

# Space, time, auteur-ity and the queer male body: the film adaptations of Robert Lepage

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What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. . . . In fact the crystal constantly exchanges the two distinct images which constitute it, the actual image of the present which passes and the virtual image of the past which is preserved: distinct and yet indiscernible, and all the more indiscernible because distinct, because we do not know which is one and which is the other. This is unequal exchange, or the point of indiscernibility, the mutual image.<sup>1</sup>

In the scholarship on the films of Robert Lepage, a dominant critical paradigm has emerged to complement the academic focus on his theatre. Drawing primarily on the work of Gilles Deleuze, and making frequent comparisons to Alain Resnais and Alfred Hitchcock, critics have elaborated a whole taxonomy of space-time collapses – from parallel montage, flashbacks and films-within-films – that work to absorb and sustain the past within the present in Lepage’s cinematic representations of memory.<sup>2</sup> Such effects are, in turn, often linked to questions of authority, or the lack thereof. For, as Henry A. Garrity points out, the reconstructed past in Lepage’s films is essentially a *de-* or *unauthorized* one, lacking an identifiable narrator, in the sense that the edits used to

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 81.  
<sup>2</sup> See Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001); Henry A. Garrity, ‘Robert Lepage’s cinema of time and space’, in Joseph I. Donohoe and Jane M. Koustas (eds), *Theater sans Frontières: Essays on the Dramatic Universe of Robert Lepage* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2000), pp. 95–107; Martin Lefebvre, ‘A sense of time and place: the chronotope in *I Confess* and *Le Confessionnal*’, *Quebec Studies*, no. 26 (Fall 1998/Winter 1999), pp. 88–98; Aleksandar Dundjerovic, *The Cinema of Robert Lepage: the Poetics of Memory* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> See Garrity, 'Robert Lepage's cinema of time and space', pp. 102, 105–6; on Deleuze's definition of the 'recollection-image', see his *Cinema 2*, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> On how the presence of a narrator need not be a precondition of narration in film, and on how film narration 'presupposes a perceiver, but not any sender, of a message', see David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> In an earlier version of this paper, I had used the word 'gay' instead of 'queer' in formulating the argument that follows. However, as the anonymous reader of the paper noted, this presupposes a somewhat essentialist conception of male homosexual identity formation (and deformation) that is belied both by the theoretical framework of the paper itself, and by the imaging of several of the sexually polymorphous characters in Lepage's films. At the same time, it might be argued that 'gay' is one of the signifiers lost in translation in Lepage's reauthorizing of his 'queer' male bodies from stage to screen.

evoke the past on screen are more often than not the result of Deleuzian 'irrational' cuts, which cannot be tied to a diegetic character's actual sensory-motor recognition but only to extradiegetic, or virtual, representation, what Delcuze calls the 'recollection-image'.<sup>3</sup> Neither can these recollection-images be tied to a stable point of view, other, that is, than that provided by the omniscient camera.<sup>4</sup> This is, perhaps, another way of saying that if Lepage's films, by virtue of their status as mediated texts generally and 'adaptations' more specifically, lack an author (in the Barthesian sense), they do at least have an auteur.

In this essay, I examine the intersection of auteurism and adaptation in Lepage's cinema by focusing on the transposition of images of the queer male body from his theatrical source texts to their filmed adaptations.<sup>5</sup> While perhaps not as visibly or politically 'out' as fellow Québécois theatre contemporaries René-Daniel Dubois and Michel Marc Bouchard, both of whom have seen their most famous (and famously gay) plays adapted memorably for the screen, neither does Lepage make a secret of his homosexuality. Moreover, his theatrical creations are filled with all manner of queer characters and images of same-sex eroticism. Curiously, however, in Lepage's first four films such characters and images are either largely absent or, in the case of *Le Confessionnal* (1995), so overlain with the symbolic weight of internalized guilt and dysfunction as to be borderline homophobic. It is possible to interpret such changes as Lepage's concession to the more mainstream audience tastes that govern the film industry. Likewise, one can see this as a necessary consequence of what, after Deleuze, we might call the collision of 'two distinct images' of the Québec cinematic imaginary, where past memories of political, social and religious repression continue to haunt present representations of gender and sexuality. At the same time, however, I would argue that the changes also point significantly to Lepage's own *self*-adaptation from theatre to film director.

What is at stake here is that, as film auteur, Lepage is arguably able to control his cinematic narratives more vigilantly than his theatrical ones, most of which were created collaboratively with his Théâtre Repère and Ex Machina troupes, or with cowriters such as Marie Brassard, and which Lepage has famously argued are never 'finished', because they are always evolving and being adapted in the necessarily evanescent and non-repeatable context of the performance moment. However, when it comes to the filmic artefact, and representations of the queer male body recorded (or not recorded) therein, a degree of auteurism necessarily accrues by virtue of each film's temporal positioning after, and thus definitive recording of, each play's constitutive images. Or, to put this in the terms outlined by Deleuze in the epigraph to this article, the image moves from the 'virtuality' of the past (those once fleeting and now lost moments of theatrical inspiration, rehearsal and performance) to the 'actuality' of the present, where it can be ceaselessly and unchangeably replayed in the temporal and spatial moment of apprehension that constitutes the film's projection. What I am interested in exploring in this

essay, then, is the ‘unequal exchange’, the ‘point of indiscernibility’ that occurs in the ‘crystallization’ of images of the queer male body in Lepage’s translation of, and surveillance over, his (and others’) stage narratives as they are adapted into screen narratives. Because many of these images reflect a highly ambivalent – and atemporal – intersection of the religious and the secular, the political and the personal, the social and the familial in Lepage’s work, attention must also be paid to the mutuality of the sexual symbolic and the national symbolic in much Québécois cinema.

Thus, before going on to my queer reading of Lepage’s films, it is first important to note how any such reading is inherently governed by a larger, and largely psychoanalytic, cultural discourse in Québec, which has repeatedly recuperated filmic representations of homosexuality within a framework of Québec’s arrested development and English Canada’s social dominance. Here, I am alluding to a very influential 1987 article by Gilles Thérien, which argues that representations of same-sexuality in films by Micheline Lanctôt (*Sonatine* [1984]), Jean Beaudin (*Mario* [1984]), Léa Pool (*Anne Trister* [1986]) and Yves Simoneau (*Pouvoir intime* [1986]), among others, are in fact restagings of Québec’s permanent identity crisis, where the child of the Quiet Revolution, alienated, but unable to completely cathect her/himself from, a patriarchal family environment, displaces this power dynamic onto a ‘falsely feminine’ idealization of a person of the same sex (who stands in for English Canada).<sup>6</sup> While Thérien’s argument, and the homophobic presuppositions underpinning it, have been succinctly and efficiently deconstructed by critics such as Robert Schwartzwald and Bill Marshall,<sup>7</sup> this has not stopped others from applying its analytical paradigms to an endless catalogue of films not discussed by Thérien, including, in Martin Lefebvre’s case, *Le Confessionnal*. As Lefebvre notes, the scenario described by Thérien ‘completely overlaps with Marc’s situation in Lepage’s film’:<sup>8</sup> Marc (Patrick Goyette), unable to reconcile his feelings of bitterness for his recently deceased ‘adoptive’ father, allows himself to fall back into a homosexual relationship with the ex-priest-turned-federal diplomat Massicotte (Jean-Louis Millette), who drags Marc to Japan on government business. Significantly, it is here, in this foreign country, that Marc commits suicide, death ‘the only possible outcome for he who can’t accept domination yet refuses to challenge it’.<sup>9</sup>

