Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale, Volume 14, Numbers 1-3 (1990).

THE SCRIPTURES THROUGH POSTMODERN STRATEGIES: CHALLENGING HISTORY

Martin Lefebvre

Ever since film started showing stories, it has represented the Gospel. It appears in fact that many of the very first film narratives to contain more than one shot were re-enactments of the life and Passion of Christ.¹ Since then, many films have set out to illustrate the Scriptures through the different cinematic conventions of their time.

The very early cinematic renditions of the Gospel owed much to both the theatrical conventions of the mystery plays and to pictorial art, especially the depictions of the Way of the Cross. This heritage resulted in films that are "faithful" recreations of the Bible. In this context, the Scriptures have taken on the function of an historical record of Christ's life. In this respect it seems that just as Renaissance art has succeeded in humanizing Christ,² movie renditions of the Gospel have succeeded in creating the historical Jesus. By using the Bible in the same way that one uses an historical account of the life of Thomas Beckett or Napoleon, films like The Greatest Story Ever Told have managed to treat the Bible as an objective, neutral, transparent and impersonal historical record-in other words, in terms of a nineteenth-century conception of the nature of historical texts. Even Pasolini's more modernist version of The Gospel According to Saint Mathew gives in to historical recreation, although here the traditional vision of Christ is subverted through formal, iconographic and thematic strategies.³

Such historicization of the Scriptures is the locus of the postmodern critique offered by Jean-Luc Godard's *Je vous salue Marie* (1985), Martin Scorcese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and Denys Arcand's *Jésus de Montréal* (1989). In challenging the historical validity of the Sacred texts, however, the films do not attack the nature of the Gospel itself, but rather its typical cinematic treatment as historical material. In other words, it is not the Gospel, but its use as if it were some history textbook that is being deconstructed.

Most obvious is Godard's contemporary transposition of the Annunciation and the Immaculate Conception to contemporary France. Here, the tampering with "historical" facts and its mixing with "fictive" elements is accompanied by Godard's usual counterworking of classical film narrative, all of which serves to problematize historical knowledge.

Distinguishing between the actions and the spatio-temporal frame in which they take place, the spectator will notice here what Genette (1982) has called transdiggetization, which is the transposition of a given spatio-temporal frame of actions. Godard's film is not an historical recreation of the biblical era but a reactualization of the biblical story in the contemporary world. In this respect, the Scriptures are not used as a simple historical referent. This in turn entails a transposition of certain actions: in contemporary France Joseph drives a cab, Mary plays basketball, the Archangel Gabriel arrives by plane to deliver his annunciation, etc. Genette calls this transformation of actions a pragmatic transposition. Here, both types of transformations serve to create a critical distance between the original text and its reformulation. As the film explores the couple's sexuality-or lack of it-through the question of virginity, and Joseph's hardship in agreeing to live with someone else's son, the spectator is trapped between the contemporary re-telling of the Immaculate Conception and the "historical" facts s/he knows so well. The spectator is more or less forced to remember her/his knowledge of the Bible and question it with Godard's contemporary reading of it. How did Mary and Joseph live their celibacy? Why is there no mention of this in the Bible? Why are there no accounts of the everyday life of the Holy Family? Such questioning, while deconstructing the traditional or historical view of the Scriptures that the movies have promoted, creates a tension that makes the spectator aware of the particular and paradoxical nature of the "historical" referent.

"History"—or, should I say, the historical use of the Scriptures—is further contested by the juxtaposition of new fictional elements in the story of the Annunciation, with which the spectator can re-read the original text. The Annunciation story is made more complex by a parallel story line which shows the love affair between a male science professor and a young woman student. Inserted are scenes from the professor's classroom, where he tries to account scientifically for the creation of life in the universe. The discourse of science serves several purposes. It problematizes the use of the Gospel as history, which has the effect of presenting the Gospel as a form of myth of origins, while offering the option of another "history" of the origins of mankind. However, the two opposing discourses (religious myth and scientific knowledge) simply play off each other: just as science can undermine religious discourse, the fact that Mary will (in the film) give birth without ever having intercourse, undermines the discourse of science. Again, what is at stake here is not

religious discourse as it is found in the Bible but its use as an objective account of "what really happened". The film leaves unresolved the confrontation of religious (or mythical) and scientific discourses, preferring to question the validity of any totalizing histories of the world. This interpretation is very close to the division of knowledge into science and myth presented by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*, published in France only a few years before the release of Godard's film. Lyotard and Godard apparently share the same outlook upon the postmodern condition as a continuation of modernism and an incredulity towards metanarratives legitimating (scientific) knowledge.

