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The Problem of Film-Theatre Intermediality in *Jesus of Montreal*

In Denys Arcand's 1989 film *Jésus de Montréal* (*Jesus of Montreal*) the representation of theatre is of such unmissable impact that it inspired me to interrogate the specific ways in which this act of heteromedial referencing was carried through. Defined in its narrower sense as 'a specific quality of individual artefacts or texts in which more than one medium participates in their signification'[1], intermediality is the most readily available concept that promises to address this issue.

The institutionalization of the intermediality discourse is a relatively recent academic ordainment. There are at least two centres dedicated to the research of its meaning and importance, one based at the University of Montreal, the other at the University of Graz. Intermediality manifests a predilection for what Walter Moser calls 'recalcitrant objects'[2], works that refuse strict medial categorization and instead situate themselves in undecided realms of representation where one medium calls to mind the practices of another. In one of the latest efforts to disentangle the term from the numerous formulations and typologies that it has generated, Andrew Shail has proposed that we think of intermediality 'as merely formal', distinguishing it from 'the transmission of content from an object in one medium to an object in another medium' which he designates as 'heteromedial intertextuality'[3]. In this paper, I am arguing for the joint consideration of these concerns in the analysis of theatre on film.

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1 Werner Wolf, 'Towards a Functional Analysis of Intermediality: The Case of Twentieth-Century Musicalized Fiction', *Cultural Functions of Intermedial Exploration*, eds. Erik Hedling and Ulla-Britta Lagerroth (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2002), p. 15.

2 Walter Moser, 'L'interartialité: Pour une archéologie de l'intermédialité', *Intermédialité et socialité. Histoire et géographie d'un concept*, eds. Marion Froger and Jürgen Müller (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2007), p. 72.

3 Andrew Shail, 'Intermediality: Disciplinary flux or formalist retrenchment', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 8, 1 (2010), p. 5.

The idea of *Jesus of Montreal* was born at the audition for the cast of another film directed by Arcand, *The Decline of the American Empire* (1986), when a young actor invoked as previous experience playing Jesus in a passion play put on by the Saint Joseph's Oratory on Mount Royal.[4] The thought of writing a similar story appealed to Arcand and stayed with him until it materialized three years later with the release of a film which elaborated on this narrative premise a 'system of contrasts and correspondences' between the contemporary setting and the story of the actors, on the one hand, and easily recognizable biblical episodes, on the other.[5] The film revolves around a young actor, Daniel Colombe (Lothair Bluteau), who is employed by the Archdiocese of Montréal to improve the script and the staging of a passion play backed by the church. He assembles a team of four other actors, of varying backgrounds and professional experience, and proceeds to rewrite the play, after consulting with a scholar and doing his own library research. In the resulting theatre production the research findings are interjected in the narrative succession of the stations of the cross. Daniel's revisionary approach is very popular with the audience but it incurs the church officials' disfavor. During the last performance of his version of the play, Daniel is the victim of an accident. Incautiously released from the hospital, he collapses in an underground station after delivering a disturbing performance to an ad-hoc audience.

Denys Arcand envisaged the passion play sections of the film as conducive to a type of experience that he summarized as 'not knowing anymore if we are in the theatre or at the cinema'.[6] This directorial desideratum suggests once more that the film is a suitable object for an intermedial reading. I shall provide an analysis of fragments of the film in which this effect is at its most powerful. Writing about the creation of the illusion of another medium,

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[4] André Loiselle, '"I only know where I come from, not where I'm going": a conversation with Denys Arcand", in *Auteur/Provocateur: The Films of Denys Arcand*, ed. André Loiselle and Brian McIlroy (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1995), p. 155.

[5] Tom O'Brien, Review of *Jesus of Montreal (Jésus de Montréal)*, by Denys Arcand, *Film Quarterly*, 44, 1 (Autumn 1990), p. 48.

[6] François Ramasse, 'Être tendre malgré tout. Entretien avec Denys Arcand', *Positif*, 340 (1987), p. 16.

