

Acting and/or/as Being? – Performance in *Pour la suite du monde*

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Abstract: In comparisons of theatrical and filmic performance, it is frequently suggested that film actors (unlike their theatrical counterparts) do not (or should not) actually act. Since film performances can be externally shaped through editing and are modified by cinematographic choices, for instance, some scholars have argued that film performance involves something that is more accurately called <being> than acting in the theatrical sense. While this sort of distinction has much to recommend it, it is nonetheless rather problematic. It overlooks the numerous similarities between stage and screen acting, for example, and, at an extreme, might be seen as partially responsible for the relative lack of attention that has been afforded to film performance in academic circles. In order to point out the potential usefulness of moving beyond the traditional distinctions between theatrical and filmic performance, this essay applies analytical techniques developed in relation to stage acting to an analysis of *Pour la suite du monde* (Pierre Perrault/Michel Brault, 1962). I indicate the way in which even individuals in documentary films can (and should) be seen as actors, and finally suggest the profound influence that their performance choices have on our understanding and appreciation of the work at hand.

In 1966, Susan Sontag aptly summarized the critical discussion about the relationship between theatre and cinema. «The big question,» she wrote, «is whether there is an unbridgeable division, even opposition, between the two arts. Is there something genuinely <theatrical>, different in kind from what is genuinely <cinematic>? Almost all opinion holds that there is» (24). Amazingly, this summary still rings true more than forty years after Sontag's writing. Whatever similarities might exist between theatre and film, the bulk of scholarly attention continues to be squarely focused on what makes each a unique art form.

Interestingly, this tendency to distinguish between theatre and cinema has been especially pronounced in discussions of acting. Stage and screen performances, it is suggested, differ in terms of everything from their ontological status and audience responsiveness to the degree to which they are molded by factors outside of the performer's control¹. In fact, building on these distinctions, a variety of authors have even suggested that film actors (unlike their theatrical counterparts) do not (or should not) truly act.² Because the screen performer is an absent projection whose work has been shaped through editing and cinematographic choices, his/her work is instead understood to involve something more accurately called <being> than acting in the theatrical sense. Stanley Cavell, for instance, puts the argument as follows: «the [stage] actor's role is his subject for study, and there is no end to it. But the screen performer is essentially not an actor at all: he *is* the subject of study, and a study not his own» (30). Similarly, David Thomson writes: «<actor> is not even a term appropriate to the cinema. The barrier of the screen certainly gives the impression of acting, but what we are seeing in the cinema are people» (qtd. in Klevan 3). Despite the numerous other differences in these scholars' ideas, they agree on one point: acting is an essentially *theatrical* concept that is not immediately applicable to the «people» (ibid) who populate cinematic works.

While there is certainly much to recommend this kind of <stage acting>/<screen being> dichotomy, I nonetheless find it rather problematic. On one hand, this kind of strict opposition overlooks the numerous attributes that theatrical and filmic performance share in spite of the elements that distinguish them. After all, performers in both media are typically engaged in the process of presenting a character (in one form or another) to an audience, and they often draw from a similar arsenal of techniques to aid in this process.

¹For example, see André Bazin on ontological specificity, Giovanna Jackson or Virginia Wright Wexman on the absent audience's effect on the screen actor, and Lev Kuleshov or Josef von Sternberg on the externally manufactured nature of film performance. Specific references can be found in the Works Cited section appended to this essay.

²Variations on this idea can be found in the writings of authors as diverse as Siegfried Kracauer, Leo Braudy, Robert Nunn, Josef von Sternberg, V.I. Pudovkin, and Walter Benjamin. Again, see the Works Cited for full citations.

Perhaps more importantly though, this sense that the term «screen acting» is little more than a misnomer has also worked to undervalue the creative contributions that film performers actually make to the texts in which they figure. With this in mind, this essay will seek to move beyond the typically posited division between stage and screen performance in order to indicate the importance of considering some of their similarities. In particular, by examining *Pour la suite du monde* (Pierre Perrault/Michel Brault, 1962), I will indicate the numerous ways in which the people in films can, in fact, be seen as actors, and finally suggest the profound influence that their performance choices have on our understanding of the work at hand.

Pour la suite du monde??

