Abstract:
How mass media and their implied audiences imagine poverty and homelessness in the city is an obvious but also complex subject of research for broadcasting studies in the emerging environment. It is obvious because media are major urban institutions that reproduce values of citizenship and help reinforce the symbolic lines of social division in the city. It is a complex subject because media regularly address audiences in the name of those who do not speak for themselves or in the name of those who claim to speak for them. This paper compares two case studies of the way poverty is imagined in Montreal through Public Broadcasting Television seriocomedy and the mainstream press in order to demonstrate how media already overlap and provide some of the city’s many ways of imagining this subject. My broader, and as yet unanswered research question, asks if it is true that journalists and public broadcasters increasingly speak of the excluded in the city in the third person, and already only rarely address the excluded that they write or film about directly—will journalism and public broadcasting still claim to fulfill their democratic responsibilities to inform and contribute to the enrichment of a diversity of cultural expression in the future? The recent popular French Québécois language seriocomedy Les Bougons is used as an example and compared to emotionally charged political disputes in Montreal newspapers on the theme of poverty. The difficulty of comparison is amplified by the construction from such different media, and so before explaining the analysis, I offer some preliminary explanation of the historical context for Public Broadcasting and the production of seriocomedy in Canada as well as an explanation for the selection of examples from newspapers before I proceed.

This paper is drawn from the preliminary results of two ongoing case studies into stories about poverty and homelessness as portrayed in a Radio-Canada seriocomedy (comedies that satirize current events, traditional values, and vernacular languages from a
contemporary point of view), and reportage from Montreal newspapers. My broader background research question asks if it is true that journalists and public broadcasters increasingly speak of, or portray, the excluded in the city in the third person, and already only rarely address the excluded that they write or film about directly; will journalism and public broadcasting still claim to fulfill their democratic responsibilities to inform and contribute to the enrichment of a diversity of cultural expression in the future?

Newspapers and Broadcasting media have long been studied as national institutions (Starr, 2004; Skinner, et als., 2005; Nord, 2001; Vipond 2000; Robinson, 1998; Breton and Proulx, 1989; De Bonneville, 1998) that reproduce cultural diversity as well as forms of inequality and injustice in the city (Park; 1952; Hardt, 1998; McChesney, 2004). There is also an ongoing tradition of research into the role of the adversarial, community, and ethnic press and public television which promote the diversity of cultural expressions. (Newkirk, 2005; Schudson and Tift; 2005) In addition, there is a highly motivated blog literature calling for a new “public journalism” that would be much better suited to the direct expression of diverse cultures on a scale that has not previously been imagined (Rosen, 1999; 2006; Jarvis, 2006). However, if it is true that the mainstream traditional mass media have passed into what Vincent Mosco terms “powerful banality” (2004, p.20), then it also has to be recognized that public television and the press remain highly influential in everyday urban life. It therefore remains crucially important to continue to investigate how cultural experiences of groups such as the poor and immigrants are imagined as “other” in the core media.

Materials for the two case studies that follow include a search engine selection from key words and a framing analysis of Montreal texts in 2005 from The Gazette, La Presse and Le Devoir and from two seasons of -- les Bougons (2003-04) a wildly popular Radio-Canada television network seriocomedy. After (1) situating the long history of seriocomedy programming in Radio-Canada and its importance to the city of Montreal below, I present the following sections that focus on three general themes from the newspapers: (2) Direct Talk on The Poorest of the Poor; (3) Polemics on Politicians, Developers, and the State; and (4) Indirect Negative Images of Poverty and The Poor on the Poor. Extracts from Les Bougons are used to help contrast or illustrate the way the poor can also be empowered in ways that are not only about claiming rights and
obligations as is more the case in the newspapers. The implied audience of newspaper images are then contrasted in section (2.1) with implied audiences for a seriocomic sketch on a television production team who has chosen to film the Bougon family as a typical example of the poor in Montreal. This gives a comic sense of how television imagines television imaging its audience would like to see the poor in the city. Section 3.1 contrasts the journalistic “rants” against institutions and agencies with anti-nationalist cosmopolitan rant from Les Bougons that argues against both the system of social benefits and development or nationally improved employment prospects as solutions to the problem of poverty and homelessness. The second part of the final section (4.1) discusses an excerpt from Les Bougons where the family is involved in developing a pilot for a television series about a poor family involved in a bunko scheme to fraud the government $5.00 a day daycare system.

Each section depicts a popular imaginary audience for newspapers and television that is hospitable toward the poor and homeless and that in the main argues against government agencies and free enterprise developers. But the hospitality is not unconditional. Different levels of hospitality toward the poor and the homeless are revealed in the exclusion of their voices and in how the implied audience maintains a paternalistic orientation toward them. I conclude that the contradiction between the plea to improve societal hospitality toward the poor and the conditional hospitality that defines their alterity, demonstrates tensions within the city that resist singular definitions of inequality and of citizenship politics.