Irina Rajewsky has pointed out the limits of this endeavor in a statement that anticipates the conclusions of this paper: 'What can be achieved by intermedial references is an (more or less pronounced, yet necessarily asymptotical) approximation to the medium referred to; an overall actualization or realization of the other medial system is impossible.'[7]

One of the initial claims that I shall be making is that in *Jesus of Montreal*, the dramatic texts demonstrate a level of complexity of their own, as they are products of an 'intermodal transformation' (or 'transmodalization'). Intermodal transformation designates in the words of Gérard Genette 'a shift from one mode to another' [8],the two presentational modes being 'the narrative' and 'the dramatic'. Both the monologue in the beginning of the film and the passion play are in this technical (and up to this point exclusively textual) sense dramatizations of preexistent narrative texts (Dostoyevsky's novel and the Bible). For the most part, Genette deliberately maintains the discussion of dramatization within the realm of the strictly textual, by exploring transmodalization through the characteristics of the text meant to be read and the text meant to be performed. Nevertheless, the problem of the medial differences between literature and theatre does not escape his attention and he remarks that the plurimedial structure of theatre can compensate for the 'loss' he identifies in transmodalization:

> A considerable loss of textual resources can thus be observed whenever the narrative is transposed into dramatic performance. To put it in Aristotelian terms ("Which can do more? Which can do less?"), let us say quite simply that what the theater can do, narrative can do as well, whereas the reverse is not true. But that textual inferiority is outweighed by a considerable extratextual gain,

[7] Irina O. Rajewsky, 'Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality', *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. by Lars Elleström (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 62.

[8] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 277.

> afforded by what Barthes called theatricality properly speaking: "theater minus the text" – i.e., spectacle and play-acting. [9]

The introduction of a theoretical separation between the textual and the extratextual allows for the intermodal and the intermedial to function as discrete categories. In recent years, the debates surrounding the notion of 'medium' have increasingly emphasized the idea that all media are 'multimodal' [10], to the effect that the intermodal is almost inextricably folded into the intermedial. Using a textual yardstick of assessment, Genette finds that theatre (in its textual dimension) is lacking in 'temporal flexibility' and 'focalization' not only by comparison with what he calls 'verbal narration' but also in relation to film.[11] If one were to follow Genette's logic, in *Jesus of Montreal* the task of outbalancing theatre's textual inferiority through 'spectacle and play-acting' is supplanted by the cinematic medium which avenges the handicap on behalf of the theatrical. Despite the fact that the theory on intermediality does not generally employ a rhetoric of medial inferiorities/superiorities, the possibility of using Genette's term in conjunction with insights derived from the literature on intermediality is not automatically precluded and my analysis will attempt to utilize both. More specifically, the present analysis engages in a dialogue with Liliane Louvel's work. In an article about different examples of photography-in-text, a hybrid literary specimen, Louvel puts forth the concept of the 'pictorial third' in order to make sense of the transit between image and text that the viewer/reader engages in. She remarks:

> My "pictorial third" designates the in-between image conjured up by a "pictorial reading" – one in which word and image combine and intermediality fully plays its role. This in-between image floats in the reader's mind in the same

[9] Ibid., p. 280.
[10] Rajewsky, p. 66.
[11] Genette, pp. 279-280.

> way as Descartes's "images in the air". The pictorial third is a phenomenological event, a visual movement produced in the viewer-reader's mind by the passage between the two media. It is a virtual image engineered by the text and reinvented by the reader, it will never exactly coincide with the narrator's. [12]

Denys Arcand's 'we are at the theatre and at the same time at the cinema'[13] requires a similar mental operation. Ineradicable, the cinematic dispositif applies itself to the task of laying open the workings of theatre, but it is not unreservedly compliant in its depiction. It doesn't only show the backstage[14] (the actors of the passion play changing costumes and rushing into the next scene), it also ventures into the offstage. The function of documenting the theatrical event is undercut by a desire to give more access to this event but also by a need to show how a film would have staged the story. The process of imagining an in-between described by Liliane Louvel is responsible in her account for 'triggering more fiction' and for eliciting what she calls a '"double fiction", that runs parallel to a text's'.[15] She discusses both cases in which a photograph would actually be reproduced within the text and in which it would only be 'mediated through words', the first set of examples being without a doubt the one that lends itself more easily to an explanation of the 'pictorial third' kind. The incorporation of a stage production in *Jesus of Montreal* is a decision that generates more fiction inasmuch as it teases the viewer with fragments of performance and it sets in motion a particular dynamic between film and theatre spectator, ranging from fictional alignment to outright dissidence. In *Jesus of Montreal*, the staging of the play is made with the thought of filmic devices in mind and the image that has to be conjured is that of the theatrical performance without the interference of the camera.