While I find much in Lefebvre’s reading of *Le Confessionnal* to be convincing, this last point is less so. Indeed, the problem with conscripting the queer male as a signifier of failed or unrealized national identity in Québécois cultural production generally, and the corpus of Lepage’s films more specifically, is that that signifier very often ends up a corpse. In an illuminating article on Hitchcock’s frequent film adaptations of drama, Alenka Zupančič notes that ‘*Every time cinematic and theatre realities coincide, every time cinematic and theatre narratives overlap, there is a corpse*’.<sup>10</sup> André Loiselle has recently explored the pertinence of this insight to Jean Beaudin’s 1992 adaptation

<sup>6</sup> See Gilles Thérien, ‘Cinéma québécois: la difficile conquête de l’altérité’, *Littérature*, no. 66 (1987), pp. 101–14.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Schwartzwald, ‘“Symbolic” homosexuality, “false feminine”, and the problematics of identity in Québec’, in Michael Warner (ed.), *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 264–99; Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema*, pp. 129 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Lefebvre, ‘A sense of time and place’, p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Alenka Zupančič, ‘A perfect place to die: theatre in Hitchcock’s films’, in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 80. Italics in original.

11 See André Loiselle, 'Cinema, theatre and red gushing blood in Jean Beaudin's *Being at Home with Claude*', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1996), pp. 17–33; and 'The corpse lies in *Lilies*: the stage, the screen, and the dead body', *Essays on Canadian Writing*, no. 76 (2002), pp. 117–38.

12 Robert Lepage, with Rémy Charest, *Connecting Flights*, trans. Wanda Romer Taylor (London: Methuen, 1997), pp. 33–4.

13 Ibid., p. 35.

14 Ibid., p. 42.

15 It is important to note that any reading of Pierre's screen sexuality necessarily overlaps with such extradiegetic considerations as Bluteau's own sexuality and his previous acting roles. Again, as a reviewer of this paper put it, Bluteau, 'although fiercely private, may well have a personal identity that matches his onscreen queer personae in such New Queer films as *Bent*, *Orlando*, and *I Shot Andy Warhol*, but his public persona, as well as his onscreen sensibility in such films as *Black Robe* and *Jésus de Montréal*, are basically asexual, and the character of Pierre surely appropriates that asexual aura'.

of Dubois's play *Being at Home with Claude* and John Greyson's 1996 adaptation of Bouchard's play *Lilies (Les Feluettes)*.<sup>11</sup> One could just as easily apply this insight to the films of Lepage, each one an adaptation of a theatrical narrative in some fundamental way, each one featuring, however obliquely (as in the case of *Nô* [1998]), a corpse. My argument in the rest of this essay, then, is that the corpse-as-signifier in Lepage's films, even when not literally embodied/discarnated by the queer male, is nevertheless tied to the 'death' of certain important homosexual significations in Lepage's source-texts, and that such auteurial revisionism has important implications for the gendered reception of both his cinematic *and* his theatrical narratives, as well as for a Deleuzian reading of Québec's national imaginary more generally.

As an adaptation, *Le Confessionnal* is multiply complex: not only does it contain characters from Lepage's first great theatrical triumph, *The Dragons' Trilogy* (chief among them protagonist Pierre Lamontagne), it also consciously quotes and incorporates scenes from Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1953), itself an adaptation of a 1902 stage play, *Nos deux consciences*, by French playwright Paul Anthelme. Finally, *Le Confessionnal* is also an anachronistic and anamorphic sequel to Lepage's next great theatrical project, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, which concludes by placing the eastern-identified Pierre in Japan.

Lepage has described the character of Pierre Lamontagne as his 'alter ego', a 'linking character' who makes connections between the various threads of Lepage's theatrical and cinematic narratives, and between those narratives and the audience: 'His naive approach towards the events he encounters [reflecting] the spectator's position'.<sup>12</sup> Lepage goes on to admit that 'Over the course of his incarnations, the character developed a few inconsistencies'.<sup>13</sup> Thus, *Le Confessionnal* begins with Pierre (Lothaire Bluteau) returning from China, where he had gone to study calligraphy, in 1989. *Seven Streams*, however, ends with the character (here renamed Pierre Maltais) arriving in Japan in 1995 to study *butoh* dance, an Orientalist elision which makes one question Lepage's statement that his 'fascination with Japan began when [he] was sufficiently mature to be able to distinguish it from China'.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, it is worth noting that the fluidly bisexual Pierre of *Seven Streams* (who seduces not only David Yamashita, but also, it's implied, his mother, Hanako) is, as we shall see, straightened out, or at the very least desexualized, in *Le Confessionnal*.<sup>15</sup>

*Le Confessionnal*'s opening shots gesture towards the disjunctive spatio-temporal poetics that govern the film as a whole. Following a Hitchcockian establishing shot of the Pont de Québec, there is a cut to shots of the 1953 premiere of Hitchcock's *I Confess* at Québec City's grand Capitol cinema. Here, the space of our present tense viewing of *Le Confessionnal* starts to merge with the pastness of Lepage's fictional intradiegetic spectators' viewing of Hitchcock's film, Pierre's voiceover recalling, as the camera focuses on his mother, Françoise's (Marie Gignac) swollen belly, that there were actually three Lamontagnes

attending the screening that night. In the next scene, the now-adult Pierre arrives home to attend the funeral of his father, Paul-Émile (François Papineau), who has died after a long battle with diabetes. Thereafter, the film cuts back and forth between the ‘present’ diegesis of 1989 and the ‘past’ diegesis of 1952. The 1989 narrative concerns Pierre’s attempts to reconnect with his estranged adopted brother Marc, who works as a male prostitute. The 1952 narrative details the pregnancy and eventual suicide of Marc’s unmarried birth mother, Rachel (Suzanne Clément), Françoise’s younger sister.

The diplomat Massicotte provides the link between the film’s past and present narratives. In flashbacks to 1952, we learn that a much younger Massicotte (Normand Daneau) actually began his working life as a priest, serving the church in Quebec City where Hitchcock (Ron Burrage) and his crew are preparing to shoot scenes for *I Confess* under the guidance of Hitchcock’s harried assistant (Kristin Scott Thomas), and where Rachel also works as a *femme de ménage*. No longer able to hide her pregnancy, Rachel is dismissed from her job, but not before confessing to the young Massicotte that Paul-Émile is her unborn baby’s father. Unable to break the seal of confession, and with Rachel unwilling to confirm otherwise, Massicotte is in turn removed from his post after suspicions are aroused in the congregation that he is Rachel’s lover. The two storylines converge in a double denouement that features several cuts between parallel scenes in both time-frames, the closing titles and the final shot of the Chateau Frontenac at the end of the 1953 screening of *I Confess* mirroring Pierre’s apprehension of the ‘truth’ about his family in Massicotte’s room at the same hotel at the end of *Le Confessionnal*.