Myth, Lyotard tells us, need not be legitimized, even if for the scientist it hardly presents a form of knowledge. Godard questions the legitimacy of the use of the Scriptures as History but doesn't question at all the legitimacy of myth. Rather, he is content with mapping out the challenge that modern (scientific) knowledge brings to traditional (narrative). Yet science itself, according to Lyotard, requires narrative (the male professor's scientific version of origins constitutes just another [his]story of *man*kind). Lyotard:

> Scientific knowledge cannot make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from it's point of view is no knowledge at all. Without such recourse it would be in the position of presupposing its own validity and would be stooping to what it condemns: begging the question, proceeding on prejudice. But does it not fall into the same trap by using narrative as its authority? (Lyotard 1984: 29)

This is where Godard's breaking up of traditional narrative conventions comes into play.

If we map Lyotard's work onto the domain of aesthetics-as proposed by Jameson (1984)-it appears that breaking the realist narrative conventions shakes the very foundations of scientific discourse's legitimacy strategies. The analogy here is a simple one: just as scientific knowledge requires that only one of Lyotard's "language games"-that of denotation-be retained in order to determine the acceptability of its statements,⁴ so realist art forms (in painting, novel or film) are also dependent on the denotative-or truth-value of their representations. The truthvalue in art is the resemblance by which the acceptability of the representation is to be determined. In this view the main question of "realist" art is the following: "Does it or does it not resemble what it represents?". If the answer is yes, the denotative art is accepted, institutionalized and seen as an objective, unproblematized representation. To question or problematize this form of representation, as Godard does, serves two goals: it pinpoints the prescriptive reality of denotation and delegitimizes or problematizes representation (or narration) as the foundation of (scientific) knowledge. As Lyotard points out, denotation or truth-value

can only determine acceptability from a single point of view or ideology, it is not universal and rests on a prescriptive (or metaprescriptive) set of values.⁵

In this sense, and continuing with our analogy, Godard's rejection of classical narrative serves to point out the prescriptive value system at play in the more "institutionalized" forms of filmaking, while at the same time undermining the narrative/ideological legitimacy of rational knowledge. History in *Je vous salue Marie* is doubly contested: from within, by Godard's refusal to film a historical recreation of the Scriptures and by the insertion of fictional material, and from without, by his refusal to use the forms of narrativity which—as Hayden White (1981, 1984) has shown—reinforce the presuppositions of historiographical knowledge.⁶

A postmodern use of the Gospel to contest History is also at the center of Martin Scorcese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* and Denys Arcand's *Jésus de Montréal.*⁷

The Last Temptation is adapted from a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis. It tells the story of Christ's life from his young adult days up to his crucifixion. For most of the movie, the story is fairly close to traditional filmic renditions of Christ's Passion. The last half-hour presents the last temptation of Christ. Having a moment of doubt on the cross, Christ is tricked by Lucifer and tempted to come down from the cross, to renounce his role of Messiah, marry Mary Magdalene and live a peaceful ordinary life. We are then brought back to the cross on the mountain where Christ is shown to have vanquished Lucifer one final time.

Compared with Je vous salus Marie, Scorcese's film is highly respectful of the traditional narrative conventions of American cinema. Story causality, character development, generic motivation, continuity editing—all of which define the essential elements of the classical Hollywood story—are used to compose a "realistic" or "illusionistic" account of Christ's life. Therefore, in order to see the film's critique of historical knowledge, one has to look into thematic and narrative re-ordering of the story and generic elements rather than narrative deconstruction àla Godard. On this level, the conventional screen illustration of the Scriptures is once again avoided although the film combines all the iconographic elements of an historical recreation.