Before considering Perrault's and Brault's film more specifically, however, it seems necessary to provide a brief word of explanation. Why should I choose to examine the confluence between stage and screen performance in this piece - a *documentary* that does not feature actors in the traditional sense? Admittedly, nonfiction film would initially seem to represent the *ultimate realization* of the «stage acting»/«screen being» distinction, not the site at which to contest it. For one thing, documentary subjects rarely play roles outside of their own identities, and, in this respect at least, they *are* being themselves, rather than acting, on screen. At the same time, the widespread tendency to equate acting with dissembling makes the notion of nonfiction performance seem even more implausible and inappropriate. As Stella Bruzzi puts it, the «connotations of falsification and fictionalization» that attach to performance «inherently destabilise the non-fiction pursuit» (125), and, as such, acting is generally understood to lie outside the boundaries of documentary practice. That is, from one commonly held perspective, if individuals in nonfiction films are *not* «being themselves» when they appear before the camera, then they are effectively liars who pretend to be something that they are not. And given that few people would want to label all documentary subjects duplicitous in this way, Cavell's sense that «the screen performer is essentially not an actor at all» (30) seems especially well borne out by nonfiction cinema.

In fact, even some of the (few) authors who *have* discussed documentary performance are loath to admit acting into the nonfiction realm wholesale.³ Despite labeling documentary subjects

³There are a few notable exceptions to this process. Thomas Waugh, for instance, points out that *all* documentary films demand either presentational or representational performance from their subjects. Likewise, Stella Bruzzi argues that the intervention of the filmmaker necessarily impels subjects to perform themselves before the camera. Thus, she writes, «performance has always been at the heart of documentary filmmaking» (125). Finally, Vinicius do Valle Navarro has recently completed a doctoral dissertation on the subject of performance in American

«social actors» (42), for instance, and acknowledging that nonfiction thrives on a kind of «virtual performance» (122), Bill Nichols ultimately equates acting with excess (141). In this respect, he underlines (yet again) that performance is something that stands *outside* the ambit of nonfiction discourse - something that documentaries struggle to avoid and/or control.⁴ Likewise, while John Corner notes that «the necessarily creative and transformative business of documentary-making [...] may encourage varieties of 'performance' even where there is no intent to dramatise» (32), he also casts performance as «a problem» that often compromises films' documentary status (51-52). Like others who refuse the notion of nonfiction performance entirely then, Nichols and Corner evoke a sense of the incompatibility of acting and documentary even as they raise the issue of the potential confluence between the two. As a result, these authors again (implicitly) position the work of most nonfiction subjects as pre-eminent examples of <being>, rather than <acting>, on screen.

Paradoxically, however, all of these factors that initially seem to militate against an analysis of documentary performance actually make a film like *Pour la suite du monde* particularly attractive for my purposes. Given this popular sense that nonfiction cinema equals non-acted cinema, any substantial evidence of documentary performance stands to throw an especially compelling wrench into the argument that acting is an exclusive attribute of the stage. In effect, a consideration of nonfiction <actors> has the potential to illustrate that, even when seemingly most themselves, people in films perform in ways that are worthy of detailed examination. In this sense, much of my motivation for discussing *Pour la suite du monde* stems precisely from its documentary status. As a prototypical example of the branch of filmmaking in which the non-acting argument seems most appropriate, the film effectively presents the possibility of refuting that argument most dramatically.

Furthermore, for my ends, *Pour la suite du monde* also stands out amongst documentaries by virtue of its rather canonical status. As David Clandfield notes, this is a film that has been «selected for top ten lists, garlanded with awards, used in university film courses, [and] cited and written about by almost every critic and scholar of films made in Canada» (71-72). In fact, the piece has earned such a central place in discussions of Canadian and

nonfiction films of the 1960s. By and large, however, these authors' insights have not found their way into *either* popular discourse or scholarly writing. The sense that nonfiction film is un-acted remains very much in tact.

⁴ Vinicius do Valle Navarro offers an extremely similar reading of Nichols in his aforementioned dissertation. Nichols, he suggests, effectively argues that «[f]or nonfiction filmmakers [...] performance is something akin to death. It is that which cannot be contained or addressed by the film's discourse, that which exposes the limits of non-fictional representation and must thereby be circumvented, omitted, or avoided» (12).

québécois cinema that, in Clandfield's opinion, there is little left to say about it that has not already been said (72). From my perspective, however, this extensive discourse just makes *Pour la suite du monde* an exceptionally interesting test case for an argument about screen acting. Put simply, performance analysis ought to appear especially significant if it can make a demonstrable contribution to an apparently saturated field. Can this kind of <theatre-appropriate> investigation augment our understanding of even the most discussed cinematic text? If so, does it not stand to reason that such an approach might be revealing and instructive in other filmic cases as well? Insofar as *Pour la suite du monde* is accompanied by a wealth of scholarship to which performance analysis might add, it provides a golden opportunity to consider these sorts of questions. Just as the film's <documentarity> makes it a remarkably striking place to find acting on screen, so too does its canonical status supply a particularly handy framework for illustrating the utility of performance study. As a result, this film constitutes one of the most compelling sites at which to begin re-thinking the traditionally posited distinctions between theatrical and filmic acting.

Acting and/or/as Being?