Having shown how this narrative can be recuperated allegorically into the larger heteronormative story of Québec’s national identity crisis, I shall now examine the queer male character’s key symbolic role as the ‘fall guy’ within that story, concentrating in particular on how his body is framed and disciplined by the quasi-panoptical composition of several of Lepage’s shots. In this regard, it is first important to point out that the two queer characters in Lepage’s film are introduced to the spectator via their positioning within lofty spaces. Massicotte occupies a grand suite in one of the turrets of the Chateau Frontenac, outside of which Pierre first spies his brother. And when the brothers finally talk properly face to face, following their encounter at the sauna (described below), the meeting takes place in the revolving restaurant atop the Hilton, which has a 360-degree view of the city.

These associations, ironically, far from signalling the queer character’s reverse panopticism, his ability to return and thereby subvert the minoritizing gaze of heteronormativity, actually position him metonymically even further as the disciplined object of that gaze. In order to understand this, we need to examine more carefully the scene at the gay sauna, where Pierre finally tracks down Marc. The scene begins at dusk, with an exterior shot of the nondescript, opaquely windowed building, isolated on a lonely and deserted expanse of street. Pierre enters

Figure 1 Pierre (Lothaire Bluteau) makes his way through the sauna.

Figure 2 Marc (Patrick Goyette) in foetal position. *Le Confessionnal* (Robert Lepage, 1995).



the frame, pausing to look sideways along the street before crossing it to enter the building. But for the absence of the requisitely suspenseful music and maybe some lower-key lighting, it is a classic film noir sequence, one usually meant to bestir anxiety in the viewer for the detective-hero who has come to investigate a mysterious lead: who on earth would come here; what dangers lurk behind those doors? In the lobby Pierre is greeted by a wary front desk clerk, who surveys his scrutiny of the Tom of Finland drawings and the sign-in list with mild disdain, commenting to Pierre that no one in their right mind would use their real name at a gay sauna – a reminder of the continued need for anonymity in a queer sexual space still subject to raids by the police. Hence the double coding of the goldfish bowl on the clerk's counter, into which Pierre peers upon entering the sauna: placing oneself on display inside such a space is potentially subject to exterior surveillance as well. As if to bear this out, once Pierre has found his room and changed into his towel, the camera begins to track his search for Marc from an overhead angle, pulling back panoptically to reveal, through the wire mesh atop their cubicles, all that the men are getting up to (which is not much, admittedly) below (figure 1). The guarantee of anonymity no longer holds in this space. The queer male body, even when it does not want to be found out, will be exposed and put on display by Lepage's all-seeing camera, as when, at the end of this scene, the outline of Marc's naked body emerges from the steam to be framed alongside his brother's towelled one in the doorway to the shower area.

Lepage's panoptical framing of this gay sauna scene might not seem so significant were it not for the fact that he employs a similar overhead camera angle three more times throughout the course of the film; each time it is Marc's body being framed by the shot (figures 2–4). The first instance takes place at the same sauna; Marc has retreated there after being told by Pierre in the previous scene that, according to a nosy aunt, the reason Rachel killed herself was because the father of her baby was a priest. Again, the camera is looking down through the grille atop a cubicle, this time capturing a naked Marc curled up in the foetal position. The second instance occurs in the limousine that will take Marc and Massicotte to the airport and their flight to Japan; there, in the back seat, with the camera looking down through the open sun roof, Massicotte prepares to correct Pierre's previous misinformation, and tell Marc the

Figure 3 Massicotte (Jean-Louis Millete) and Marc (Patrick Goyette) outside the motel.

Figure 4 Marc's suicide. *Le Confessionnal* (Robert Lepage, 1995).



truth about his parentage. The last of these overhead shots records Marc's suicide in Japan; standing up in the sunken bathtub, the blood from his slashed wrists trickling down his body, Marc falls backwards into the water, and the camera tracks back quickly to reveal an aerial shot of his submersion just as the jacuzzi jets begin and the water starts turning red. All three shots occur just after or just prior to Marc receiving crucial information about his family, and about his own place within that sphere; their combined imagistic weight adds up to a positioning of the queer male as forever outside – *even when inside* – the bourgeois family, to the point of Marc's ultimate self-disciplining of his own body through the act of suicide.

Something similar happens in terms of Massicotte's association with another Foucauldian space of sexual self-disciplining, namely the confession box.<sup>16</sup> Early on in the film, during one of the 1952 flashback scenes, Massicotte is shown hearing Rachel's confession. The young priest is receiving news that, like the information received by Montgomery Clift's Father Logan from the killer, Keller, in *I Confess*, he must keep secret because of the seal of the confessional, but that, paradoxically, will have the effect of framing each priest for a crime he did not commit. This points to how the confessional, far from being a space that disciplines the congregation (as its prominent presence within the nave of most churches is meant to), in this case serves to frame and discipline Massicotte, his extended time within its confines with a now visibly pregnant Rachel coming to serve as evidence, in the congregation's mind, of his guilt-by-association. The grille that separates Rachel from Father Massicotte in the confessional box, like the grille above the cubicles in the gay sauna, becomes a symbol of the social constraints faced by the queer male when placed in the context of a later flashback scene. Massicotte, under pressure from his clerical superiors to resign, visits Rachel at home to beg her to reveal that he is not the father of her child. Rachel refuses to let him in, and he is forced to speak to her through the grille of the doorframe. It is a striking visual representation

<sup>16</sup> Obviously, my reading of Lepage's panoptical camera and the disciplined queer male body in *Le Confessionnal* owes much to Foucault's analysis of the Benthamite panopticon in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1977). In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault famously reads the seventeenth-century confession as one of the sites of the production of a discourse of sexuality, arguing that this 'unrelenting system of confession' puts 'sex into discourse' by 'compelling' individuals to articulate their sexual peculiarity – no matter how extreme'; see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: an Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage, 1990), p. 61.

of Massicotte’s own imprisonment and a reminder, within the context of what the audience knows about him from the 1989 narrative, that there would be another way for him to prove to the congregation that he is not Rachel’s lover: by declaring that he is homosexual.

Of course, it is really no choice at all. Either way, Massicotte would be forced to leave the priesthood. In this respect, Lepage’s film represents, as Garrity suggests, a far more ‘ruthless’ updating of Hitchcock’s film, in which ‘the self-contained Jansenistic priest of *I Confess* who escapes punishment despite his own inaction is transformed by Lepage into one who suffers humiliation and degradation, never succeeding in rehabilitating himself with his church or parishioners’.<sup>17</sup> This is a reminder that there is another queer male ‘framed’ within Lepage’s film: Montgomery Clift. Although he appears as Father Logan only in one brief excerpted scene from *I Confess*, the flashing of his name on the screen-within-the screen at the start of Lepage’s film necessarily interpolates him as a crucial absent presence throughout *Le Confessionnal*. As Deleuze notes at one point in his discussion of the crystal-image, the film within the film ‘has often been linked to the consideration of a surveillance, an investigation, a revenge, a conspiracy, a plot’.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Clift’s role as the tortured priest in *I Confess*, who is not only unable to declare his innocence of murder but who is also unable to return the love of the female protagonist, Anne Baxter, one site of surveillance must necessarily be the actor’s own sexuality. Clift’s equally tortured life offscreen is a reminder that the closet is as powerful a space of self-disciplining as the confessional. That Lepage consigns to the closet the queer male protagonist of the play that inspired his next film thus bears further analysis.