1. National Broadcasting and the Cultures of Urban Laughter

As key cultural producers in Canada and Quebec, the CBC (1936) and Radio-Canada (1938) have served as an important force in the democratization of each society and as the organization that has had a prominent role in reproducing the narratives of a variety of lifeworlds through its music, drama, entertainment and news. This has been accomplished by absorbing a balance of historical conflicts and contradictions that entail i) the opposition between systems of private and public capital, ii) the inherent geopolitical contradiction between center and periphery, and iii) the opposite interests of
cultures whose memberships are notoriously difficult to define sociologically (anglophone, francophone, first nations, and a growing number of diasporas and transnational groups). (Nielsen, 1995b) Bringing together the complex demands of diversity into a unified communications subsystem of the public sphere has been a long political process that has made Toronto and Montreal key centers in the production and legitimation of a multi-national imaginary.

Not surprisingly then, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and la Société Radio-Canada are extremely interesting examples of how state sponsored cultural organizations deal discursively with the addressees of cultural diversity and politics. In fact there is nothing from either networks official discourse or from the federal mandate that would actually indicate either seeks to produce a multi or a bi-national project. Each network absorbs a reference to its ‘other’ audience so that, Radio-Canada is simply the French network of the CBC; as the CBC is the English network of Radio-Canada. The Corporations’ definitions of “Canada” and “Quebec” thus require a double-voiced discourse. On the one hand, the ‘dialogized’ absorption of the one into the other, demands an absence of region in that Radio-Canada’s majority French-speaking Quebec audience does not easily imagine itself as just another Canadian province like the others. On the other hand, the CBC requires an absence of reference to an English-speaking nation in that its societal culture has not cultivated the capacity to imagine itself as one of two, three or more nations. Although Radio-Canada provides services to the tiny number of French speaking minorities across the Federation, through its programs and its policies, almost exclusively produced or defined in Montreal, it addresses a distinctly French-speaking Quebec audience that has the historical capacity to imagine itself as a people without the rest of Canada. The CBC addresses a distinctly English-speaking Canadian audience and although there has been much historical lip service paid to addressing regional drama, news and multicultural programming, product has for the most part been directly or indirectly issued from Toronto and in the main has not represented the diversity of the emerging transnational city itself.

The CBC Broadcast Center provides production of an imaginary Canadian community mostly managed but not exclusively produced in Toronto’s downtown core. Toronto headquarters is a striking historical and symbolic institution that defines the city
as a national media capital. The CBC has in fact been drawing all kinds of creative talents from Canadian regions into Toronto since 1939 when the city first became the center for radio drama production and where it has continued its role as gatekeeper and center for development of creative formations in film and television. (Nielsen, 1994) From the outset, the CBC sought to bring together the best artistic talents from the various regional centers—Halifax, Vancouver, Winnipeg, (English-speaking) Montreal—to create production teams for the national network in Toronto. Between 1936 and 1961 the CBC produced more than 300 radio theatre series, including more than 8,000 individual plays of which half are original productions. Around 70 original seriocomic radiotheatre plays were broadcast from Toronto between 1940 and 1952, of which 50 were written for the prestigious Sunday evening Stage series directed by Andrew Allan. Allan, who began his career in Vancouver, produced over 450 shows out of Toronto during the first twelve years of the series. During the same period, more than 70 writers and over 150 actors and actresses were employed.

By contrast, today, the CBC plays a decreasing role in the Canadian film and television industry, which produces over four billion dollars of revenue a year and employs more than 50,000 people.

Like the CBC in Toronto, Radio-Canada also came to take-up a key symbolic national role in Montreal. As Germaine and Rose (2001) point out, a vision of Montreal as a media centre for French Quebec and the Francophone world was conceived in the late 1950's by Jean Drapeau. He saw the development of a Cité des Ondes (A city of the airwaves) along with the new Place Des Arts and Les Complexes Desjardins as a way to shift the centre of commerce eastward and away from the traditional westward English leaning downtown core. The construction of the Radio-Canada Centre in Montreal was the first step in a futuristic vision that defined the city in terms of the new economies of telecommunications and more recently new media. This vision has evolved into a plan that would make Montreal a bonafide ‘wired city’ (Cité Multimédia).