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[12] Liliane Louvel, 'Photography as Critical Idiom and Intermedial Criticism', *Poetics Today*, 29.1 (Spring 2008), p. 45.
[13] Ramasse, p. 16. My translation.
[14] The term is slightly inadequate since the performance is open-air and a stage is seldom delimited.
[15] Louvel, p. 46.

To attend to the double focus of the analysis – intermodal transformation and intermediality – I shall concentrate, on the one hand, on the process of dramatization, insofar as the film gives indications about textual re-workings, and, on the other hand, on the specific intermedial consequences of film representing theatre. Intermodal transformation and intermediality are both constitutive of the passion play as we see it in the film. Transmodalization can only be inferred, being, in a certain sense, 'hidden' in the text, whereas intermediality is an observable condition, a tension between media[16] that informs the mise-en-scène of the film. Furthermore, I shall argue that the performances are constantly calibrated to fit the changing medial situations and I shall analyze the ways in which they are wedded to varying actor-spectator interactive formulas. What will also become apparent throughout my analysis is that Denys Arcand's reflection on theatre goes as far as committing to a dialogue with the work of important theatre figures, Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski.

In order to write the script, Arcand became a student of history all over again, reactivating scholarly habits of mind. As part of the project of 'studying everything' concerning his topic, *The Brothers Karamazov* was one of the choices that left visible traces in the final version: the film begins with a 'fausse pièce'[17], a monologue that Arcand composed for Smerdyakov on stage to accompany the suicide which in the novel, instead of being 'witnessed' by the reader, is reported by Alyosha Karamazov. After this exercise written in the manner of and in addition to Dostoyevsky, Arcand engages in a 'paraphrase of the Passion',[18] conceived as a cutting-edge revamping of the passion play, a sub-genre of the mystery play with roots in the Middle Ages.

The fragment from *The Brothers Karamazov* gives an advance idea about the preoccupation of the film with theatre but it is also a very different sample of theatrical

[16] One of the two media (theatre) is, as intermediality theorists would say, present only in concept.
[17] Ramasse, p. 15.
[18] Ibid., p. 14.

experience than what the rest of the movie will portray. Janis L. Pallister interprets the scene as 'the forerunner to Daniel's play – a preplay, the first play-within-a-play, and one in which man is seen without God'.[19] This interpretation begins to explain the positioning of this fragment in a relation of precedence with the passion play, especially in line with the allegorical reading that associates the young actor playing Smerdyakov with the figure of John the Baptist anticipating Daniel's Jesus. The text of the dramatization effects an unusual truncation of the novel, dropping the actual ending and fabricating a soliloquy for Smerdyakov, a character promoted to centrality. More problematic and indeed of immediate interest for the purposes of this argument is the way in which the fragment presents itself to the spectators of the film, privileging details of performance over the whole picture and deferring clarification of setting and situation. Because of its placement at the very inception of the movie, the scene is important for setting up expectations about the entire film as well as about itself and it has been analyzed by Tony Simons as follows:

> The spectators have come to watch a film, and their expectations when the film opens are that what they see on screen is the opening of the actual plot and that these are the actual characters. (…) the spectators at this point do not ask any questions about what they are seeing. It appears to be a straightforward, traditional, costume-drama film. Even the rather theatrical overacting and outpourings of Smerdiakov can be accepted as being part of the genre of cinema, given the fact that it is leading to his suicide. The camera uses so many close-ups and extreme high and low angle shots that the cinematic mode is convincing. [20]

[19] Janis L. Pallister, *The Cinema of Québec. Masters in Their Own House* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, London: Associated University Presses, 1995), p. 384.
[20] Tony Simons, 'Denys Arcand: *Jésus de Montréal*', in *Where Are the Voices Coming From? Canadian Culture and the Legacies of History*, ed. by Coral Ann Howells (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 155-156.