In film, historical recreations generally serve to authenticate a discourse. They often end up however producing the opposite effect. Hence, as historical recreations become more and more "realist" in showing "the way it was", they usually fall victim to the same issues that have faced historiography: the myth of objectivity, the problematic rapport between fact and event, the relationship between History and fiction, the role of narrativity—all of which have been theorized by Raymond Aron, Paul Veyne, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault and the historians of *la nouvelle histoire* in France, and by Hayden White, Dominick LaCapra and Fredric Jameson in the United States. More often than not, historical recreations do not question the fact that the historical referent is accessible only through a textualized form, and that the events are "already constituted" (White, 1973; 6n), semiotized, as facts. In this sense, even though most historical recreations are fictional, they partake in the traditional discourse of History.

By participating in this generic tradition, The Last Temptation of Christ is caught in contradictions not unlike the ones exposed by Linda Hutcheon in her many studies of historiographic metafiction. According to Hutcheon, "postmodernism is a contradictory cultural enterprise, one that is heavily implicated in that which it seeks to contest. It uses and abuses the very structures and values it takes to task" (Hutcheon, 1988a; 106). As a paradigm for postmodernism in literature, historiographic metafiction uses History and fiction while at the same time reworking and rethinking the forms and contents of the past. Such contradiction leads up to historiographic metafiction's questioning of History. It plays upon the historical record-sometimes lying, sometimes telling the truth about it-in order to acknowledge the paradox of History, the conflict between the reality of the past and it's accessibility only through texts. Analysing historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon notes how "certain known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error . . . making us aware of the need to question received versions of history" (114-115).

The Last Temptation of Christ questions the historiographic use of the Scriptures while using what appears to be the format of a historical recreation. In fact, we will see that the film uses two distinct strategies to undermine the historiographic effect of its format on the viewer. These strategies are both thematic and formal. Thematically, Scorcese's film introduces notable changes to the well known story of Christ's life. Among the more important changes is the representation of the young Jesus as weak and unsure of himself, a collaborator who builds crosses so that Romans can execute State prisoners. He is not illuminated by the Holy Spirit: "I am a liar, I am a hypocrite. I am afraid of everything. ... Lucifer is inside me". Differences also appear in the depiction of Judas who is seen as a hero, Christ's best friend, a freedom fighter who initially won't betray Christ but is forced by him to do so in order to fulfill God's master plan. Finally, during the the last temptation, Christ marries and has sex, lives in adultery with Martha and her sister Mary, raises a large family, meets a Sal (Paul) who invents Christianity through lies about the resurrection.

These changes are all the more manifest when seen through what appears to be a "realist" historical recreation of the Scriptures. Challenged by these changes the viewer is confronted with her/his knowledge of the Scriptures, as well as with the multitude of "traditional" Gospel films s/ he has seen. The outcome is a questioning of both: how true are those Hollywood recreations? how historical is the material on which these recreations are based?⁸ As these questions are asked, it becomes clear for

the viewer that the traditional film versions of the Gospel' do not rest simply on historical material, and that unproblematized historical recreations of Christ's life do little justice to the complexities of the Sacred Texts. Most interesting in this light is the scene, during the dream sequence, in which Jesus meets Sal (or Paul). Sal is spreading the word of God to some followers, explaining the Immaculate Conception and the resurrection of Christ. To Jesus who, in the dream, has renounced his role of Saviour, the words of Sal are lies. When Jesus confronts Sal, the latter replies:

I don't care whether you're Jesus or not. The resurrected Jesus will save the world, and that's what matters. I created the truth out of what people needed and believed. If I have to crucify you to save the world then I'll crucify you. And if I have to resurrect you, then I'll do that too whether you like it or not... you know, I'm glad I met you, 'cause now I can forget all about you. My Jesus is much more important and much more powerful

Blurring the distinction between fact and fiction, this scene is a good example of the film's critique of the use of the Scriptures as historical referent. The scene destabilizes the received version of History that Gospel films have traditionally presented, raising questions about conventional historical knowledge: what is the function of History, who writes it and why?