As the preceding discussion begins to suggest, *Pour la suite du monde* demonstrates the presence of performance where performance is typically denied. To be sure, the subject who appears before Perrault/Brault's camera in this film is not an actor in the traditional sense of the term. As Guy Gauthier points out, «au moment où il est enregistré, il est lui-même [...] Il n'a pas à dire un texte, ni même à redire un texte qu'il a déjà dit» (32). In spite of this fact however, (and, indeed, in spite of Perrault's emphatic claims that the people he films are *not* actors)⁵, the Île-aux-Coudres citizens who appear in *Pour la suite du monde* can finally be seen to act in at least three broad ways.

To begin with, these people are performers to the extent that life in general necessarily involves performance. But how is this the case? While passing *Theatrum mundi* metaphors have been commonplace at least since the time of Plato,⁶ a range of social psychologists and sociologists have more recently articulated the

⁵ Amongst other places, he makes this argument in both the interview with Jean-Daniel Lafond and the dialogue with René Allio that are cited at the end of this essay. Yves Lacroix also discusses Perrault's opposition to the notion of performance in some detail.

⁶ As Elizabeth Burns points out, Plato referred to the «great stage of human life» in *Philebus*. (qtd. in Burns 8). Burns also cites uses of the theatrical metaphor in writings by Petronius, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Richard Steele, and others (8-14).

performative nature of human existence in some detail.⁷ On one hand, many of these authors argue that social beings resemble stage actors in that both generate meaning through communicative activity. In his seminal book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, for instance, Erving Goffman contends that interactions are largely determined by information that their participants «give» and «give off» (2). When in the presence of others, he writes, «the individual will have to act so that he [sic] intentionally or unintentionally *expresses* himself, and the others will in turn have to be *impressed* in some way by him» (ibid, emphasis in original). In a similar fashion, Randall Collins and Michael Makowsky assert that «situations do not simply define themselves. They must be constructed by symbolic communication and hence social life must be expressive, whatever else it might be» (qtd. in Brissett & Edgely 3). Given the communicative imperative of collective existence, as such authors argue, people are near-continually engaged (consciously or not) in the actorly task of conveying information about themselves and the circumstances in which they figure. And in this respect, we are all performers of a certain sort.

Moreover, dramaturgically-minded social psychologists also point out that human beings are motivated strongly to control the way in which we appear to others. Since many of our opportunities and outcomes are dependent on the way that we are seen by those around us, we «typically prefer», as Mark Leary puts it, «that other people perceive [us] in certain desired ways and not perceive [us] in other, undesired ways» (xiii). What's more, countless authors and researchers have also shown that this pervasive concern with public opinion exerts a considerable impact on social behaviour. In Barry Schlenker's words, we «attempt to influence how other people – real or imagined – perceive our personality traits, abilities, intentions, behaviors, attitudes, values, physical characteristics, social characteristics, family, friends, job, and possessions» (6). Or as Goffman puts it: we «mobilize [our] activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in [our] interests to convey» (4). Effectively, what all of these writers underscore is that, when confronted by others, people mold and *present* themselves just as stage actors craft roles for an audience. To this end, all social activities can be understood as performances that, as Schlenker says, are «more or less revealing, more or less truthful, more or less deliberate – but performances nonetheless» (35).

In light of this connection between acting and everyday interaction, any and all of the multi-person encounters in *Pour la suite du monde* can be construed as expressive performances. Early in the film, for instance, as the three Tremblay brothers prepare to discuss the island's defunct whale hunt with their father,

⁷ For a few notable examples of this vast body of research, see the pieces by Goffman, Malone, Brissett & Edgely, Leary, Schlenker, Jones & Pittman, Baumeister and Tedeschi listed in the Works Cited.

the close proximity in which they stand communicates a sense of familiarity, comfort and group solidarity. At the same time, Léopold's placement at the centre of this semi-circular arrangement and his tendency to dominate the conversation also imply that he is the natural leader of this assemblage. In this respect, his self-presentational choices serve to subtly remind his brothers that, while he values their camaraderie, he nonetheless expects to be treated with a certain amount of admiration and respect.

On the other hand, once inside the Tremblay house, the boys' father, Alexis, quickly claims this position of authority for himself. Upon entering the scene, he curtly orders one of the boys (Marcellin) to evacuate 'his' (Alexis') chair, immediately demanding a degree of deference and veneration in the process. (Of course, Marcellin also enhances the sense of Alexis' importance by complying and scurrying quickly out of his father's path.) Furthermore, once Alexis has taken up this seat of patriarchal authority, he refuses to relinquish it (or to move much at all) for the remainder of the sequence. As a result, he continuously telegraphs a sense of unwavering dominance to his children. While the Tremblays may not be acting in the traditional sense in these sequences, they nonetheless meet Goffman's definition of everyday performance by making visual, verbal and gestural choices that profoundly influence the way in which they are understood by their fellow interactants.