Lepage’s second film, *Le Polygraphe* (1997), is based on the play of the same name he cowrote and costarred in alongside longtime collaborator Marie Brassard. It premiered in Quebec City in a French-language production directed by Lepage in May 1988. The play was subsequently produced in an English translation in Toronto in February 1990. It is this latter version which Lepage chose to have tour the world, as well as to be published.<sup>19</sup> For the film version, however, Lepage reverted to French dialogue, but not before radically revisioning and revising the original script.

The play focuses on the complex interrelationships between three characters. David is a criminologist who escaped from East Berlin and now works at a forensics institute in Montreal. He meets Lucie, an actress from Quebec City, when they witness a suicide in a Metro station. Lucie has just been cast as the murder victim in a film based on an actual unsolved case, for which François, her gay neighbour, remains the prime suspect. François maintains that he is innocent, and has taken a lie detector test to prove it, but the police assert that the results were inconclusive, and their continued harassment, together with their failure to find the real murderer, eventually drive him to take his own life (also by jumping in front of a subway train). Meanwhile, the audience learns

<sup>17</sup> Garrity, ‘Robert Lepage’s cinema of time and space’, p. 103.

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> See Marie Brassard and Robert Lepage, *Polygraph*, trans. Gyllian Raby, in Alan Filewod (ed.), *The CTR Anthology: Fifteen Plays from Canadian Theatre Review* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).



20 Ibid., p. 652.

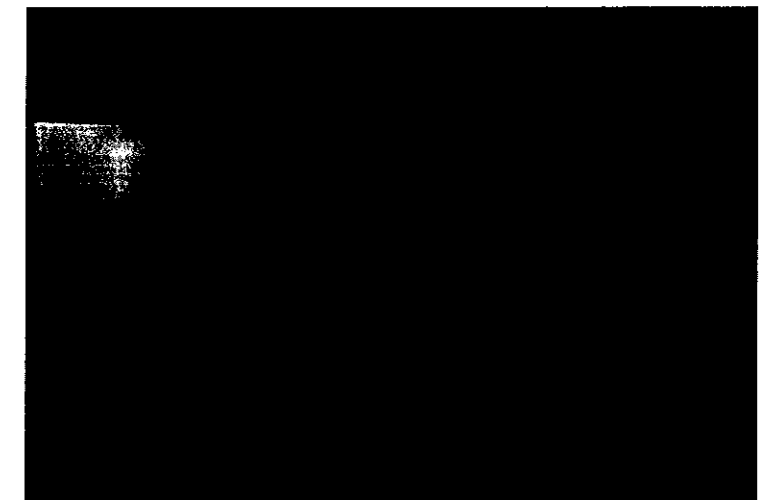
21 See Michael Sidnell, 'Polygraph: somatic truth and the art of presence', *Canadian Theatre Review*, no. 64 (Fall 1990), pp. 45–8.

Figure 5 François (Patrick Goyette) taped to the polygraph machine. *Le Polygraphe* (Robert Lepage, 1997).

that David has his own secrets: not only did he leave a former lover behind when he escaped to the West, but, in the play's penultimate scene, it is revealed that he was the one who both administered the polygraph to François *and* planted the seeds of doubt within him about the validity of his testimony.

Early on in the play, David boldly states that 'the body never lies',<sup>20</sup> although what Michael Sidnell has identified as the 'instrumental' operations of 'somatic truth' in this play relate as much – if not more – to what sexual acts François voluntarily chooses to have performed upon his own body as they do to what was involuntarily visited upon the body of the murder victim, Marie-Claude Légaré, whom we are told was raped before being repeatedly stabbed.<sup>21</sup> That is, the play version of *Le Polygraphe* makes it clear that François, who is both gay and a masochist, is the subject of a police investigation in part because of his perceived 'criminal' sexuality, and that his feelings of self-doubt derive in no small measure from the shame he is made to feel in confessing to the police – and, tangentially, to Lucie – the pleasure he gets from pain. This autocritique is largely absent from Lepage's film adaptation, which shifts the hermeneutics of truth, as applied to the queer male body, from detection to cover-up.

To this end, the all-important polygraph scene, which closes the play, opens the film, a temporal relocation that spatially abstracts the forensic thrust of the action that follows. Specifically, Lepage uses the opening credit sequence to capture, with diagnostic precision, François's (Patrick Goyette) head, torso, arms and fingers being attached to all manner of wires and electrodes (figure 5), as well as, through time lapse dissolves, the prosthetic record of his responses to the questions put to him by the technician Hans (James Hyndman). We later learn that Hans an old friend of Christof (Peter Stormare), the film's reworked version of the David character from the play. What is significant about how this scene



has been adapted for film, apart from who is asking the questions this time round and the fact that Lepage once again employs a series of overhead shots to frame François's body, is that the audience not only witnesses François's self-declaration of innocence at the start of the film's narrative diegesis (rather than at the close of the play's), but in effect has 'objective' corroboration of this in the form of the polygraph needle's steady and unwavering movement over the printout being monitored by Hans. Whereas in the play the audience is left to wonder about the *othered* François's innocence or guilt until the very end, Lepage's film works to solicit spectators' identification with the character from its opening frames, thereby transferring the weight of narrative suspense to the question of who *other* than François is responsible for Marie-Claire's (Marie-Christine Le Huu) murder. Here, again, the presence of a film within a film serves as an important 'mode of the crystal-image'.<sup>22</sup> And yet, while the scenes documenting the making, editing and broadcast of Judith's (Josée Deschênes) film about Marie-Claire's murder do, in the end, resolve the generic conspiracy at the heart of Lepage's crime drama – by revealing, eventually, the identity of the murderer – they also perpetuate further conspiracies relating to gender by confirming that the only alibi François ever needed was his heterosexuality.

Among the changes made in the film version of *Le Polygraphe*, is the addition of a back story absent from the play that informs the spectator that not only were François and Marie-Claire lovers who had quarreled the night of her murder, but that while she was seeking comfort from her best friend, Judith, he was getting drunk in a bar, allowing himself to be picked up by Marie-Claire's sister, Claude (Maria de Medeiros), with whom he had had a previous affair. In scenes of double parallel montage near its conclusion, the film cuts from Judith and François talking about the night of the murder in her Montreal editing studio to Lucie (Marie Brassard) showing Claude the empty apartment of François in Quebec City, and from shots of Judith's film's ultimately false intradiegetic reconstruction of the murder (she blames the police) to Claude's flashbacks of what really happened: in a fit of jealousy she had stabbed her sister and set fire to her apartment. In other words, in the film François's relative gender normativity gets him off, relative in the sense that the film does at the very least indicate that the erotic basis of François and Marie-Claire's relationship was partially informed by S/M sexual practices.