The applauses following the suicide elucidate the scene, but this elucidation is less of a reversal than Tony Simons would have it. The Dostoyevsky fragment is far from straightforwardly pointing to an unambiguous costume-drama. What initially appears to be just another beginning *in medias res*, in itself not terribly confusing for a viewer of the late 1980s, soon enough looks and sounds more like the rush towards a finishing line that is almost palpable in the urgency of the character's actions and in the speedy and shouted delivery of lines, at times out of breath because of the crying. This loud impetuosity announces a premature denouement of events that the spectators of the film - the outer audience in relation to the inner level audience we see applauding after the culmination of the scene - barely have the time to attempt guessing. Due to the close range from which the characters are filmed, when the camera switches from one to the other, the distance between them seems much smaller than it is subsequently disclosed to be (during his speech, Smerdyakov seems to approach Ivan but despite this, they are never brought together in the same shot). One gets the impression that the skewed glance that Ivan casts in Smerdyakov's direction is not quite resolved by the next shot. Until the very end of the sequence when the stage is frontally shown we only have an approximate representation of the spatial relations between the characters and between the characters and the setting. Although cinematic devices are clearly on display, their use is not seamless and, if anything, it encourages alertness to the frenzied performance and to the imminence of an ending, both of them preparing the ground for and favoring the revelation of the theatricality of the fragment. Furthermore, however much one justifies the monologue as cinematically viable because of the special psychological circumstances of a prelude to a suicide, it remains a rare device in cinema and one with clear ties with the theatrical world. During the applause, the actors of the play are filmed from a low angle as from the vantage point of a spectator, as if, after trying on different shooting angles on the stage, the camera suddenly settled for a place in the

audience disavowing its own previous prowess. In addition to being a foretaste for the already mentioned concern with theatre that the film consistently espouses, the sequence also offers a representation of a performance that takes place on a single stage in contradistinction with the passion play that, in true medieval fashion, is multi-station and moving.

Daniel Colombe (Lothair Bluteau) narratively links the play after Dostoyevsky and the passion play, by being present at both, as a spectator and, respectively, as a lead actor/writer/director. He is asked by Father Leclerc (Gilles Pelletier) to 'modernize' the passion play that, under his direction, had been running for thirty five years with a gradual diminishment of popularity. In a confrontation following the first performance of the show put together by Daniel and his team of actors, Father Leclerc retracts his initial ambitious stance towards the text, by de-radicalizing the import of the modernizing agenda and translating it as 'freshening up' the play based on the biblical account of the Passions of Christ. His attitude is not unlike that of a medieval redactor of a passion play for whom the essentials of the subject were 'within certain limits immutable' and who, as a result, 'took what he needed where he found it, and devoted whatever talent he possessed to patching, arranging, and supplying (…) new scenes or extra-Biblical material as might prove striking and successful'.[21] What the film leads us to think Leclerc was actually asking for was a slightly more commercial packaging of the play, sufficiently and cautiously up to date as to seem appealing to contemporary audiences but not too reworked to stir 'negative popularity' and attract the large numbers that this usually entails. An impossible middle between scientific revision and conservative mindset, the perfect formula of script and staging the priest tries to get Daniel to abide by is predictably not the one we see at work. Instead, the film presents Daniel guiding a troupe of actors that he personally assembles towards achieving what seems to be a concoction of commercial success and artistic boldness.

[21] Grace Frank, 'The Palatine Passion and the Development of the Passion Play', *PMLA*, 35.4 (1920), p. 476.

Reviewing the American reactions to the film, Peter Wilkins identified a reluctance on the part of certain critics to buy into this account of the revitalization of the play. Particularly David Denby and Barbara Shulgasser refuse to hail Daniel as the redeemer of the show (pun intended) and generally seem to dislike the fact that in the theatrical milieu reenactment gives way to reliving, to use the pair of concepts used by Pallister[22] Shulgasser signs an article entitled 'Another actor who thinks he's divine' and David Denby connects Daniel and, through him, Arcand, with 'theatre revolutionaries of twenty years ago – hectoring actor-prophets who wanted to provoke but had nothing of interest to say'.[23] It is a testimony to the importance and quality of the representation of theatre in the film that critics have commented on the passion play as if it could be somehow evaluated separately from the film. Wilkins's answer to Denby's position interestingly reframes the issue:

> If *Jesus of Montreal* were a stage play and not a film, Denby's criticism might apply, but the medium of film objectifies and displaces that of the stage play. It is worth considering this displacement, for Arcand himself is staging a passion-play of sorts by setting up the play within the film. The medium of film is not just a means of demonstrating the plot; it is also an intermediary between the world of acting on the stage and the commercial world of television advertising.[24]

During the passion play Daniel's restrained performance, although effective, does not necessarily suggest there is a disturbing parallel being developed between the two figures (Christ and Daniel). When, during the first performance, a woman breaks loose from the other spectators and starts talking to Daniel as if he were 'sweet Jesus', the incident is greeted with slight wonderment by Daniel and set right by the warden whose intervention slants the

[22] Pallister, p. 384.
[23] Shulgasser and Denby quoted in Peter Wilkins, 'No big picture: Arcand and his US critics', in *Auteur/Provocateur: The Films of Denys Arcand*, ed. by André Loiselle and Brian McIlroy (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1995), p. 129.
[24] Wilkins, p. 129.

incident towards comedy. The episode during the second performance when Daniel directs Jesus's address to the Pharisees to the church representatives present in the audience is a political twist that Daniel gives to the play by incorporating into the show the critique of the institutional apparatus surrounding it, in anticipation of the censorship gesture that was to follow. The parallel is less of the actors' doing and more a narrative schema devised by Arcand. Bart Testa has analyzed in great detail the film's 'diagrammatic narrative'[25] and its allegorical system, but my interpretation will steer away from these concerns in order to highlight the importance of the film's intermediality.

The coextensivity between Christ's story and Daniel's own fate seems to be ultimately consecrated by an accident (a member of the audience inadvertently knocks down the crucifixion cross) rather than by deliberate imitation. This accident is actually an element in a carefully constructed network of mirroring events that Arcand sets in place for the spectator interested in the riddle aspect of the movie and in collecting the scattered allegorical clues. The overarching parallel functions as a decoy, the 'film's invitation to the viewer to inhabit the Jesus story', to 'consider how it works existentially'[26], but as Clive Marsh puts it, '*Jesus of Montréal* thus presents the theologian with the prospect of all eschatological concerns being collapsed into ethics'.[27] The rediscovery of Jesus as not much more than an inspiring figure from an ethical point of view and as an intriguing character archaeology-wise acts as the driving force of the dramatization.

With regard to the aesthetic stakes of the passion play, Denys Arcand has acknowledged the lesson of Peter Brook[28]. The film seems to almost thematize Peter Brook's typology of forms of theatre, with the old pageant standing for 'deadly theatre', the bad

[25] Bart Testa, 'Arcand's double-twist allegory: Jesus of Montreal', in *Auteur/Provocateur*, p. 94.
[26] Clive Marsh, *Theology goes to the movies. An introduction to critical Christian thinking* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 144.
[27] Ibid., p. 149.
[28] Ramasse, p. 16: 'Pour le film, j'avais donc à monter ce spectacle théâtral. Notre référence a été simple: Peter Brook'. Arcand goes on to explain how each of the four elements is present in the passion play. This is the only aspect of the Brook influence that he discusses, but I believe the influence is possibly farther reaching.

theatre of 'respectability'[29], an outmoded formula that has exhausted itself in unimaginative reiterations of the same material and of the same strategies, and the new pageant roughly approximating the 'holy theatre', a theatre of reinvented rituals and ties with the community.[30] The connection between the passion play and Peter Brook can be expanded upon if we focus on the problem of the relation between the stage director and the dramatic text, a problem that is at the core of the theatre production in *Jesus of Montreal*. Discussing Brook's work, Richard Paul Knowles remarked that, in his treatment of the Shakespearian plays, Peter Brook is one of the directors

> who regard Early Modern Culture as at once usefully primitive and essentially modern, its anarchy and dissolution reflecting our own time and serving us as valuable metaphoric ground for the resolution of our own anxieties; and who play the role of colonialist ethnographers in relation to the primitive Elizabethan age as well as other "othered" cultures, constructing Shakespeare very much as "third position" cultural translator and native informant about our "primitive" essential selves. [31]