Quebec French language urban laughter in a mass culture form also has its origins in radio during the 1930's. Radio-Canada, headquartered in Montreal, has drawn talent from all over Quebec and to a lesser extent French speaking regions across Canada since its birth in 1938 when the two networks first uncoupled. (Nielsen, 1994) A standard theme across the history of Quebec radio and television seriocomedy has to do with
language. Social satires draw from the deep tension between traditional and modern culture through the ironic use of subdialects, local oral traditions, and regional accents. (Pagé and Legris, 1979) Language is stratified from top to bottom and is defined through a struggle between the peripheral forces of popular speech and the centralizing pull of literary correctness. Language stratification plays a key role in establishing the scale of satire that ranges from the serious to the light and that addresses audiences that are potentially both popular and scholarly.

The variety, burlesque and satirical magazines and situation comedies that developed the seriocomedy genre on Radio-Canada from the 1940's to the present are narratives that cover a broad range of this kind of linguistic diversity. Radio-Canada’s infamously irreverent Carte blanche 1950's weekly Montreal based radio review was one of the highest achievements in this period of the stratification of voice in seriocomedy that satirized the coming modernization of Quebec society. (Nielsen, 1994; 1999) One of the longest running seriocomedies, Le Bye-Bye, developed along similar lines out of another 1950's radio show where the main cultural and political events of the year are treated to a seriocomic send-up.

Les Bougons is the latest one of the most important examples in the 70 year history of the seriocomedy genre produced by public television in Canada. It is about an unemployed poor family of six living somewhere in Montreal’s traditional francophone working class East End. Les Bougons are part of a wider imaginary but not fictional underclass who endlessly scheme to make money illegally and to cheat the system. The implied audience gets a double message. On the one hand Les Bougons appear to be allies of the poor in a struggle against a corrupt system. On the other hand, they themselves are not poor given the success of their activities—although they are almost never seen spending money. For Les Bougons, going to school, getting a job, going straight, supporting political ideologies all represent debased values whereas eliminating need and maximizing profit through elaborate bunko schemes and family team work constitute the highest values. They often cheat each other and generally appear to be out for themselves as individuals whenever possible. But the carnivalesque spirit of a broader urban underclass culture of laughter lightens the moral message and also allows the series to empower the poor within a generous notion of the common good. They cheat the housing
authority, the welfare office, the unemployment office, all social services and bureaucracies, and any municipal, provincial or federal authority that might enter into their sphere of contact. They buy as little as possible, steal almost everything they use, and never pay rent.

2. Direct Talk: “The Poorest of the Poor”

As will be seen in the following sections, newspapers perform many of the same operations as seriocomedy without the poetic devices and in so doing provide other kinds of outlets for deliberation over disputes about the common good within democratic publics. Strictly speaking the scholarly definition of extreme poverty is limited to the more than 20% of the planet who live with incomes less than $1.00 a day and who are rarely reached by social assistance of any kind. (Sachs, 2005; Davis, 2006). It may not be appropriate to calculate this kind of extreme poverty for the poor who live in fourth world conditions in Montreal but may have access to first world social services, food and shelter. Nonetheless, images of ‘the poorest of the poor’ are presented in the newspapers.

Four articles address images of extreme poverty in Montreal in 2005. La Presse reports on a day in the life of some twenty homeless who continue to sleep outdoors on the coldest day of the year at -34 degree Celsius. Alain, who is 50 and has Aids, has lived in the street for fourteen years. He lost his will to survive in the shelters and says, “I am like a dog, and I always want to be outside.” Two other young men, Simon and Donald, also avoid shelters because their pet dogs are not allowed. As Simon says; “I live in the street to keep my future open. In a house you only see your future through a window.” (La Presse, January 19, 2005).

Three other highly compelling reports by Brian Miles for Le Devoir are about an estimated 350 homeless aboriginals (February 26, A1) who are presented to the anticipated reader as “the poorest of the poor in Montreal.”(28 February, A4; A1). In his article “A White amongst the Aboriginals, Miles reports on the perspective of an amateur anthropologist, Emmanuel Morin, who first met Inuit street people while still a student and developed a lifelong compassionate relationship with them as an activist and social worker. We are told First Nation males have no shelter or treatment center of their own in
Montreal while there is one small shelter for females-- even though more than 10,000 first nation peoples live in the city. As aboriginals prefer not to use shelters run by whites due to their experience of racism, and even if they did want to use the shelters, they would generally not be eligible because the faculties require sobriety. In other words, they sleep outside and as Morin says, “the violence is there, the alcohol is there. And when it explodes it really explodes…It is so disappointing, he says, that whites have written off the Inuit who are living in the harshest of third world conditions. Sometimes it gives me the shivers, says Morin, these are the most messed up people you can find. They are at the bottom of the bottom and live in the hour not the everyday.” (28 February, A4)