In a scene just prior to François's departure for Montreal, Lucie confronts him in his bathroom about what she has learned about his relationship with Marie-Claire during the making of Judith's film; he tells her that she does not know everything, and proceeds to blindfold her and tie her hands to the washbasin with a leather belt (figure 6). He then says that he sometimes tied up Marie-Claire when they made love, before hitting and breaking the bathroom mirror in rage. And yet, even here, the scene is presented as a relatively sanitized version of the one from the

Figure 6 François (Patrick Goyette) ties Lucie (Marie Brassard) to the washbasin. *Le Polygraphe* (Robert Lepage, 1997).



play upon which it is based, not least because of the hiding, or covering up, of the queer male body, as well as the transferring of the belt from a signifier of male masochism to one of male sadism. In the play, François explains to Lucie that one of the functions of the belt is as a device for auto-asphyxiation during masturbation. He then ties Lucie, like her screen surrogate, to the washbasin. However, in the ensuing dialogue he informs Lucie that, in the case of his own sexual practices, he is invariably the person being tied up. Furthermore, this confession to Lucie, delivered in French, is simultaneously translated for the audience into English by David, who, it soon becomes clear, is actually reading from a transcript of François's police interrogation in connection with the murder of Marie-Claude. By contrast, in Lepage's film version of *Le Polygraphe* we never witness François divulging his sexual secrets to anyone other than Lucie, and even then they serve not so much to demonstrate his vulnerability as to confirm his power.

In the end, the queer male body in *Le Polygraphe* is most hidden when it is most exposed. It is important to note that in addition to the insertion of the crucial back story noted above, there are several key shots of actor Patrick Goyette's back in the film. In this, *Le Polygraphe* is linked metonymically to *Le Confessionnal* not only through the casting of Goyette in the respective roles of François and Marc, but also in terms of how, in both films, the actor's naked body is framed by the camera. Just as in *Le Confessionnal* Lepage uses a series of panoptical top shots during key scenes featuring Marc, so he shoots François from above not only during the opening polygraph/credit sequence, but also during another scene early on in *Le Polygraphe*. François is in the bath, bent forward with his head between his knees, so that all we see of his body is the smooth and unblemished expanse of his naked back (figure 7). The camera lingers clinically, forensically, as if searching for something

Figure 7 François (Patrick Goyette)  
in the bath. *Le Polygraphe* (Robert  
Lepage, 1997).

embedded upon the skin, a scratch or bump or bruise that might betray a secret that evaded detection by the polygraph machine. But the François of Lepage's film has nothing to hide, unlike, say, Christof, who bears the burden of guilt in the film *vis-à-vis* a betrayal of heteronormativity when we discover that the wife he abandoned in East Berlin has committed suicide now that the Wall has come down. And unlike the François of Lepage's play, whom we witness, in a scene titled 'The Flesh', entering a 'crowded gay bar', being 'propositioned to have sex in a private room', kneeling against a wall, removing 'his shirt ... his belt ... which he gives away': 'He turns his back, and unzips his pants. As he is beaten, with

23 Brassard and Lepage, *Polygraph*, pp. 657–8. Ellipses in original.

24 Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 44, 46.

each sound of the whiplash, François physically recoils against the wall. La petite morte and collapse, finally, the exchange is finished. Satisfied, soul weary, François gathers his clothes and his shreds of self-esteem.<sup>23</sup>

A comparison of the play and film versions of *Le Polygraphe* yields two very different images of François. Both solicit the (male) viewer’s gaze, but whereas the screen François invites identification (including erotic identification), the stage François effects only alienation. How can this phenomenon be explained? One way is in terms of gender, with the theatrical representation of the queer male body’s excessive ‘anti-naturalness’ and passive acquiescence to the performed lie distancing the (stage) actor from the (stage) role, and with the cinematic representation of the straight male body’s proximate ‘realism’ and active mastery of the embodied truth making obsolete the distinction between (social) actor and (social) role. In other words, heterosexuality is not dependent upon illusion or artifice: it just exists. So too with cinema, and another way of explaining the differences between the two François is in terms of the *form* or *medium* of the representation of each’s body. As Steven Shaviro has noted in discussing the differences between theatre and film, whereas theatrical spectatorship depends for its effect on ‘the physical presence of the actors’ bodies in space’, cinematic spectatorship replaces bodies with images, physical space with virtual space, presence with absence:

Film’s virtual images do not correspond to anything actually present, but *as* images, or *as* sensations, they affect me in a manner that does not leave room for any suspension of my response. . . . The cinematic image, in its violent more-than-presence, is at the same time immediately an absence: a distance too great to allow for dialectical interchange or for any sort of possession.<sup>24</sup>

Given Shaviro’s comments, it is hardly surprising that a reading of the shifting representations of the queer male body in Lepage’s third film, *Nô*, should likewise depend on looking at how that body has been fatally disposed of in the process of adaptation from stage to screen. Shot with super-16 mm film in seventeen days, *Nô* is based on Section 5 (‘The Words’) of *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*. The play, which in its epic entirety comprises seven parts staged over seven successive hours, was developed collaboratively over a three-year period with the members of Ex Machina, and subsequently toured to more than twenty-five different locations around the world. Its plot spans fifty years, moves back and forth in time and space between Japan, the United States and Europe, incorporates over fifty different speaking roles in four different languages (English, French, Japanese and German), and employs all manner of meta-representational devices to foreground the processes of spectatorship and cultural mediation. Even more boldly, *Seven Streams* also attempts to make political and historical sense of such cataclysmic world events as the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima and AIDS in terms of a recurring set of aesthetic oppositions: between East and West, life and death, tragedy and comedy, masculine and feminine.

Wisely, Lepage narrowed his scope for the eighty-five-minute *Nô*. In the film, he has chosen to focus on Sophie (Anne-Marie Cadieux), a Québécoise actress starring in a production of a Feydeau farce as part of Canada's cultural programme at the 1970 World's Fair in Osaka, Japan. Sophie, with the aid of Hanako (Marie Brassard), a blind Japanese translator attached to the show, has just learned she is pregnant. She is not sure if the father is her costar, François-Xavier (Éric Bernier), or her boyfriend, Michel (Alexis Martin), a writer who, back in Montreal, has suddenly been thrust into the thick of the October Crisis thanks to an unexpected visit by radical friends intent on planting a bomb. While Sophie finds herself embroiled in her own bedroom farce when she drunkenly sleeps with Walter (Richard Fréchette), the Canadian cultural attache in Tokyo, Michel labours over the wording of the political message that will be attached to his friends' bomb, whose detonator, he soon discovers, has been incorrectly set. The two narratives, whose temporal and spatial distinctiveness had previously been signposted by having the scenes in Montreal filmed in black and white and the scenes in Japan in colour, merge during a key scene in which Sophie, returning from Japan to discover only rubble where her home once stood, is arrested by Agents Bélanger (Tony Conte) and Ménard (Jules Philip), plain-clothes detectives who had been keeping her and Michel's apartment under surveillance. Not only does the shift from black and white to colour that occurs during the middle of this scene chromatically connect the intradiegetic media footage of the 1980 Québec referendum results that follows in the film's epilogue with similar intradiegetic footage of Pierre Trudeau being interviewed about introducing the War Measures Act to deal with the FLQ in the 1970s used at the start of the film; its resulting focalization of the spectator's gaze on the blood flowing down Sophie's legs as a result of the miscarriage brought on by her arrest serves as a syntagma that connects the various overlapping discourses of nationalism and sexuality throughout the film (figure 8).