This 'Shakespeare-plus-relevance'[32] tendency is, *mutatis mutandis*, identifiable in the transmodalization of the biblical narrative into a passion play. The story of Jesus's teachings and miracles is woven back into a reconstructed context: 'The East swarmed with prophets, charlatans, magicians…Judas of Galilee. Theudas. The Great Egyptian. Simon the Magician. … Jesus was also a magician. He was said to have grown up in Egypt, the cradle of magic.' Iconic images, like the crucifixion, are re-familiarized, shown to be commonplace, devoid of the striking quality they had in the traditional account:

[29] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Macgibon & Kee, 1969), p. 13.
[30] Ibid., p. 45.
[31] Richard Paul Knowles, 'From Dream to Machine: Peter Brook, Robert Lepage, and the Contemporary Shakespearian Director as (Post)Modernist', *Theatre Journal*, 50.2 (1998), p. 194.
[32] Ibid., p. 194.

'Crucifixion began six centuries before Christ. It was progress of sorts – the Assyrians had favored impaling'. The characters of the New Testament drama could be seen as informants from time immemorial about our inner power to generate beliefs, to maintain and reproduce them. For Knowles, such an attitude towards the text, in which the text is annexed by the 'colonizing brands of essential humanism'[33] implies a modernist director that acts as an 'exegete'[34]. In *Jesus of Montreal*, the dramatic text is written to support this discourse and Daniel fits the profile of a theatre director that brings to unity[35] the efforts to enliven the text. In the context of an analysis of Robert Lepage's theatre output, Knowles comments on the Canadian director's fascination with Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' soliloquy, a fascination traceable in his film *Polygraph*, the 'one man Hamletmachine' *Elsinore* and, most interestingly, in *Jesus of Montréal* as well. The character Robert Lepage plays in Arcand's film, René, insists on the interpolation of the soliloquy in the passion play and this postmodern wink relies for its effect on the audience perceiving it as 'a Quebec theatre in-joke'.[36] The interpolation also vaguely throws back to Smerdyakov's monologue in the beginning of the film.

Daniel is not only the assigned director of the passion play and its creative mastermind, he is also the lead actor, a 'holy actor' in a 'poor theatre').[37] The Grotowskian holy actor is the one who 'publicly challenges others, and through excess, profanation and outrageous sacrilege reveals himself'[38], a 'person who, through his art, climbs upon the stake and performs an act of self-sacrifice'[39], in opposition to the 'courtesan actor' whose acting

[33] Ibid., p. 195.
[34] Ibid., p. 191.
[35] There is a strong emphasis in Knowles's text on the high modernist idea of unity of cultural fragments within a staging, achieved through the controlling presence of the director.
[36] Ibid., p. 198.
[37] Jerzy Grotowsky, 'The Theatre's New Testament. Interview with Eugenio Barba', in Jerzy Grotowsky, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. by Eugenio Barba (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1975), p. 41.
[38] Ibid., p. 34.
[39] Ibid., p. 43.

range is defined by 'an accumulation of methods, artifices and tricks'.[40] Notified of the decision to go back to the old script after a few successful runs of the new pageant, Martin (Remy Girard), René (Robert Lepage), Constance (Johanne-Marie Tremblay) and Mireille (Catherine Wilkening) give a derisive performance in front of Father Leclerc in which they mock their own professional baggage by saying the first lines of the old pageant in a variety of badly mimicked acting styles (Comédie Française, method acting, Kabuki, a street slang rendition), thus constructing a collective image of the 'courtesan actor'. There is yet another understanding of the courtesan actor activated in *Jesus of Montréal*: the actor diverted from his trajectory by a 'producer souteneur'[41] - the actor playing Smerdyakov is coopted for the publicity campaign 'L'homme sauvage'. It is in front of the commercial poster of this campaign that Daniel breaks down and initiates his final public and self-sacrificing performance, but, interestingly enough, this performance happens outside of the conventionally understood theatre context. By elaborating on the avowed influence of Grotowsky and Brook, I am suggesting that Arcand's representation of theatre goes beyond the mere reconstruction of a theatrical environment. It demonstrates an awareness of the medium's history, or, in the words of Lars Elleström, of the medium's 'qualifying aspects', of its 'historically determined practices, discourses and conventions'.[42]

Daniel's overall performance is to be understood in relation not only to the commercial world of advertising that he is meant to be so alien to, but also in relation to the other theatrical performances in the film: Smerdyakov's monologue and the 'bad pageant'[43], the old version of the passion play he is supposed to revise, that he watches in a VHS recording on a TV set. The bad pageant is clearly represented as a tired, worn-out