Moreover, if we consider the conflicting temporal cues provided by the film, the format of historical recreation suddenly loses a lot of its historicism. On one hand the film is set in Galilee and respects all the iconographic conventions of realism as to the setting, decor, costumes, etc. On the other hand it abstains from important generic conventions concerning the style of acting, the dialects of the characters, and their dialogue. Characters act and speak according to conventions of contemporary American movies. There is no attempt at distancing Jesus and his followers from our modern world. This is a realism innocent of historicism, a departure from traditional Gospel films which have created distance through the use of British accents or higher-class diction for their lesuses. In The Last Temptation of Christ generic expectations are frustrated as Willem Dafoe's lesus is made to speak and act in an ordinary and simple manner. The same goes for the other characters in the film, especially Judas, whose nitty gritty good sense and delivery align him more with the contemporary urban characters that Robert de Niro has portrayed over the years, than the customary filmic apostle.

A sense of contemporaneity is also represented by the style of acting. Consider the scene in which Jesus, returning to Nazareth, makes his first speech. Muttering a few words, not knowing what to say, he sounds like a bad method actor just out of the Actor's Studio.

As in *Je vous salue Marie*, historical recreation is denied, although in Scorcese's film it is deconstructed through a surplus or collision of re-

alisms which contradicts the conventions of the biblical film as historical recreation. This surplus of realism is caused not by an attempt to present biblical times nor by generic conventions, but by the contemporizing of the story through its characters. As Sal (Paul) is made to speak out like some T.V. evangelist (during the dream sequence) we realize that the surplus of realism which undermines the historical format is in fact our own vision of contemporary reality. Hence, in a curious manner, the film actualizes the story of Christ just as Godard's film actualizes the story of the Immaculate Conception, while deconstructing any attempt at historical recreation. The result is a strange (and sometimes funny) displacement of referent from the Scriptures to Scripture representation.

The historical validity of the Scriptures is also questioned in Denys Arcand's Iésus de Montréal, although contrary to Godard's and Scorcese's films interrogation is directly thematized in the narrative. The plot can be outlined as follows: Daniel Coulombe, an unemployed actor, is hired by a priest to play Jesus in a theatrical re-enactment of the Passion of Christ at St. Joseph's Oratory on Mount Royal. He is supposed to update a somewhat bland version of the play. To do so, he assembles in a very Christ-like manner ("Je suis venu te chercher") a small company of actors who do odd acting jobs in anything from dubbing porn to small publicity films. The actors eventually have to confront the clergy who are displeased with the play, while Daniel, identifying with his role, experiences his own Calvary. After their contracts are terminated by church authorities, the actors decide to perform illegally one last time. Security guards interrupt, and Daniel is severely injured and brought to a first hospital. After a brief "resurrection", he dies at Montreal's Jewish Hospital. His organs are donated to save others while the actors, with the help of a business lawyer, decide to form a theatre company under their mentor's name, dedicated to preserving the authenticity of the original production. One of the actors will be the first president.9

As was the case with *Je vous salue Marie*, we find what Genette has called a diegetic transposition of the original story to modern times. In *Jésus de Montréal* however, the transposition is accompanied by a peculiar *mise en abyme* of the original story, the Passion of Christ, in which the modern rendering of the Passion ensues from the representation of the original story as encompassed within. In presenting a theatrical version of The Way of the Cross, *Jésus de Montréal* actually "quotes" (so to speak) the very origins of Scripture films, showing both its inheritance and its rejection of traditional Gospel movie representation.

At the same time, the film critiques the "historicity" of Gospel representation on two fronts: thematizing the historical quest for the "real" Jesus in the radical Passion play—a play which also serves to deconstruct the traditional theatrical origins of the filmic historical recreations of the Scriptures—and recasting the story in modern times, thus refusing, like Godard and Scorcese, to give any historical validity to it.

Let's start with the play. Inspired by new textual, scientific and historical research on Jesus, the group's play is a controversial re-enactment of Christ's Passion that also offers an historical explanation of how little is known about Jesus.¹⁰ It is structured by two intertwining sections: an historical recreation of the Passion, complete with costume and props, and a contemporary comment on the historical Jesus, "complete" with archeologist's trench, computer and costumes. The juxtaposition of the two creates critical distancing as the contemporary section questions the historical. We see portions of the play on three occasions. Although we have seen Daniel collecting all sorts of data on Christ, it is during the first representation-and in the scene just prior-that historiographical elements challenge the traditional telling of this story. The actors ask "how can we tell you this story? The world's most famous A story everyone thinks they know!" They then explain how little we actually do know about Jesus. Using new theories produced by archeology and the history of cultures, the play questions the Immaculate Conception and even considers that Jesus-who is said to have been called Jesu Ben Pantera (son of Pantera)-might have been the illegitimate child of a Roman soldier, whose mission order dated 6 A.D. has just been found. Later, the play goes on to show the resurrection happening not three days after the crucifixion, but more like five or ten years.