In an earlier scene in the film, the police officers arresting Sophie are explicitly depicted as duplicitous, not only in terms of their collaboration with the state by spying on their nationalist brothers but also in terms of attempting to hide the true nature of their domestic *ménage*. Staking out Michel and Sophie's apartment from what they believe is an unoccupied apartment across the street, the police are interrupted by the landlady, who wants to show the place to a pair of prospective tenants. While Bélanger attempts to keep her at bay by blocking the door, Ménard quickly hides their surveillance equipment on the floor, covering it with the roll-out cot from the sofabed, upon which he promptly installs himself in a languorous pose (figure 9). This is how Lepage and André Morency's script describes the ensuing shot sequence:

Pushing against [Bélanger], the landlady enters energetically and stops just as quickly when she sees the other police officer stretched out on the hide-a-bed. Believing she's dealing with a homosexual couple, she

Figure 8 Sophie (Anna-Marie Cadieux) miscarries as she is arrested by Bélanger (Tony Conte) and Ménard (Jules Philip). *Nô* (Robert Lepage, 1998).

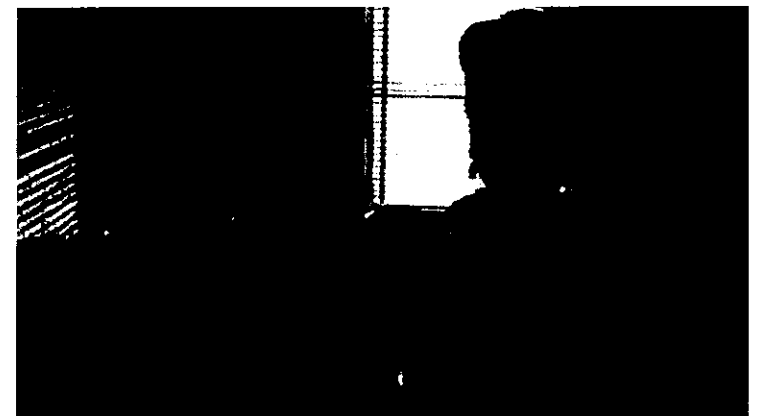


25 Robert Lepage and André Morency, *Nô* (Laval and Montreal: Les 400 Coups/Alliance Vivafilm, 1998), p. 57. My translation.

gives them a dirty look. Under the same impression about the sexual identity of the cops, the visitors, themselves homosexuals, exchange knowing looks, attempting to establish a complicity that singularly embarrasses the representatives of the forces of order.<sup>25</sup>

The scene, like most in the film, is played for laughs, and in a social satire of the sort directed here by Lepage one should be wary of critiquing broad stereotypes employed for comic effect. Still, within the context of the long-entrenched symbolic associations of homosexuality in Québécois culture that I have been sketching throughout this essay, it is hard not to take away a familiar message. The queer male body being overwritten with/by the ‘forces of order’ in this scene means, concomitantly, that it cannot also be linked with the forces of revolution and change. Hence the image of a gay couple blithely out shopping for an apartment while all around them the world is exploding. This also explains why the queer ‘self-abortion’, that in some senses constitutes

Figure 9 Bélanger (Tony Conte) and Ménard (Jules Philip) are interrupted by the concierge. *Nô* (Robert Lepage, 1998).



Sophie’s miscarriage at the hands of these same police officers, is in cinematic terms absolutely necessary.<sup>26</sup>

I do not wish to indict Lepage for his failure to produce positive images of queerness here or elsewhere in his cinema. Rather, to come back to the ambivalent heterogeneity of Deleuze’s time-image, I want to suggest that the virtual traces of national memory in Lepage’s films, and Québécois cinema generally, are in part sustained by a willed sexual amnesia in the actual present, whereby a ‘teleological vision’ of progress paradoxically preserves a heteronormative link between past repression and future liberation. Here, it is worth examining more closely the conclusion of *Nô*, which flashes forward from October 1970 to 20 May 1980, the night of Québec’s first referendum on sovereignty-association. As Sophie and a newly-yuppified Michel watch dispiritedly the television results confirming a victory for the ‘No’ side, Michel expounds upon his theory that ‘people with a collective project are always a little disadvantaged next to people who don’t have a project . . . The idea is that it always takes more energy to change political institutions, social institutions than . . . to do nothing’.<sup>27</sup> To Sophie’s response that the ‘common project’ of the No side in the referendum must surely be the idea of a unified Canada, Michel scoffs that ‘It’s a bit static as a project, isn’t it?’.<sup>28</sup> He then suggests that perhaps he and Sophie need a common project, something that looks to ‘posterity’, something like a child. Incredulous, Sophie asks him whether he would have considered that a worthy ‘common project’ ten years earlier, at the start of their relationship. Michel replies that it wouldn’t have been the same thing ten years ago: ‘we were occupied with changing the world. . . . Times have changed’.<sup>29</sup> The scene ends with Sophie – who clearly intends not to tell Michel about her earlier failed pregnancy – gradually acceding to Michel’s increasingly amorous arguments, assenting to the idea of a baby in an escalating series of percentages – she goes from being 40.5% sure, to 49%, to 50%, and then finally 50.5% – that mirror the closeness of the numbers for and against sovereignty in Québec’s second referendum.

Indeed, it is impossible not to read this scene in light of the events of 1995. The film’s release date of 1998, combined with the appearance of Jean Chrétien as a talking head on some of the television footage shown of the 1980 referendum, ensures that Sophie and Michel’s conversation will resonate with both Québécois and English-Canadian audiences. Not least because of the discourse surrounding reproduction that emerged over the course of the 1995 campaign, with sovereigntist leaders like Lucien Bouchard and Jacques Parizeau urging *pure laine* Québécois to do their bit to reverse the plummeting provincial birthrate in order to offset, among other things, the inevitable antinationalist consequences of ‘les votes ethniques’ and, by extension, ‘les votes *fédérastes*’.<sup>30</sup> This confluence of discourses of racial and sexual difference within the context of Québec self-determination leads us back to *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* and explains, paradoxically, why Sophie’s miscarriage is, in some respects, inevitable.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Gittings reads Lepage’s cut ‘from a low-angled close-up shot of blood running down the inside of Sophie’s legs to Sophie and Michel watching television coverage of the results of the May 1980 Referendum’ somewhat differently, arguing that it constitutes Lepage’s ‘rather heavy-handed point about the failure of Québécois separatists to carry the embryonic Québec nation to full term.’ See Christopher Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), p. 191.

<sup>27</sup> Lepage and Morency, *Nô*, p. 87. My translation.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. My translation.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 89. My translation.