[40] Ibid., p. 34.
[41] Ibid., p. 48.
[42] Lars Elleström, 'The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations', in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. by Lars Elleström (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 25.
[43] Pallister, p. 385.

performance, one that a modern audience would attend 'in the expectation of being virtuously bored'.[44] In the recording, we see figures clad in undistinguished white robes who, after taking turns in reciting lines that have a hint of rhyme about them, join their voices in choral unison. Constance is the only actress who participates both in the old pageant and in the new one. The character she plays in the old pageant employs 'stylized hand-gestures' that in certain historical accounts are deemed representative of medieval acting style.[45] The 'bad pageant' is illustrative of several of the conventions of the mystery plays, of which the passion play is a sub-category and in this sense it could almost be considered the 'good pageant' (although the undertones of ridicule in the representation are difficult to bypass). John Elliott has inventoried some of these conventions:

> Direct addresses to the audience, self-identifying speeches, prophecies, laments, and curses, litanies of praise, anachronistic foresight, total recall in hindsight – all these are less techniques of characterization in the modern sense than of exposition and commentary, though in medieval drama they become qualities of the character as well.[46]

In the old pageant captured on VHS, the actors serve as chorus figures, pointing towards the figure of the Christ bearing the burden of the cross and insisting on the importance of his sacrifice. Although their lines are explanatory, their mood is dolorous. They address the camera directly, interpellating the spectator and inviting him/her to both contemplate and grieve. To quote Elliott once more, there is a marked difference between mystery acting and modern performances.

> However medieval actors created their characters, we may be sure that it was not by means of the Stanislavskian methods which dominate our drama schools

[44] I borrowed the expression from T.S. Eliot quoted in John R. Elliott, *Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 127.
[45] Elliott, p. 131.
[46] Ibid., p. 132.

> and actors studios today. The characters in the mysteries are types, not individuals, and the actions they perform are mythic and larger than life. The mirror they hold up reflects not only nature but the supernatural as well. It would be pointless to ask an actor to 'internalize' the character of God or the risen Christ …[47]

Daniel performs with a difference. Although the passion play Daniel stages and performs still retains a number of the characteristics of the mystery manner of acting, such as the direct address which dominates the expositional passages, it is introducing a modern admixture consisting not only of the scientific and historical refurbishments of the play but also of a new conception of acting, a seriously undertaken work of internalizing the character, that makes Daniel exercise consistency with the role outside the role. In what follows, I shall look at how the performances in the first station of the cross segment of the play are constructed on stage and screen in relation to the audiences pertaining to the two media/levels of fiction, theatre and film. I have selected for analysis the first station of the cross segment of the passion play in order to 'visualize' the theory, to demonstrate that intermediality can open up a whole area of concerns that can further our understanding of a film.

Just like its upgraded version, the old pageant appears to be a procession punctuated by performances delivered at certain stops (the stations of the cross). The video recording shows only a fragment of the first station of the cross performance, in which the actors seem to aspire to the condition of a statuary group or a tableau vivant, halting movement at significant points and regaining it only enough to find and form a new arrangement. The freeze frame on Constance brings to an end the frustratingly retarded pace of the performance, arresting the slow succession of images into a perfectly composed close-up. The pageant is clearly established as passé in terms of acting and mise-en-scène.

[47] Ibid., p. 131.

In response, Daniel's new staging reverses the hierarchy of immobility and flow, reinstating the idea of a performance in motion. Even when the acting is contained within the parameters of a stage-like space, the flowing quality is preserved by having characters move towards or away from each other, like in Pilate's interrogation of Jesus. Cited by Arcand as an influence, alongside Peter Brook, for the use of the four elements in the staging of the passion play[48], Jerzy Grotowski can be read into several aspects of the play's design. His preoccupation with 'finding the proper spectator-actor relationship for each type of performance and embodying the decision in physical arrangements'[49] is certainly matched by a similar interest in the staging of the passion play, with the added intermedial complication of having two different audiences to consider. Most of the time, even when the camera adopts a position unattributable to any member of the theatrical audience, it still captures something that the theatre spectator could hear or see, albeit from a different angle.