In addition to appearing before (and attempting to influence) the others in their community, however, the individuals in *Pour la suite du monde* must also present themselves before the documentary camera. Their words and actions are not only observed by those in their immediate presence, but are also recorded and preserved for viewing by a much larger group of spectators. And, importantly, they are eminently aware of being on display in this way. Accordingly, the islanders in *Pour la suite du monde* can also be seen as actors to the extent that appearing in a nonfiction film necessarily augments the performative nature of life. In the face of the extreme public exposure that attaches to the documentary situation, the people who appear in Perrault's and Brault's film must be especially motivated to control the way that they are perceived. Concurrently, the specific expressive choices that they make in response to this pressure influence not only those around them, but their larger filmic audience as well.

In the aforementioned sequence in the Tremblay house, for example, Alexis' self-presentational choices serve to inform both his sons *and* the film's spectators that he is an individual who demands to be treated with respect. As a matter of fact, at the end of the scene, Alexis virtually acknowledges that his performance of authority has been at least partially intended for these outside observers, turning abruptly toward the camera and pronouncing «c'est tout!» By addressing Perrault/Brault and the camera in this way, this documentary actor momentarily admits his awareness of

the larger audience that must have been increasing his pressure to perform throughout the segment as a whole. At the same time, by harshly putting an end to the scene, he also demonstrates his dominance for this extended viewership more specifically. (He refuses us further access to himself, and thus points out that we too are partially at the mercy of his decisions, at least for the duration of the sequence.) As such, Alexis can clearly be seen as an everyday actor who performs not only for those around him, but also for those implied by the presence of the documentary camera.

Finally, in addition to intensifying everyday performance practices, documentary films also require individuals to adapt their self-presentations to the contingencies of the filmmaking process. Thomas Waugh makes this point especially clearly when he defines nonfiction performance (in a rare article on the topic) as «the self-expression of documentary subjects for the camera *in collaboration with the filmmaker/director*» (71, emphasis mine). Amongst other things, Waugh calls attention to the fact that the conventions and practices employed by the documentary filmmaker dictate the manner in which individuals are expected to relate to the camera as they are filmed. Directors can ask nonfiction subjects to perform «awareness» of the camera or to perform «nonawareness» of it, Waugh says (68), but, in either case, the subjects are asked to perform. This insight points to the third and final way in which the citizens of the Île-aux-Coudres act in *Pour la suite du monde*. Like more traditionally recognized players, these documentary actors present their «characters» according to performance conventions imposed by the text in which they figure.

Most frequently, this involves adhering to what Waugh calls a «naturalistic, representational performance style borrowed from fiction» (71). To be sure, even when they are required to execute planned, rather theatrical blocking,⁸ the islanders generally obey the «don't look at the camera» rule that defines the realist model of performance. For instance, when the three Tremblay brothers prepare to broach the subject of the hunt with their father, they are positioned in an awkwardly frontal formation that Charlie Michael has described as clearly staged (38). Rather than acknowledging the camera for which they are arranged, however, the men feign ignorance of their audience just as if they were actors in a naturalist play. As such, in addition to engaging in self-presentation that conveys important information to both their co-actors and the filmic audience, the Tremblays also act in this scene by carrying out that self-presentational activity according to the tenets of the representational mode.

On other occasions, Perrault and Brault seem to allow (or even encourage) their performers to present themselves to the camera quite specifically. For one thing, moments of brief direct

⁸ Several authors discussing the film have pointed out moments that appear to be staged. See, for example, the essays by Michael, White, and Clandfield.

address about (such as Alexis' abovementioned «c'est tout!)), repeatedly underlining the fact that the predominantly employed realist style is indeed just feigned convention.⁹ Perhaps more importantly, at several points across the film, Alexis is filmed in storytelling sequences that encourage him to shift his performance to a presentational register for a much longer duration. His speech describing the traditional practices of the whale hunt is a case in point. Here, Alexis is shown alone and in close up, and, as he speaks, he alternates between gazing slightly up and away from the camera, and glancing straight at it and at the extended audience it implies. Thus, at this juncture, an islander-actor effectively responds to the more presentational setup established by the filmmakers and modulates his performance style accordingly. Like his sons in the aforementioned scene, Alexis not only engages in augmented self-presentation during his storytelling sequences, but also «performs this performance» in a manner that is consistent with the conventions established for the scene as a whole.