<sup>30</sup> In an important article examining the ‘tragic resiliency’ of various homophobic tropes that have helped fuel a ‘profound sexual anxiety in Québec’s anticolonial discourse’, Robert Schwartzwald has analyzed the jokes about ‘*fédérastes*’ that routinely appeared in the back pages of the journal *parti pris* in the 1960s. As Schwartzwald explains, *parti pris*’s punning link between federalism and pederasty implies that Québec’s national self-interests have been perverted and corrupted by a predatory and ultimately non-productive English-Canadian system. See his ‘Fear of federasty: Québec’s inverted fictions’, in Hortense J. Spillers (ed.), *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), pp. 176, 178.



31 Robert Lepage and Ex Machina, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* (London: Methuen, 1996), p. 147.

In the narrative universe of the play, the child that results from Sophie’s pregnancy is both a born *fédéraste* and a future queer libertine, the product of his mother’s drunken liaison with the Canadian diplomatic toady Walter, and, as such, voracious in his pursuit and consumption of new experiences and pleasures, different cultures and genders. Indeed, when he should be back in Québec performing his nationalist duty by voting in the referendum, the Pierre of *Seven Streams* is actually in Japan learning to dance like a woman: one of the last images we see in the play is of him dressed in a Japanese wedding kimono, his face covered in white makeup, ‘[performing] a butoh dance in which a woman moves gracefully, then experiences a moment of terror and pain’.<sup>31</sup> Is it any wonder that such an image is excised from the film version of *Nô*? In the ‘common project’ that is the Québec national imaginary, the queer male body is, fundamentally, disposable. Like the Oriental body, it functions as an arrested Other against which to measure the normative progress of an autonomous selfhood; but, also like the Oriental body, it is, in the end, unassimilable. This, to some extent, explains the fate of the queer male body in Lepage’s next film, *Possible Worlds* (2000).

*Possible Worlds* opens with the camera focusing, from the inside, on a window cleaner (Griffith Brewer) who is busy washing, from the outside, the floor-to-ceiling windows of a trendy condominium loft. As the soap suds are gradually wiped away by the deft strokes of his squeegee, the window cleaner is able to see inside the condo, whereupon he makes a shocking discovery: the dead body of its owner splayed across the sofa. We then cut to the arrival of Detective Berkley (Sean McCann) at the scene, who learns from his partner, Williams (Rick Miller), who the murder victim is – George Barber (Tom McCamus), a successful stockbroker – as well as what makes this particular crime so gruesome: the killer has neatly sawn off the top part of his victim’s skull and absconded with the brain. Although Lepage’s fourth film, *Possible Worlds* is his first shot in English. And, while the film is based on a previously staged work of drama, it is not, this time, one by Lepage. Instead, he is adapting John Mighton’s 1992 play of the same name. However, a brief analysis of the plot and structure of Mighton’s play reveals some familiar Lepage themes, including the parallelling and overlapping of different temporal and spatial realms, the mourning of a lost love object, and the unravelling of a mystery whose solution is in some fundamental sense beyond imagination.

In the case of *Possible Worlds*, this mystery concerns not just who stole George’s brain and why, but also the exact nature of his relationship with his wife Joyce (Tilda Swinton). To summarize, both the play and film, like all of Lepage’s films, follow two (at the very least) separate narrative temporalities, flashing back from the opening scene described above to trace the initial meeting, courtship and, it is briefly suggested, subsequent estrangement of George and Joyce. But even here, in the flashback narrative, there are further diegetic layers. In one version of events, George and Joyce meet in the cafeteria of the hospital where she

works as a research biologist, or rather re-meet, as it soon becomes clear that they are from the same small town in Northern Ontario. In another possible scenario that both theatre and film audiences witness, the couple meet in a crowded downtown bar, as a coquettish Joyce, who now seems to work as a stockbroker in the same office as George, aggressively pursues a liaison. These scenes, and others documenting further stages in the couple’s twin relationships, are repeated throughout the play and film, dramatizing what George describes to Joyce at one point as the metaphysical romance of human interconnection, that ‘each of us exists in an infinite number of possible worlds’.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, in the present tense of the crime narrative, the play and film’s other couple, Berkley and Williams, who kibbutz, cajole and generally annoy each other like an old married couple, trace the theft of George’s brain to a Doctor Penfield, renamed Doctor Keiber in the film (Gabriel Gascon), a neurologist who has been stockpiling the cerebella of very intelligent and powerful people as a way of ‘extracting information from them’.<sup>33</sup> As Penfield puts it to Berkley early on in the play: ‘Everything you think, Inspector, even the most trivial fantasy, leaves a trace, a disturbance in that field. I’m trying to learn how to control those disturbances’.<sup>34</sup>

What, one might ask, has any of this to do with representations of the queer male body? Arguably nothing and everything. That is, George’s fantasies of heterosexual happiness with Joyce, who may or may not be the same ‘wife’ whom George repeatedly claims died three years ago in another of his possible lives, would depend, following from Judith Butler’s theories of gender melancholia, on the trace signs of another ‘disturbing’ fantasy that he has repudiated, namely homosexuality. In other words, Doctor Penfield/Keiber might not be the only one trying to ‘control’ George’s imagination. George’s own obsessive replaying of his life with Joyce – which is only ever presented as but one of a number of *possible* scenarios – might betray certain anxieties around the equally possible ‘fictiveness’ of his presumed heterosexual gender. But what images of the queer male body are there in Lepage’s film to support such a claim? None other, I would argue, than that of George’s corpse.

Monique Wittig has argued that ‘the straight mind continues to affirm that incest, and not homosexuality, represents its major interdiction. Thus, when thought by the straight mind, homosexuality is nothing but heterosexuality’.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Butler has theorized normative heterosexual gender identification as a kind of melancholia in which unresolved same-sex desire is internalized as a prohibition that precedes the incest taboo.<sup>36</sup> Homosexuality, in other words, is, to use terminology borrowed from two other classic essays by Wittig, nothing more than a ‘fiction’, but a necessary one, whose symbolic otherness helps constitute and maintain the ‘heterosexual contract’.<sup>37</sup> Structuring the various versions of George and Joyce’s marriage contract throughout Lepage’s film is another ‘possible world’, another window of gender identification, made available to the spectator in its opening minutes. As Detectives Berkley and Williams circle George’s corpse looking for evidence and a

<sup>32</sup> John Mighton, *Possible Worlds* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1988), p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> Monique Wittig, ‘The straight mind’, in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 28.

<sup>36</sup> See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), pp. 63 ff; *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), pp. 235–6 ff; *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Wittig, ‘The mark of gender’, pp. 76–89, and ‘On the social contract’, in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, pp. 33–45.

motive for the crime, and thus policing to a certain extent our generic reading of the scene, Lepage’s camera swoops down from the upper reaches of the loft, lingering almost pornographically over the body of actor Tom McCamus, splayed across the back of his sofa, shirt front open to the waist, a look of absolute ecstasy on his face (figure 10). In short, George is made into an object of desire for the viewer, even if only clinical desire, *and regardless of the gender of that viewer*. And here our screen surrogates are none other than the homothetical couple of Berkley and Williams, whose close inspection of George’s body, the camera makes clear, is lovingly professional. If, in Butler’s and Wittig’s readings of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, homosexual cathexis must precede ego identification and the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex, then this is the scene in Lepage’s film that performs most spectacularly that rupture, and that perforce haunts our reading of all subsequent images in the film, especially those involving George.