There is one significant exception. In the beginning of the Pilate-Jesus confrontation of the first station of the cross performance, as Daniel's Jesus is brought in front of the procurator by two guards and subjected to a visual and verbal inspection, the theatre spectators are seen from the vantage point of the stage closing ranks around Daniel. At this point, they are very much part of everything that happens and their allowed proximity promises future entitlements. Subsequently the view alternates between the downward glance that Pilate (played by Robert Lepage's René) casts on Jesus and a frontal take from Daniel's perspective on the slightly elevated stage. This stage consists of the space surrounding a statue of Jesus placed in front of the Montréal cathedral, and the statue, its pedestal, the stairs leading up to it and its enclosure are the props the actors playing Pilate and the Jewish judge use to sit on, take distance from or hide behind. The rows of standing spectators backing Daniel and sharing his point of view complete the system of spatial relations in the first

[48] Ramasse, p. 16.
[49] Jerzy Grotowsky, 'Towards a Poor Theatre', in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 20.

station performance. Pilate retreats towards the statue to communicate the result of the preliminary questioning, the rapidly deliberated 'harmless' verdict, to the member of the Sanhedrin (Rémy Girard's Martin). As he approaches, the theatre spectators are left behind and we notice them over the actor's shoulder, a silent legion of bodies awaiting his return in the distance.

The dialogue between the two characters represents a second, more private deliberation session, a whispering consultation away from the ears of the accused and of the audience alike, taking place in the area situated behind the statue. In turns, Pilate and the Jewish magistrate are glancing back at the theatre audience, as if to secure their disciplined attention. They are filmed, for the most part, in a mid two shot, in the available light (spotlights on the cathedral's facade and torches). Visible for the film viewer, they are only partially so for the theatre spectator, the sight of at least one of them being occluded at each time. What is being verbally exchanged between them though is for the film spectator's ears only. Their conclave acquires thus an ambiguous status in relation to the performed play: not entirely offstage from a visual point of view, but outside the hearing range of the theatre audience. The sequence constitutes a striking example of focalization realized through filmic means, an intensification as it were of a theatrical moment made possible by film. This fragment functions in my analysis less as an instance of cinema 'remediating' theatre's 'deficiencies'[50] and more as an interesting example of the frailty of the heteromedial illusion, subject to the vagaries of the camera.

At the end of the first station of the cross, the warden turned steward indicates the way to the second station adding 'It's a lot farther than last year'. An inverted repoussoir figure, he stands in the foreground of the frame, swiftly flashing his light pass the film spectator and leftwards. His gesture called to mind André Bazin's reflection on cinema: 'we

[50] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Introduction', in *Narrative across Media. The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. by Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 32.

might say of the cinema that it is the little flashlight of the usher, moving like an uncertain comet across the night of our waking dream, the diffuse space without shape or frontiers that surrounds the screen'.[51] By the same token, the performance space stretches in our direction, an impression that is accentuated later when Mireille and Constance, leading the theatre spectators, steadily advance towards us, their eyes probing into the near distance, but avoiding direct contact. The threat of invasion is constant, the opportunities for intersection and convergence between the film and theatre spectator are numerous.

To paraphrase Liliane Louvel, a film that features the story of a theatre production and even endeavors to show the theatre event itself and its reception cannot be analyzed in the same way as a film with no such premise[52]. Although not all films about theatre are of necessity intelligent about this premise, the ones that rise to the occasion demand the use of conceptual tools that are able to illuminate this particularity. In the case of *Jesus of Montréal*, formulating the problem as intermediality is tantamount to exploring the paradox of having a passion play that never takes place anywhere else but in the film and that comes to be perceived as theatre by means of the very same film. In *Jesus of Montréal*, the logic of intermediality has been revealed to be not only one of conflation but also one of displacement where displacement is understood as 'planting' a performance in an artificial medial environment designed to replicate a medial system that exists and functions outside this experiment. Furthermore, in the process of revealing this logic, the representation of theatre in the film has also been linked to an understanding of dramatization, theatrical genres (the passion play) and drama theory [53].

[51] André Bazin, 'Theater and Cinema Part Two', in André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1967), p. 107.
[52] Her exact formulation is: 'A text in which images figure (...) cannot be analyzed in the same manner as a text where none appear', Louvel, p. 46.
[53] See Brook and Grotowski.

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