With all this in mind, the widespread notion that nonfiction films (and cinematic texts in general) do not involve performance is plainly untenable. In fact, documentary subjects such as the citizens of the Île-aux-Coudres act on at least three levels simultaneously. They perform for one another within the world being documented, actively managing the impressions they make on their fellow interactants. At the same time, the extended audience created by the documentary camera prompts them to craft images of themselves for the benefit of their cinematic spectators as well. Indeed, this is precisely what so many recent nonfiction scholars are getting at when they claim that the process of being filmed inevitably interferes with and transforms subjects' behaviour.¹⁰ Finally, documentary subjects also perform inasmuch as they are required to adhere to the performance conventions established for the film in which they feature. In the face of this kind of complex, multi-leveled performance, it becomes clear that acting

⁹ Clandfield also notes several further examples of direct address across the film.

¹⁰ Michel Marie, Eric Barnouw, John Corner, Jean Rouch, and Jean-Louis Comolli, amongst others, all bring up this point in one way or another. In fact, both Stella Bruzzi and Noel Carroll suggest that the camera's capacity to alter subjects' behaviour has become a central concern in documentary theory. Similarly, Guy Gauthier points out that this issue has been brought up many times in relation to Perrault's films specifically. While many writers view the change engendered by the camera as a qualitative shift in conduct (with the concomitant potential to compromise documentary «authenticity»), however, it is more profitably understood as an extension of performative processes that are already operative in life. Since self-presentation constitutes a fundamental aspect of human existence, individuals are not necessarily being dishonest when they perform themselves for and in relation to the filmmaker's camera. Actually, if, as Goffman says, the self is finally just a «dramatic effect» constructed through social behavior (253), then there is no singular, «true» version of any individual's identity that might be captured on film anyways. (Judith Butler and her followers have developed this last idea – that identity itself is an unfixing, constantly performed construct - extensively.)

is not inimical to the documentary pursuit, but rather constitutes a centrally important aspect of nonfiction practice. As Stella Bruzzi puts it, «the important truth any documentary captures is the performance in front of the camera» (74).

Acting and Interpretation

If performance is a fundamental element of nonfiction discourse, then documentary performance analysis must also be seen as an eminently plausible – and potentially fruitful – pursuit. Not surprisingly then, careful analysis of the actors' work in *Pour la suite du monde* enriches understanding of the film on several levels. For instance, a consideration of the islanders' decisions along performance continua traditionally discussed in relation to stage acting (voice, gesture, position, interaction with environment, etc.) augments and clarifies one's sense of the individual personalities that make up the Île-aux-Coudres population. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the changes and developments in these individuals' performance choices over the course of the film also generate some exceedingly interesting insights about the events represented on screen and their potential thematic significance. By the time the film winds to a close, the complex and shifting ways in which the islanders have performed themselves demonstrate not only the intricate web of personalities and relationships that comprise the island society, but also the extent to which that community is reinvigorated by the renewed whale hunt, and, by extension, by the film itself.

Early in the piece, the performance choices made by the subject-actors do much to establish their unique character traits, and thus to indicate the differences existing within the Île-aux-Coudres community. In fact, while many writers have noted the generational divide that is explored in the film, closer attention to performance emphasizes the numerous differences that exist *within* age groups on the Île-aux-Coudres as well. Most obviously, the three elders on which the film focuses – Alexis, Grand-Louis and Abel – each present themselves in drastically different ways that belie any sense of generational unity that might otherwise be observed. Where Grand-Louis is consistently animated and loquacious in his stories and reminiscences, for instance, Alexis' own acts of storytelling tend to be rather measured and restrained. On the other hand, as the third representative of the older cohort, Père Abel talks comparatively little. Unlike Louis and Alexis, with their near-constant recitations, Abel largely only speaks when spoken to, and is often shown overseeing a scene in rather stoic silence. Thus, while all three of these men may be representative of a single generation and ultimately share similar beliefs, the way in which they perform themselves at the beginning of this film nonetheless sets them up as strikingly divergent individuals with as many things dividing them as binding them together.

A particularly vivid demonstration of this process can be seen in the sequence running from the end of the shareholders' meeting through to the beginning of the first trip in search of the old weir. The segment begins with Louis recounting one of his characteristically colourful stories to a group of assembled children, and, as usual, both his physical presentation and his vocal delivery offer striking demonstrations of his upbeat, active and convivial personality. As he tells the tale of how the hunt once reinvigorated him after a particularly harrowing adventure on horseback, he speaks at a brisk, excited pace, his voice as expressive as any good actor's. His pitch drops suddenly and dramatically, for instance, when he first mentions the pain caused by his rapid-fire ride, helping to emphasize the sense of gravity he wishes to confer on his injuries. Likewise, his sudden employment of voiced sound effects, such as the «ra-ba-tat» he uses to suggest the noise made by the horse's hooves, vary his vocal patterns and help to construct a vivid sonic image of the scene he is attempting to evoke. Finally, having built his story up and amplified the sense of excitement attached to it by steadily increasing both his tempo and his pitch, Louis pauses and takes a deep breath before coming to his central point about the reinvigorating powers of the hunt. Now clearly at his dramatic climax, he confidently declares that the next hunt will also possess this rejuvenating power, finally repeating the pronouncement for further emphasis and effect. Through this range of vocal modulations, Louis demonstrates his unique and distinctive character, indicating both his skill as a storyteller and the optimism, energy and good faith that mark his personality.