To this end, it is important to note that the opening image of George’s body draped provocatively across his sofa is repeated once more in the film; this time, however, George wakes up, to the realization that he is merely suffering from a massive hangover, and that he has just slept with Joyce #2, the stockbroker. Moreover, consider the opening scene as I have discussed it in relation to the speech by Joyce #1 that closes both the play and the film:

The word ‘not’ is really magical. I could describe something and say – ‘But it’s *not* that, it’s something more’ – and you’d know what I meant. It’s a way of getting around our ignorance. . . . We say ‘Things might not have been the way they are’, and feel free or uneasy. But there’s really nothing behind it. Just a bunch of ghostly possibilities. Because, in the end, everything simply is.<sup>38</sup>

My argument about the absent presence of images of the queer male body in Lepage’s film adaptation of *Possible Worlds* likewise coalesces around this interdictive word. Homosexuality is what is ‘not’ in our



Figure 10 George (Tom McCamus) found dead at the film’s start. *Possible Worlds* (Robert Lepage, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> On the 'heterosexual matrix', see Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 35–78. On the specific ghosting of lesbianism in modern literary and cinematic culture, Terry Castle and Patricia White have both written perceptively. See Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993); Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

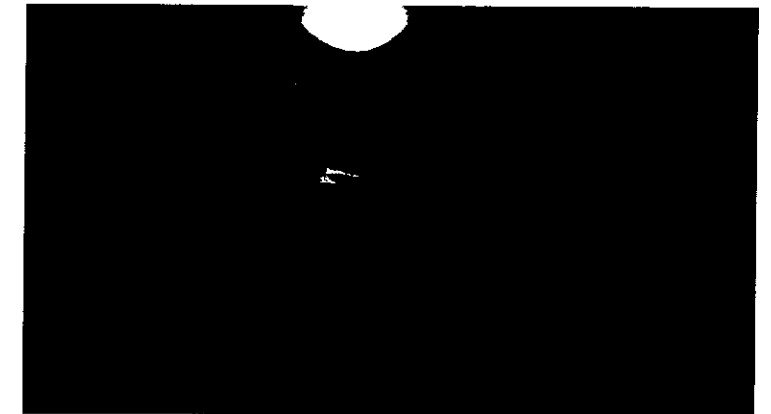
culture; it's the ghost in the machine, of the 'heterosexual matrix' generally, but also of the matrix of cinema more specifically.<sup>39</sup> In other words, take away the straight mind and what you are left with is the queer body. Arguably, this is what we are left with in Lepage's most recent film. Only this time, that body is incarnated on screen by the auteur himself.

Winner of the FIPRESCI International Critics Prize in the Panorama Series at the 2004 Berlin International Film Festival and a Canadian Genie Award for Best Adapted Screenplay, Lepage's fifth film, *La Face cachée de la lune* (2003), is shot in high-definition video. An adaptation of his award-winning solo play of the same name, the film is set against the backdrop of the US–Soviet space race and current investigations into extraterrestrial life. Jumping back and forth in time between the 1950s and the present day, the narrative through-line concerns the complicated relationship between two Quebec City brothers, Philippe and André (both played by Lepage), and their different responses to the death of their mother (played in flashbacks by a mute Anne-Marie Cadieux). Not only is *La Face* Lepage's most personal memorial film to date (the impetus for the source play came from the death of his own mother), and not only does it mark his debut as an actor in one of his own films, it also sees Lepage, as director, consciously quoting from his previous work. Indeed, one important scene crucially revises and reorients the scopic regime of queer male images on offer in Lepage's previous films. Let me conclude this essay by very briefly explaining how this works.

The theme of narcissism runs throughout *La Face*. Most prominently, it serves as the theoretical cornerstone of Philippe's twice-rejected PhD thesis in the philosophy of science, which argues that the US and Soviet space programmes were fuelled not by the desire to seek out and explore new worlds, but rather to claim and remake those worlds in each country's national and ideological image. As for Philippe's own self-image, it has been shaped by childhood memories and battered by adult failures. Still living in the old family apartment, surrounded by his dead mother's clothes and shoes, he is unkempt and socially inept, reduced to taking on a series of menial and underpaid jobs while he revises his thesis. Even his one shot at academic stardom he manages to sabotage; having been invited to present his research at a conference in Moscow, he sleeps through his scheduled panel. Meanwhile, younger brother André could not be more different. A self-absorbed and pompous weatherman, he lives in a trendy and well-appointed new condo overlooking the harbour with his equally well-appointed boyfriend, Carl (Marco Poulin). André is the stereotyped embodiment of gay male narcissism, obsessed with surface appearances – his own and others'. However, just when it looks like Lepage is in danger of recycling classic homophobic tropes from Hollywood cinema, he inverts this process by exposing his own body to the minoritizing gaze of the camera.

In a very funny scene midway through the film, Philippe, having put in a desultory workout at a local gym, suddenly finds himself sharing a

Figure 11 Philippe (Robert Lepage) and Carl (Marco Poulin) talk in the sauna. *La Face cachée de la lune* (Robert Lepage, 2003).



sauna with Carl. Never having met his brother's boyfriend, Philippe misinterprets Carl's friendly grin and casually provocative legs-splayed pose as a cruise, and rapidly rushes to declare his heterosexual credentials. It is only at this point that Carl reveals his own identity, noting that he immediately recognized Philippe as André's brother owing to the family resemblance. Thereafter, the two men fall into a casual conversation about work, with Philippe surprised at Carl's interest in his research. What I find most interesting about this scene is how it subtly revises the epistemology of surveillance that governs the sauna scene in *Le Confessionnal*. Not only is it the straight male who is required to out himself in this space, but it is his body which is subjected to both Carl's and the camera's voyeuristic gaze (see figure 11). That the body is here framed in medium closeups and a shot/reverse-shot sequence of edits, rather than via the overhead tracking shots used in *Le Confessionnal*, also forces us to consider exactly who is policing whom in *La Face*. In the sexualized space of the sauna, Philippe's overweight, out-of-shape and pale straight body, when juxtaposed against Carl's tauter, tanned, tattooed, and pierced queer one, cannot help but be found wanting.

Moreover, both Philippe and André are played by Lepage himself, who has openly acknowledged his, at times painful, alienation from his own body (he suffers from alopecia, resulting in a complete hair loss), which would seem to authorize a reevaluation of all of his screen images of the male body. In this regard, consider *La Face*'s memorable closing shot. In it, Philippe's/Lepage's body 'floats', courtesy of blue screen technology and the director's own surprising physical agility, up out of the Moscow airport lounge where he awaits his return flight to Canada, and into the stratosphere. For me, its orbit, like Deleuze's crystal-image, splits time in two, launching Lepage's queer male body into a future as yet indiscernible but fundamentally free, at least in my estimation, of the weight of its hitherto overdetermined nationalist inscriptions.