The play questions the attempt to reproduce Scriptural history: If Jésus was in fact the illegitimite son of Mary and a Roman soldier, what does that make of the Scriptures? And more importantly, what does that make of all traditional representation of the Scriptures?

Just as Godard did, Arcand pits mythical and scientific discourses against each other: the Scriptures are presented as an oriental story, remote and mysterious. At the same time, while historical knowledge per se is not questioned, it is regarded as inefficient in dealing with the Scriptures and incapable of presenting a historical Jesus. As in *Je vous salue Marie*, the introduction of scientific knowledge (historiography and archeology, along with the technical apparatus in the archeologists' trench), serves to problematize any representational endeavor that would treat the Scriptures as anything other than a story or a religious myth.

Outside the play, *Jésus de Montréal*'s modernization of Christ's Passion is somewhat more allegorical than Godard's. Buisness men, lawyers, publicists and church men become tempter, temple vendors and Pharisee. The film nonetheless serves the same goal of de-historicising Gospel representation. Like Godard, Arcand refuses to take the Sacred Texts as simple historical referent. The difference with Arcand's film lies in the presence of another referent in the film, as seen with the historical part of the Passion play. As with Hutcheon's model for historiographic metafiction, Arcand contradictorily uses and abuses the very conventions he seeks to deconstruct: employing an historical representation of the Passion–

whose role, in turn, is to problematize historical representation. It appears then that the original referent for Daniel Coulombe's life and Passion is completely destabilized. If, as shown through the play, Jesus is not the character who has been depicted throughout the centuries by traditional religious discourse, then Daniel's life refers not to the life of Jesus but to it's representations: the Passion play, the Scriptures as text, and the many paintings, novels, movies, etc, that comprise Christian culture. The most important difference from Arcand's film is this inclusion of the discursive referent (the play) in a strange *mise en abyme* for the rest of the story.

Reading Godard's and Scorcese's film through Arcand's we can see that in order to question conventional representation of the Scriptures, both *Je vous salue Marie* and *The Last Temptation of Christ* require us as viewers to recall the conventional storytelling-cum-History of biblical events. *Jésus de Montréal* on the other hand gives us a version of our own memory of Scripture representation (the historical part of the play) before criticizing and destabilizing it as the film unfolds. At the same time, reading Scorcese's and Arcand's films through *Je vous salue Marie*, we realize that both *The Last Temptation of Christ*'s and *Jésus de Montréal's* critique depend upon the presence of what they are deconstructing as a formal element of those texts, whereas Godard's film deconstructs "History" through a strategy of absence.

Post-Scriptum: Film Analysis and Film History

Analysing the three films through postmodernist strategies we have come to see them as representing a common singular object. But what is so special about that? After all most genre films, like Westerns, usually represent variations of the same object or basic opposition (nature vs culture, order vs anarchy, etc.). The distinctive quality of this corpus however is that neither of the films participates in a genre, nor does any form a genre of its own. Godard's *Je vous salue Marie*, for example, can hardly be placed on the same list as Hollywood's biblical extravaganzas like *The Greatest Story Ever Told* or *The Ten Commandments*. It is clear, as my analysis has shown, that the films resist, in terms both of their iconography and themes, classification in the biblical film category as a sub-genre of the historical film.

In fact what these films do is introduce a new *series* in the ongoing filmic representations of the Scriptures. A series, a term I borrow from Foucault's archeology, is a discursive formation which, unlike a genre, is not constrained by pre-established norms of iconography or themes. There is no law of the series to follow. It therefore has little relevance to the actual production of films, which enables it to escape the "chicken/egg" dilemma facing cinematic genre theory. Unlike traditional group-

ings, the series is purely a construction of the analyst and has no essence outside film viewing. The organization of such discursive formations will depend on the analyst's competence to construct a singular object out of a number of films.