At the same time, his physical mannerisms also contribute importantly to the expressive, energetic self-image that he fashions in this scene. Throughout his recitation, Louis gesticulates with joyous abandon, painting the picture of his tale visually as much as aurally. He literally re-enacts the process of horseback riding, for instance, and also physically points to several discrete locations as if to help lay out the geography of his remembered scene. In addition, like his near-constant speech, Louis' physicality also vividly demonstrates his extroversion and sociality, as he constantly maintains eye contact with his listeners, and frequently leans in to address them more directly. Just like his expressive vocal delivery, Louis' animated physicality in this sequence positions him as a uniquely vibrant, energetic and gregarious individual.

In marked contrast, Alexis' performance choices in the following sequence indicate that he is private and reflective where Louis is outgoing and unreserved. For instance, though the initial cut from a close up of Louis to one of Alexis emphasizes their physical similarities to some extent, Alexis promptly puts an end to any thoughts of resemblance by pausing for several seconds before he starts to speak. This amount of silence was certainly never allowed to elapse while Louis was onscreen, and its emphatic presence here marks Alexis as uniquely methodical and

rational. Interestingly, when he finally does begin to talk, Alexis takes up a topic not unlike the one just addressed by Louis, describing the whale hunt as «la pêche la plus enivrante... qui donne le plus d'passion à l'homme» (transcribed in Brûlé 30). Again though, the way in which Alexis utters this statement distinguishes him from Louis in spite of the similarity of their words. Where Louis' vocal delivery was energetic and highly varied, Alexis speaks at a measured pace and in a consistently hushed, almost melancholy tone. Furthermore, while Louis danced around with frenetic abandon as he spoke, Alexis is entirely still in this brief section, barely moving but for some slow blinks and contemplative smiles that suggest his introspection, and thus further distinguish him from his extroverted colleague. Hence, even though their stories make the same ultimate point, Alexis' and Louis' divergent performances in these consecutive scenes reveal just how different the two men actually are.

Continuing this process of character differentiation, Père Abel presents himself as yet another distinct personality amongst the island elders in the film's subsequent scene. Here, as he leads the first attempt to locate the remnants of the old beluga trap, Abel distinguishes himself immediately from both Louis and Alexis by speaking only when it is absolutely necessary. As younger men row energetically on all sides of him, Abel simply kneels in the middle of the boat, his central positioning and unwavering stance reflecting his position as the natural leader of the group. He surveys the river with an expert's eye, and remains silent for twelve full seconds before turning his head and announcing, in a brusque and authoritative fashion, that the fishermen need to travel further southward. He then returns to silently keeping watch over the scene, further cementing his status as a stoic, no-nonsense sort of individual who differs considerably from Alexis and Louis.

As all of this suggests, the way in which these three elder characters perform themselves early in the film constructs a remarkably vivid sense of their strong, but distinctive personalities. Even when talking about similar things, Abel, Louis and Alexis could not be more unique, and this fact is reflected in their self-presentation not only at the moments I have described, but at several other points near the beginning of the piece as well (for example, their broadly discrepant reactions when Léopold broaches the subject of reviving the hunt with each of them in turn.) Moreover, this process of establishing a distinct, individual personality through performance is by no means limited to these three characters. Close attention to Léopold's vocal and gestural choices, for instance, clearly suggest the extent to which he differs not only from older community members such as his father and Grand-Louis, but also from individuals – such as Joachim Harvey – who are closer to his own age. In this respect, attention to the actors' early work corroborates Peter Harcourt's argument that «if distinctions are made between the generations» in *Pour la suite du*

monde, «distinctions are made within them as well» (127). Where Harcourt emphasizes Perrault's role in «shaping, selecting, provoking» this kind of complexity (126), performance analysis indicates that many of the details of this intricate picture are constructed and/or augmented by choices made by islanders themselves.

Furthermore, continued attention to the way in which these documentary subjects present themselves also generates insights that extend beyond those offered by Harcourt. Most importantly, while the islanders' performances throughout the beginning of the film do much to emphasize their individuality and difference, their techniques of self-presentation become much more uniform as the trap revival progresses. The three elders, for example, whose performances differed so drastically early on, start to appear rather similar as the film draws to its close. In particular, Alexis and Abel, (and many of the younger characters as well) begin to behave more and more like the always energetic and optimistic Grand-Louis. Significantly, this remarkable transformation suggests the actual reinvigorating effect that the revival of the hunt may have had on the community after all.