Miles is among a minority of journalists (although with quite limited success) to attempt interviews with aboriginal homeless and to portray them in their own voice. He explains that there are multiple reasons why natives become homeless in the city. Causes are rooted in “a corrosive cocktail of racism, bureaucracy and ignorance. For the poor it is difficult to find housing. For a poor aboriginal it is almost impossible.” (February 28, 2005, A1) While the Inuit makeup 10% of the native population in Montreal, “they account for 43% of the aboriginal homeless in the City.” He situates the high rate of homelessness for Inuits in the context of their migration from Nunavut where “the suicide rate is six times higher than the Canadian average … and where 40% of Inuit children are victims of sexual assault. Inuit are drawn to the City because of phenomenal demographic growth while employment opportunities remain non existent.” Violence, abuse and exclusion increase as Inuit pour into the city. “Through a cruel stroke of destiny the Inuit who live in the street, live in the violence they thought they were free from…a violence that is especially brutal on women.” (February 26, 2006, A1)

In the first article of the series The Third World at the End of the Street, Miles tells the story of Hank who is waiting for a band of natives from the West to come and “take revenge” on the whites. It is Valentines Day and a young Inuit woman is looking for Sebastian for a party while Hank eats sandwiches distributed by Ka’wahse (Mohawk for “where are you going) parole in Atwater Park next to the metro. Later they try and find a place for the night for Annie who is always drunk while all of them are nervous that Greg is going to come. Greg is a Métis “that the Inuits instinctively mistrust, Miles tells us, and they are right! Greg just served eight years in prison for having raped a
seventeen year old girl in front of her mother who was tied-up….This evening, fortunately Greg is not there.”

The purpose of presenting these examples is to get at the image the authors have of their reading public and to demonstrate how the two construct the image of homelessness through their dialogue. It is important to recall the dialogue is not a simple conversation but a broader exchange that takes place in the imagination of each. Authors anticipate the reader’s intrinsic interest in their subject and frame their texts to meet that anticipation. In the process they look to describe the maximum level of poverty in the city. Having aids and living almost entirely outside social life, or coming from Northern poverty and descending even further into its degradation in the Southern city, suppose an understanding from the reader and at the same time an unsaid acknowledgement that the reader has no immediate experience of being poor. These images shine a powerful light of hospitality and dignity on the most poor through contextual analyses they provide; but the extreme poor remain radically “other”; in the sense they are among the furthest away from the imaginary readers of *Le Devoir* or *La Presse*. At the same time, they are ‘others’ who also have basic rights to shelter, food, warmth and medical care. In this example the newspapers do engage in mediated acts of citizenship in so far as they stand for the rights of these “others” to have rights. I return to this theme in section two but first I want to contrast the discussion with an extract from Les Bougons.

3.1 “Our TV Poor” are at Peace

There is no representation of either aboriginals or extreme poverty in *les Bougons* but there are parodies of the way in which Quebec television imagines how its audience would like to see poverty. In the episode under question *les Bougons* are selected as the best example of a poor family in Montreal. The characters from *Les Bougons* live in a dilapidated second story apartment. Family members include Papa and Mama, Mon Oncle Fred, the invalid quasi-mute grandfather, Delores, the eldest daughter who practices prostitution at home; the son Junior; Mao, the illegal refugee androgynous Asian eight-year-old daughter, and Ben Ladin, the family dog. Prostitution, fraud, theft and vice are noble endeavors aimed or directed against anyone who has money and especially against government agencies.
In the television interview sketch, *Les Bougons* are informed that a mobile unit from a reality style program lead by the popular host, Monsieur Gagnon, would be visiting them. The sketch is both a parody of the reality show genre in that it demonstrates how scripted the format is, and a fantasy discussion on how the mainstream audience would like to see poverty represented. In preparation the Local Association for the Poor sent *Les Bougons* an elaborate fruit basket to put in their refrigerator so as to give a good impression to the television audience. The point claims *Papa Bougon* “is not what you do in life but how you look on television, especially in politics!”

Papa Bougon (answers door): Dear Mr. Gagnon, what a surprise…

Mr. Gagnon: My television team and I were just passing by and decided to drop in.

TV interviewer (addresses the camera): We caught them by surprise as you can see….

Papa Bougon: Rita, uh Mama and Les Bougons we have visitors

Papa Bougon: It’s not very difficult to be poor but it doesn’t pay well.

TV Interviewer (off camera): You look very well actually…

Papa B. It seems to me we look shameful…wouldn’t it look better if we were drinking beer or something….

TV. Interviewer: No no. Just stay natural...

Mama Bougon. We are reassured to know that there are people there to defend us.

Papa B: Exactly, you are right my dear. We feel better knowing we can stay poor without being disturbed.

