also, symbolically, on places and people. We will revisit this later.

The idea of maintaining the possibility of co-existence is also present in the final sequence shot in al-Walaja, which reunites Mohammed Said El Arj with his nephew. The two are linked by the history of the house and the film.

The sequence begins with Gitai talking with the Palestinians in Hebrew and they tell him the story of the film and the house. The dialogue continues with the story of another house, this time Palestinian, and the impossibility of building under the current laws. The editing indicates that the film produces a form of circularity by ending with a sequence directly linked by its

![FIG. 5. A House in Jerusalem: the “return” home of Raji Dajani and his daughter, Naïr.](image)

---

characters to the one at the beginning of the film, which was also the initial sequence of Bait and thus the beginning of the trilogy. The narrative, on the other hand, leads from an Israeli house that is being built and ends with a Palestinian house that will not be built. It is precisely between these two houses that the trilogy stands and generates connections. It allows these two stories to be told together—and to be held together.

FROM “LIVING TOGETHER” TO CO-EXISTENCE

The intermedial method allows us to underline what creates the conditions for “living together” while downplaying the difficulties. In this concluding section, we would like to point out some limits of this theoretical model. These limitations come from the case study we have been working on, namely, the House trilogy.

Indeed, it is also worth observing the way Gitai sometimes works by underlining the absence of communication between the protagonists. This is something much more explicit in the last film than in the first. Indeed, in the 1978 documentary, the editing was based on the principle of a constant interplay between the Palestinian and Israeli voices. The editing thus participated in this notion of building something together by creating links between one instance of speech and another. In the third film, on the other hand, we notice that the principle of the interplay between the individual stories and between the Palestinian and Israeli voices is far less direct.

Indeed, the first hour is completely focused on the “Palestinian side,” between the workers and the Dajani family, and the second hour on the “Israeli side,” with new interviews with Claire Cesari and Michael Kichka. This means that in the third movie a much clearer separation is made, with the stories of the people living in the house being presented as two separate “blocks.”

Still in the same film, we find another interesting example that brings us back to the notion of the construction site (1:11:22–1:11:45). The camera enters the building site and observes the workers and the contractor of the house, Steve Levy. The dialogue between them is reduced

---

**FIG. 6.** News from Home: Amos Gitai meets with Palestinian workers, and they discuss Dajani’s house and their difficulties in building a new house.

---

18 This is notably the case in the work of Marienello, “À travers l’intermédialité…”
to essentials and is managed through gestures. Levy talks with Gitai while the workers in the background are working (1:12:03–1:14:43); he tells of the shooting that took place near the Israeli settlement of Gush Etzion, on the road between Jerusalem and Hebron. In this case, the “co-existence” of Israelis and Palestinians in the workplace and in the setting does not erase the tensions between them, which is manifested by silence and a tangible difficulty in communicating.

This focus on the limits of “living together” leads to a complete reinterpretation of the trilogy, or at least to a more complex interpretation. It is a question less of paying attention to the creation of links or a common space and more to the moments when these links are challenged.

Let us take just one example from Bait. When the owner of the house speaks, his voice is cut off by the sound of a stonecutting machine. This is a gesture created during the editing process. Gitai explained his creative choice: “Then comes the meeting with the economist who has just recently paid for this house and who gives us a great Milton Friedman-like speech about the market economy. Then we come back to the worker cutting stones with his grinding wheel. This is a way, by editing, to cut off the economist’s speech….”

Thus, from the very first film, the editing allows for the creation of links between Israeli and Palestinian protagonists as much as it deals with the limits of “living together.”

If we now return to the way elements of the first films are edited into the other films in the trilogy, it is possible to interpret certain editing gestures in this particular manner. Take, for example, the sequence from A House in Jerusalem with Raji Dajani, who, together with his daughter, Nair Dajani, is edited into News from Home. To be more exact, this sequence is taken from two separate passages of the 1998 film. The first part is at the beginning of the film and the second is at the end. It is the first sequence that is interesting for our purposes.

FIG. 7. News from Home: Amos Gitai talks with Steve Levy on the building site about the current situation in Israel.

In the 2009 film, Dajani’s daughter is heard saying that one should not be too interested in the past and should look to the future. In the previous film, this sequence was longer. She said the same thing, but with much more nuance. She explained that she was also interested in the past and in her family history. Hence, through the editing, the 2009 film reinforces the positions of the protagonists. The editing makes the relationship to the past more problematic and the dialogue between the generations more difficult.

It is because of these limits that we have chosen not to use the expression “living together” in the title of our paper. It seems to us that this expression insists too much on the positive aspect of the creation of links in time and space. In fact, as mentioned at the beginning of our reflection, the intermedial approach developed by the members of the so-called Montreal school is also characterized by the choice to extend the study of relations between media to “political questioning, in the broad sense of the term.” This can be explored by studying the way in which the media represent and take part in the construction of “living together.” As illustrated by Johanne Villeneuve, this perspective insists on the role of the media in the construction of relations: “The intermediality would be the instituted relation between, on the one hand, the materialities by which the community interpellates itself, builds itself, and conceives its exchanges; and on the other hand, its properly political aim, its ideal of community.”

The “intermedial” analysis of the Bait trilogy, in addition to the study of the construction site as an intermedial milieu, allowed us to demonstrate—in this last part of our argument—that in the films the creation of links in time and space does not erase the staging of limits and blockages which sometimes confront this construction process. This led us to question the relevance of maintaining the expression “living together” in relation to the analysis of the construction site as an intermedial milieu. The study of the trilogy itself, and of the “blockages” that we see taking shape in it and that appear at the level of both human and media mediations, led us to use another term that could also render conceptually the same limits and frictions staged in the films. The term “co-existence” thus seems to us to be more appropriate to account for the aspects evoked by Gitai in the Bait trilogy.

The use of this term requires further precision, however. As specified by the psychosociologist Jean-Pierre Boulinet, it is possible to understand the term “co-existence” according to two different meanings: a “strong” sense which “consists in seeing in co-existence a pooling of our capacities to exist, of our identity resources,” and a “weak” sense, which considers co-existence to be “the capacity to endure together, to juxtapose as best we can our capacities to exist, the essential happening elsewhere.” It is precisely this second and more critical meaning of the term that we adopt in this paper. In other words, “co-existence” would not be a synonym of “living together”; rather, it would refer, also on the visual level, to the phenomenon of juxtaposition, for

---

21 “L’intermédialité serait le rapport institué entre, d’une part, les matérialités par lesquelles la communauté s’interpelle elle-même, se construit, conçoit ses échanges ; et d’autre part, sa visée proprement politique, son idéal de communauté.” Villeneuve, “La symphonie-histoire d’Alfred Schnittke.”
23 Ibid., 2. “…le sens faible fait de la coexistence la capacité à perdurer ensemble, à juxtaposer tant bien que mal nos capacités à exister, l’essentiel se passant ailleurs.”
example, in the space of the building site as in the filmic space, without, according to the words of Jean-Pierre Boulinet, there being a true “setting in common with identity resources.”

In conclusion, the co-existence that we perceived at work in the Bait trilogy corresponds to the existence of communities, which are certainly linked (by the hyphen), but also quite distinct, that is, that which have their own existence—although they work on the same project represented concretely and symbolically by the construction site. Finally, it is no longer a question of “living together” and of the social and political difficulties generated by the fact of sharing the same space. Instead, it is a question of distinct modes of existence linked only by the fact of living at the same time and of sharing the same temporality.24 Thus, people may live next to each other while their social relationships are practically nonexistent. It is this form of co-existence that the Bait trilogy stages with its weaknesses and difficulties, without trying to hide it.