Glimmers of this gradual movement toward a more uniform population of Grand-Louis-like individuals can be seen as early as the initial discovery of the old weir. Here, buoyed by their success, the younger fisherman on the sandbar momentarily take on several of the characteristics that have typified Louis throughout the film, gesticulating wildly and speaking over top of one another as they excitedly proclaim their genius. The most emphatic indication of the onset of this shift, however, comes in the argument between Alexis and Léopold in the forge. In this scene, Alexis is suddenly more animated than he has ever been in the past. At one moment, he jumps up from his stool to act out the process of harpooning a whale, thereby performing a vivid, «Louis-esque» physical re-enactment. Even his typical readings from Cartier's diary become more and more expressive and outwardly-directed as the scene progresses, suggesting a drastic change from the continuous introspection that characterized his work before. At times, for example, he raises his voice to emphasize key phrases of text that will help to prove his argument, simultaneously looking up at Léopold in order to underscore the words with a pointed facial expression. Despite the fact that he's still disagreeing with his son, and even considering the ongoing rationality, obduracy and reliance on Cartier that still mark him as unique, Alexis' increased interactivity and animation in this sequence suggest the beginnings of a change in his character. This process only becomes more pronounced as the film continues.

For his part, Abel too seems to have been changed somewhat by the process of reviving the hunt. When the fishermen discover the initial whale in the trap, for instance, this previously quiet and stoic individual suddenly becomes expressive and

effusive. As a matter of fact, Abel begins to speak frequently and colourfully as he and Léopold approach the weir, and does not really stop throughout much of the rest of the scene. Most emphatically, as the men move in to celebrate their catch, Abel literally greets the trapped beast in a witty, jocular tone. Raising both his pitch and his volume far above their usual level, he jokingly addresses the whale as his «vieil ami» (transcribed in Brûlé 40), and moves in to welcome the creature with a friendly pat on its side. Having celebrated the success of the hunt in this quirky, demonstrative manner, Abel then encourages the other fishermen to do the same, shouting and gesturing for them to come and shake the whale's «hand.» In this relatively exuberant response, Abel too seems to have picked up some Grand-Louis-like joie de vivre, expressing himself and his emotions much more fully and insistently than he had in the early portions of the film.

Perhaps this sense of transformation is most completely realized, though, in Alexis' reaction to the news of the whale in the weir. Rushing from Léopold's truck with far more vigor than he has heretofore displayed, Alexis hurries in to shake Abel's hand just as Abel had done with the whale itself. At the same time, instead of resorting to the sort of deliberate and ponderous speech patterns that he used throughout the beginning of the film, Alexis here speaks quickly and with abandon, his rapid pace and raised pitch indicating his considerable excitement and emotion (particularly on his final emotional exhortation of «Ah, mon ami Abel!»)

Working in concert with this more energetic and expressive vocal delivery, Alexis' arms and head are also much more animated than usual in this scene. As he tells the story of how he learned about the catch, his hands continually bob about to emphasize his words, while his head moves frantically from side to side to include each of the several people who are listening. He even finishes off his story by physically demonstrating the shiver that ran through him upon hearing the news, again suggesting his movement from introspection and reminiscence to Grand-Louis-like re-enactment. In fact, when Louis himself arrives on the scene moments later, his performance is remarkably similar to the one just offered by Alexis. He too exits hurriedly from a truck, rushes to congratulate Abel, and details his reaction to the news in an exuberant and animated fashion. Suddenly, however, Louis does not seem all that unique. Despite all of the previous differences in their performance choices, in this moment, Alexis and Louis present themselves quite similarly indeed.

Finally, this sense of Alexis' and Abel's movement toward a more Louis-like mode of self presentation is capped off in the two men's extended conversation on the hill at the end of the film. At this point, well after the initial excitement of the catch has died down, both of these men are still far more energetic and animated than they had been early in the film, and this marked change suggests that the revival of the hunt may well have had a lasting

impact on their characters. As Alexis tells Abel about the trip to New York, for example, he again demonstrates the sort of physical and vocal animation that he displayed in his reaction to the initial success of the trap. He smiles and laughs as he describes seeing a nude mannequin in a New York shop window, modulating his voice expressively and barely pausing for breath between sentences. Moreover, while maintaining a seated position on the hillside, Alexis nonetheless adds additional colour to his anecdote by way of communicative gesture, almost constantly moving some combination of his head, arms, and torso in visual accompaniment to (and extension of) his words.