TV Mr. Gagnon: Now I think this is the message the population really needs to hear: Our poor are at peace in poverty…

This sketch introduces the main characters of the program. At the point where the above quote ends, Delores, the sex worker daughter enters the apartment with two of her clients. They apologize for the interruption and through a series of double entands excuse
themselves to her bedroom. The television team thanks the family and leaves the apartment. On one level, the parody shows us the way television laughs at television. On another, it shows the sideward glance of the implied audience that is in the know all along with Les Bougons about how bad realty television can be. In other words, the parody critiques the way poverty is imagined and the implied viewer is called to witness a form of everyday injustice within the media system itself. Like the articles on extreme images of poverty Les Bougons engage in citizenship through witnessing the everyday injustice of media that transform the reality of poverty into fantasy.

4. Polemics on Politicians, Developers, and the State;
Like les Bougons, most of the newspaper articles are critical of local, provincial, and federal government agencies. Newspapers also refer mostly to relative poverty in Montreal. As noted above, descriptions of poverty are most often framed in the voices of disappointment and backed by data, ethnography, expert testimony from workers in the field, or opinions from researchers. A completely opposite response to the ‘expert’ who speaks in the voice of the politician, police authority, or developer can also be met with sarcasm and ridicule in the same form of direct speech as seen in the rant from Paul Bougon above. A good example of the anti-institutional rant is found in the Gazette article by Bill Brownstein who ridicules the downtown borough councilor from Ville Marie who last year proposed to increase a tax on buskers by more than 800%:

“Surely the councilors have more pressing matters to contend with in the downtown borough like littered sidewalks and busted recycling receptacles and the homeless … Seems the borough mayor feels Place Jacques Cartier gets too jammed. Hello! Isn’t it a good thing to have people pack the place in the summer?” (The Gazette, May 11, 2005, p.D-1)

Alexander Popovic from La Presse challenges the arrogance of the Police who announce a new “plan d’action” against the homeless:
“But why the homeless? What have they done? Have they become a new danger to public security? To National security? No. The mortal sin of the homeless is that they exist and give the city and the neighborhood a bad image. Police tell us citizens no longer want to see them. So the police give themselves the noble mandate to clear the homeless out and provide a more agreeable urban aesthetics for the city. Should we applaud them…or vomit on them …. A society that encourages or tolerates the persecution of the homeless by the police is not civilized or guided by humanist values. No, it is a society of neglect, founded in egocentric values of the maximum accumulation of everyone for themselves.”  
(La Presse, June 5, 2005, A11)

Two other articles in La Presse, one by Marcel Sevigny, an activist and former municipal councilor, and another by Rima Elkouri ridicule the coalition of developers who promote a version of commercial citizenship that would revitalize a run down neighborhood by moving the Casino from its out of the way location on Ilse Notre Dame on the Ste Lawrence seaway to the historically working poor neighborhood of Point Ste Charles situated just south of the downtown area. Sevigny recalls that the Casino was put out of the way in the first place in order to protect communities from risks associated with gambling. Loto Quebec’s plan (the government lottery agency promoting the move) included the Casino as one part of a plan for a massive shopping center.

“What a great societal project, exclaims Sevigny! Not only would the Casino come and empty the pockets of the communities new gamblers from the Point and other Montrealers, but also proposes a wasteful anti-ecological development organized around the use of automobiles …at the same time the City of Montreal has just announced its strategic plan for sustainable development.”

Rema Elkouri is also very sarcastic about the plan to move the Casino into the Point but is much more ironic in her utterance:
Far be it from me to not celebrate or to turn my back on international
development for Montreal, or to turn my nose up to the hordes of tourists who
will descend on the futuristic entertainment complex costing 1.2 billion dollars.

Far be it from me to spit on the 6450 jobs….

How could I possibly doubt the genius of Cirque de Soleil. Far be it from me to
ever question its capacity to get Montreal to prosper like no other city.

The voices in these rants are doubled and contradictory. Their implied audience is the
same even though they are talking about different issues. Each charges that the poor and
homeless are the victims of political and economic incompetence, greed or plain
stupidity. Charging buskers an outrageous tax, using the police to eliminate the homeless,
moving the cities only casino into a poor neighborhood are ultimate violations of the
common good. Their implied audience has an especially paternalistic orientation toward
the poor in that the poor become this ultimate moral trump card illuminating any possible
rejoinder from developers or politicians. Each of the policy proposals under attack were
dropped either by the time these polemics were published or shortly thereafter. Each of
the rants claims superior reasoning with the implied audience through this ultimate
argument about the common good in the name of the least well off. At the same time
each also uses language to pretend they are in some way inadequate judges of their
adversaries. The ironic reversal of utterances distorts literal meanings so when Sevigny
says “What a great societal project” he means moving the Casino is the worst possible
plan for the neighborhood. When Elkouri exclaims “How could I possibly doubt the
genius of Cirque de Soleil.” She means the Circle is acting out of self interest which
counters its legendary status as a community conscious international entertainment
enterprise. When Popovic asks why the police point to the homeless he is ironically
reversing the question into a charge against the Police. In each case the rights of the poor
and homeless are defended on a second mediated level of observation and in each case
the reference to poor and the homeless is secondary to the agencies who claim to work
for the common good.
4.1 “Cosmopolitans of the World Unite” Against the Common Good