The series, however, is an historical object. It unfolds through time and, as other films come gradually to join it, it is subject to alterations. In this sense, it is clear that the series has a beginning and an end. In addition, the series is historical from the standpoint of its construction. For example, the very process that enabled the constitution of the Gospel series-interpretation through postmodernist strategies-is relative to an historical moment in the study of contemporary cultural phenomena. It seems therefore that, as it proposes a new way of organizing and analysing a corpus of films, the notion of series may very well be capable of revitalizing the field of historical studies in cinema. It is possible to imagine a new history of cinema: a history of film seriesesthetic, thematic, etc. By singling out and analysing a multitude of series as they have evolved or changed, one could arrive at a new understanding of film and film history. In fact, such a film history could be conceived as an archeology-to use Foucault's term-of film knowledge and knowledge about film. Furthermore, as the series themselves become cultural units or cultural referents, they would not be restricted to film alone. Further studies could identify the larger cultural units as they manifest themselves through a number of media and types of discourse. A multidisciplinary approach could then examine the characteristics of each discourse while studying how specific types of discourses negotiate the representation of those cultural units.

> Sémiologie/études littéraires Université du Québec à Montréal.

Notes

- 1. See Noël Burch, 1983.
- 2. See Leo Steinberg, 1983.
- 3. For example, the presentation of the preaching scenes *en bloc* in a montage sequence serves to create a certain distanciation effect which subordinates the narrative to a stronger, or more modern, form of rhetoric through which Pasolini makes his point and presents Jesus as some sort of pre-Marxist social activist.
- 4. See Lyotard, 1984: 25.
- 5. According to Lyotard, "The pragmatics of science is centered on denotative utterances, which are the foundation upon which it builds institutions of learning (institutes, centers, universities, etc.). But its postmodern development brings a decisive 'fact' to the fore: even discussions of denotative statements need to have rules. Rules are not denotative but prescriptive utterances, which we are better off calling metaprescriptive utterances to avoid confusion (they prescribe what the moves of language games must

be in order to be admissible). The function of the differential or imaginative or paralogical activity of the current pragmatics of science is to point out these metaprescriptives (science's 'presuppositions') and to petition players to accept different ones. The only legitimation that can make this kind of request admissible is that it will generate ideas, in other words, new statements" (Lyotard: 65).

- 6. This analogy between knowledge and aesthetics, however, opens itself to criticism such as Fredric Jameson's. He sees Lyotard's commitment to the experimental and the new as determining "an aesthetic that is far more related to the ideologies of high modernism proper than to current postmodernisms, and is indeed-paradoxically enough-very closely related to the conception of the revolutionary nature of high modernism that Habermas faithfully inherited from the Frankfurt School (1984: xvi). It is, nevertheless, such an analogy that Lyotard himself appears to make when he describes the postmodern as being "undoubtedly a part of the modern" (Lyotard: 79).
- 7. That neither of them participates in Lyotard's scheme of the postmodern condition is, however, not problematic. On the one hand, it must be noted that Lyotard's programme of putting forward "the unpresentable in presentation itself" (1984, 81) is not the only way to undermine the legitimacy of rational knowledge or to call attention to its presuppositions. On the other hand, postmodern criticism has already pointed out the contradictory aspects of postmodernism and the fact that it sometimes "works within the very systems it attempts to subvert" (Hutcheon, 1988a, 4). Such contradictions, as we shall see, are important in both *The Last Temptation of Christ* and Jésus de Montréal.
- 8. Such questioning has been the focus of media coverage of uproar surrounding the film's release.
- 9. The plot resembles that of another novel by Nikos Kazantzakis, *Le Christ crucifié*. A young shepherd is asked to play Christ for a theatrical representation of the Passion. Identifying with his character, the shepherd starts behaving in a most Christ-like fashion and thus shocks the Christian community of the village. He ends up being killed by the priest who had "hired" him in the first place. (See Genette-1982: 359-for a short analysis of the novel.)

If the formal organization of the narrative in both novel and film is somewhat similar, the intertextual knowledge it implies in the film—it's significance to borrow a term from Rifaterre (1978, 1979)—is quite different, as I demonstrate in the body of my text.

10. This explanation is offered to spectators and to journalists who cover the play's performance. Most of the latter are caricatures of Montreal television, radio, and newspaper critics. This implies a kind of "regional competency" and constitutes yet another level of complexity in the film, one not available to all spectators.