Similarly, through his performance choices, Abel continues to convey the jocular, talkative personality that first appeared during his encounter with the trapped whale. As a matter of fact, he now appears to have become quite garrulous and light-hearted indeed, interjecting at several times throughout Alexis' story and joking about everything from his wife to the possibility of catching the first whale's mother. Again, at this late juncture in the film, both Alexis and Abel make use of performance strategies that are quite similar to those typically used by Grand-Louis. They both speak quickly, constantly, and expressively, all the while employing energetic movements to clarify and emphasize their emotions. What's more, these animated choices make both men seem far more social, upbeat and contented than they did at the beginning of the film, and thus suggest that the renewal of the hunt has reinvigorated them, just as Grand-Louis predicted.

In this respect, careful attention to the islanders' acting over the course of *Pour la suite du monde* provides some interesting insights into the film and its larger thematic implications. By gradually shifting from widely discrepant brands of self-presentation towards a much more uniform performance style, these individuals underline both the initial divisions within their community and the way in which the process of reviving an obsolete tradition has made them into a much more cohesive, homogeneous group. As a corollary, they also point toward the transformative powers of the hunt itself. More precisely, while the vast majority of authors discussing the film focus on the vision that Perrault and Brault paint of the islanders' future,¹¹ an awareness of performance emphasizes that – whatever the future may hold – the process of rebuilding the trap has been supremely effective within the immediate *present* represented onscreen. Though the hunt may not protect the Île-aux-Coudres community from the onslaught of modernity and assimilation, the clear performance shifts of these documentary actors intimate that it has nonetheless transformed, reinvigorated and reunited a variety of community members, for the time being at least. And perhaps this is just as important.

¹¹Michel Brûlé, Jerry White, David Clandfield and Peter Harcourt, for example, all provide interesting perspectives on this issue.

Furthermore, the fact that all of the people featured in the film become progressively more like Grand-Louis ultimately endows this individual with unusual significance. Although Michel Brûlé claims that, by the end of the film, «le monde appartient aux Léopold» (42), attention to performance nominates Louis instead as the film's figure of primary import. By extension, certain characteristics associated with and embodied by this favoured individual are also given special weight. First and foremost amongst these emphasized attributes is Louis' tendency to participate in active, social performances of culture.

To be sure, whereas Alexis prefers (initially, at least) to reminisce in isolation or to read from Cartier's diary, Grand-Louis takes part in public, community rituals throughout *Pour la suite du monde*. In addition to being a cantor at the local church, he is also involved (unlike Alexis, Léopold or Abel) in both the auction for the souls and the traditional Mid-Lent celebration. What is more, Louis repeatedly takes it upon himself to explain and demonstrate local custom (even outside of the hunt) to members of the younger generation. Rather than simply telling stories (as Alexis might), Louis literally re-enacts, and thus resurrects, rituals. When he gives the children Easter water to drink, for example, he successfully engages them in a cultural tradition, whether or not they fully understand or appreciate its symbolic weight. Indeed, even when he is literally renewing a tradition in this way, his animated, highly physical storytelling often involves vigorous re-enactment (as in the horseback mime), which ultimately has the same effect of revivifying a past moment within the present. Stated simply, Louis continuously resuscitates local tradition through *doing*. With this in mind, perhaps it is not surprising that others on the island become more like him once they are brought to actively and socially participate in the revival of local custom through the film itself.

Questions of past and future aside then, an analysis of the actors' work in *Pour la suite du monde* emphasizes that the communal performance of cultural tradition has a rejuvenating, uplifting effect on the immediate existence of those who undertake it. This is the secret that Grand-Louis Harvey already knew (however instinctively) before Perrault and Brault arrived on the scene, and the secret that the film retroactively suggests is at least partially responsible for his considerable perseverance, optimism and bonhomie. Moreover, this is also the lesson that the other islanders learn in the process of making the film; they are impelled to participate in Grand-Louis-like re-enactment, and thus are revitalized and invigorated themselves.

Conclusion: Stages and Screens

A consideration of the actors' work in *Pour la suite du monde* clearly indicates that the time has come for analyzing performance as carefully on screen as we do on stage. Amongst

other things, the film demonstrates the ways in which even documentary subjects can be seen as performers, underscoring the implausibility of the ‹stage acting›/‹screen being› dichotomy in the process. More importantly, it also begins to illustrate the numerous kinds of insights that stand to be gained from paying closer attention to screen performance. If even a simple investigation of the most basic elements of the actor's repertoire (precisely what I have provided here) can generate some striking conclusions about a film as frequently discussed as this one, then the potential for this kind of analysis seems almost endless. With this in mind, perhaps it is time to stop expending intellectual energy in discussions and debates about what distinguishes stage and screen acting, and to instead consider the things that this process of separation is causing us to miss. To be sure, if the performance in *Pour la suite du monde* is any indication, the rewards stand to be promising indeed.

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