The most important point about the “poorest of the poor” and these more relative images of poverty in anti-institutional rants for les Bougons is that their resolution is never in the system. They do not look to claim rights or impose obligations but develop strategies to subvert gentrification, social assistance programs, the police, and all other institutions contributing to the common good. This is made clear in an episode entitled Citizen of the World, where Papa Bougon gives an impassioned direct speech against his brother Fred (mon Oncle) who announces a sense of pride on being called in for his first job interview. For the middle aged uncle Fred this is his first chance to finally become a ‘real citizen’ like everyone else.” When asked by his brother Paul or Papa Bougon why he wants this Fred’s reply is simply: “to contribute to my country.” This receives the following acerbic response:

Paul Bougon: Your country? Have you ever asked what your country has done for you? Nothing but Shit! Come on!!! A tiny elite of thugs that we never see runs your country! When you don’t get in their way or bother them they still feed off you and can’t leave you alone. If they decide to drive an electrical pylon in your yard, don’t worry they can do it whenever they want and will probably crush your car in the process. If they wanted to drive a truck over your pants they would pave them first; if they wanted to build a hog farm on your land, they would zone it that way for their piss. Whenever they might want to get two or three times richer, they pick up your pension and drop it into the hands of their friends without you knowing shit about it. That’s’ what your fucking country is…. Moron!!!

Fred Bougon: Yes but we have free hospital service.

Paul B : Aw, what luck for Christ sake. Would you pay for that service? It’s only there so you will keep working for them and so you keep buying their crap. The only way to screw the system Fred Bougon is never to work for it and to keep your money in your pocket. Not the bank! Banks lend to people who already have money! They make money for people who already have it. Come-on! (Someone knocks at the door) When you deposit your miserably small amount of cash once a week, they give you a huge 0.1% interest!! They do it just to wet your appetite so you will borrow for a mortgage on a house! Because they make money from you, you can’t make money from them! Is this what you mean by becoming a citizen like everyone else: mortgaged to your eyeball!
The carnavalesque audience of the Bougon family within the television frame (as distinct from the implied audience) listening to the rant provides relief to its serious tone (for the implied audience). A lighter comedy clashes with a darker one and helps save the extremely serious political speech from its serious oblivion and recover a joyous relativity. The Bougon family audience inside the sketch listening already know the speech before the implied audience does. The speech is like a manifesto they have already internalized. They wait nervously and cynically for him to finish his fight with his brother so they can get back to having fun. On the other hand, the implied listener is piecing together a political argument against ‘the system’ that sees everyone but the rich as being exploited. The sideward glance between the implied audience and Paul works against Uncle Fred who represents the logic of the system. The ‘we’ opposes any solution to end poverty that begins with the assumption that society has to create jobs. The poor as ‘other’ are constructs of the system. Getting a job is participating in the system that exploits everyone who does not subvert it.

4. Indirect Talk: Poor on Poor

Very few direct negative images of poverty and homelessness are found to draw together any of the implied audiences within the newspaper articles. One exception to this is a letter to the editor that describes the problem of poverty from the point of view of the business perspective. (Reference example) Most negative images of the poor are derived indirectly by arguing for the development of a neighborhood to illuminate homelessness or by comparing the ‘authentic’ homeless with ‘inauthentic’ homeless. A good example of the indirect negative image of poverty is the critique by Le Devoir’s Stéphane Baillargeon of the government inertia regarding its plan to develop the Quartier du Spectacle or the Arts Quarter at the heart of the city’s festival life. According to Jacques Primeau, the vice-president of the Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles, “the entrance to the sector is especially pitiful. Bleury Street is still scared by vacant lots with dilapidated buildings housing homeless squatters. This is a very troubling situation for a great city like Montreal. ” (Le Devoir, October 21, 2005, p. B2). The ideal development for the neighborhood should be more along the lines of what happened in the International Quarter of Old Montreal that created Le Palais de congrès, La Caisse de
Dépôt, and the offices of International Civil Aviation Association out of vacant lots and abandoned buildings. “These places have become prestigious addresses in Montreal.” No less than 17 prizes have been awarded for the development. The general director of the project states: “Planning a city is a great cultural gesture, and vice versa. It is a fundamental choice to propose a negative or positive plan and when people came into the no-man’s land of vacant lots and abandoned buildings that were there before it presented the negative image of poverty.”

Another negative image is the one the poor have of the poor, especially between cities, regions, and generations. Montreal is somewhat of a magnet for migrant homeless youth from across Quebec, Canada and from the United States who drop into the city during summer festival season. Some estimates, according to Hugo Meunier put the influx of people sleeping outdoors on any given night during this period at up to 40,000 whereas local homeless population gravitates between 20 and 30,000. Some leave jobs and home to party in the city for a while and live in the streets before returning back to their lives. According to Meniur, “The locals call them “shrimps”. They are temporary homeless who come in and make good money off the street then leave. André, a local for the last 8 years is quoted as saying “it really pisses me off when I see those imbeciles from Ontario. Manitoba and Vancouver do their squeegee number.” André, another local, claims the visitors are mainly junkies and see us locals as bums so we have to be aggressive some times just to protect their space. “The streets have really changed since the squeegees invaded us.”(July 18, 2005)

The sense of authentic street credibility has its own version in the straight world as can be seen in stories from the Gazette. Ann Sutherland writes on the front page about an out of town visitor who had his possessions stolen from his car including his much valued inline skates. He noticed a homeless shelter nearby and went in to ask the nun at the desk for help and posted a reward. Apparently the skates and most of his possessions appeared at the front desk anonymously a little while latter demonstrating an unexpected moral code between the shelter and the street. (September 12, 2005, p. A1) Another front-page cove story on the theme of codes of honor is about a wealthy Toronto panhandler selling happy faces in Montreal streets. According to journalist Catherine Solyn, the woman was reported seen in front of the Eaton Centre selling stickers and that she
commuted from Hamilton to get there in a Volkswagen Jetta. The story illustrates the moral question of ‘real street people’ versus ordinary thief’s mascara ding in poverty in order to profit: “I don’t make much money, and I’m just one person trying to live.” Hebert says she budgets to make about $75 a day-- which fluctuates according to the weather. She paid $300 in taxes last year, she says proudly. And she insists she is always honest with potential benefactors about what money is for: to feed and cloth her two children. Never mind one of her two children is twenty-five years old and apparently living on her own in Toronto.”

Distinguishing between real poor and homeless from pretend poor and homeless addresses the implied audience in two ways. First it confirms a shared judgment that a fraud carried out in the name of the poor is among the lowest transgressions. The implied audience is in agreement about the distinction between authenticity and fraud and between the more legitimate and the less legitimate. The fake panhandler and squeegee punks are the most fraudulent and the least legitimate respectively. The poor in the shelter are authentic and deserve a measure of forgiveness for sharing a moral reference as is seen in the return in of the stolen goods through the medium of the Nun. The seemingly wealthy panhandler from Toronto has no credibility and is universally condemned. The seasoned regulars on the street are given a significant moral edge over the ephemeral suburban or out of town street youth who are seen as less credible. The doubling of discourse suggests a scale of values that remind the implied audience of their conditional hospitality toward the poor and homeless. In the case of the regular “down and out”, the otherness of the poor is secured in the understanding offered them while the implied audience is encouraged to reject the second group of ‘others’ as inauthentic and as having violated conditions these values set for hospitality. The act of citizenship is framed in an ‘outing” of the inauthentic and non-credible and a call to answerability toward real panhandlers and real street people. Unlike the authentic poor and homeless the former are individuals who do not take responsibility and in so doing degrade the common good and transgress its condition for hospitality.

4.1 TV Poor on TV Poor
A final extract from *Les Bougons* illustrates a similar relativity in the concept of poverty as just discussed in the samples from the newspapers; that is, the way the poor might imagine the poor as ‘other’ than themselves. In the latter episodes of season two the Bougons have won a contract to develop a television series about a poor family who are involved in elaborate schemes to fraud government agencies. The pilot they have sold concerns the creation of a fake daycare for neighborhood children for which the government pays five dollars a day. The actual story line is drawn from an early episode of the first season. In the last phase of production before going on air Rita Bougon, the co-producer, leads a discussion with a focus group to see if any last minute changes are needed for the script. The focus group points out that the series is not funny and that it is not very realistic and a little offensive. After some questioning from Rita a member of the focus group says:

Focus Group: “I thought they were laughing at the poor.”

Rita: You thought they were laughing at you?

Focus Group: Not at us. At the poor.

Paul Bougon to Fred: Looks like we are going to have to rewrite it a bit more positively

Fred Bougon (the writer): Common Paul, these are just a couple of uneducated welfare bums, they don’t know anything…..

Marc Lebreque (Radio-Canada executive): But they are exactly the same people who watch our shows.

After the pilot airs Radio-Canada receives a series of complaints that pick up on the same point raised in the focus group and cancels the series.

Lebreque: Look Paul, things have changed since yesterday. We were flooded with complaints about the show. The audience feels that the show is laughing at the poor. They don’t think they speak that bad and that they don’t dress that bad. The thing is they want a more positive image of the poor, the League for Anti-Poverty think it will make the real horror of poverty seem banal.

Paul: How many complaints did you get?
Lambrequin: three hundred and thirty

Paul: That’s not much, no more than the ratings at Radio-Quebec!

Lambrequin: No. That’s not how it works. For each complaint the network assumes there are 100 other viewers who are also unhappy. That makes 330 thousand unhappy Quebecois!

Like the newspapers Les Bougons address their implied audience in two ways. In the first instance they empower them through a universal form of participation in that the laughter is not so much against a person or a group but rather invites all of its implied audience into the fun. Here all social classes share inside jokes about BS culture as if this were the distinguishing characteristic of Quebec society itself. The other way they address their implied audience is through shared knowledge that the system is no less corrupt than they are. That the poor do not recognize themselves as poor means they do not recognize themselves as “other”, as outside the universal or as impoverished. Here a very similar moral value to that expressed in the newspapers cited above. The implied audience is in agreement that television does not represent the ‘real poor’ and at the same time it participates in a destabilizing sideward glance that turns back on itself (as the institution of television) while pretending to look in another direction.

Conclusion

Whereas Public T.V. seriocomedy travels between an imaginary national realism and a local living culture of urban laughter, journalism moves between a social realism and moral allegory in consummating its relationship with its mainly urban readers. Journalists anticipate their reader’s intrinsic interests and frame their texts accordingly. Voices of the poor and homeless, or more often, of agencies, groups or individuals who speak for them, are framed in tones of moral disappointment and argued through independent data, ethnography, expert testimony, or opinion from scholarly sources. Public Broadcasts of seriocomedy have historically framed its implied audiences with knowing sideward glances about the common good and uses a variety of poetic devices that converge or bring into collision the serious and the comic; ironically reversing social,
linguistic, and bodily hierarchies; clashing and fusing accents, different vernacular, and speech genres; and addressing aspects of social life that range from the darkest and most cynical to the most light-hearted, mindless, and silly. (Nielsen, 2006) The juxtaposition of the seriocomedy and stories that treat poverty and homelessness in newspapers in Montreal reveals the way in which comic and serious discourse can be seen as extensions of each other. Comparing the two allows an image of how the public perceives poverty and homelessness and to a lesser extent about how the poor and homeless see the public. At the same time both the newspapers and seriocomedy demonstrate an important sensibility about Montreal’s urban citizenship in showing limits of rights claims that can be imagined or said in one place and time but cannot be imagined, said or represented in another.

References on Request
Radio and television seriocomedies are more recent forms of cultural production than print media but like newspapers tend to be studied more within the history of mass communication and within national rather than urban contexts. Seriocomedies include a variety of poetic devices that converge or collide the serious with the comic; ironically reverse social, linguistic and bodily hierarchies; clash and fuse accents, different vernacular and speech genres; and address aspects of the human condition that range from the darkest, most cynical and acerbic, to the most light-hearted, mindless and silly. (Frye, 1962; Bakhtin, 1984; Emerson, 2002; Nielsen 2006)

Whereas all 36 episodes from the first two seasons of *les Bougons* were examined, a manageable sample of 112 articles of varying lengths distributed across the three newspapers was selected using keyword selections from online search engines available from *Biblio Branché, Factiva* and *Proquest*. The keywords include poverty (*pauvreté*), poor (*pauvre*), vagrancy (*itinérance*), homeless (*sans abri*), and *centreaide* (a Montreal organization that includes 340 community groups who work in the area). Only articles from columns, editorials, letters from readers, news reports and feature articles were selected. The search was done in a way that insured results would contain both Montreal and one of the keywords in the same paragraph so as to focus the selection on the city as much as possible. After a preliminary selection of 316 articles that came from the online search we examined each one separately for relevance and arrived at a final sample of 112 that would be best suited to the more limited dialogical analysis that is our object of research.

Since 1960, CBC radio has produced over 80 satires in the form of one-hour radio plays and irregular mini-satires series as well as dozens of short-lived comic sketch shows. An example of the latter would be the 15-minute weekly comedy series on the three hour Morning program over the last twenty years. See the Concordia Centre for Broadcasting Studies collection of 16,000 radio drama scripts. See the online bibliographies [http://ccbs.concordia.ca/bbcarchives.htm](http://ccbs.concordia.ca/bbcarchives.htm).