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Recycling Images: Adaptation, Manipulation, Quotation in the Digital Age

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Horea AVRAM

Longing for the past is not a fissure, but a *feature* of the present.

Recycling seems to be the word of order in most Western societies today. Recycling is (or should be) part of our everyday behavior. It reflects our (righteous) obsessions with ecology, vintage, retro, recuperation, reevaluation, reciting, redesigning, and reprocessing.

The domain of the images – being them visual arts, cinema, media or popular culture – makes no exception from this trend or "rule of the Re-". A rule that, although devised only a few decades ago, has a long history in the field of visuality. Indeed, recycling is neither a modern, nor a postmodern concept: the idea and the mechanisms of recycling are the very motor that assured the continuity of culture over centuries. Recycling was always a way to valuate – and, surely, *re*-evaluate – the predecessors: Roman art was consciously fashioned on Greek models; medieval art took a great deal of inspiration from the previous pagan cultures; Renaissance art was an "update" version of the classical art (and much more); various realisms and expressionisms of the modern period were inspired by the precepts of visuality established long before them; avant-garde discourses have always been built on (negating) previous artistic moments; high-modernism's pretended autonomy and originality was largely based on former avant-garde principles; postmodernism's appropriation and recuperation (read relativization) of models was nothing but the systematization (and theoretization) of an already validated pattern of cultural exchange.

Of course, this doesn't mean that there is nothing new under the sun in the arts field. Originality is not just a "modernist myth" (Krauss 1986), and newness is not an undesirable construct (as per post-

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modernists). Art and media's effective survive – and yes! evolution – is based on finding new ways of expression and original means of manifestation. The problem, then, is not (the possibility of) innovation, but the fetishization of the new. That is, the frequent practice of presenting any new (media) arrival as a turning point in our culture, a historical change that will break with the immediate past and will surely change our future, an attitude manifested mainly in the media world, since art has somehow escaped from this obsession with the new. Such technological determinism proves to be not only "uncool" in the academia, but also intellectually unproductive. In the media theory field, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin dedicate a book-length study to demonstrate that no mediums (or, by the same token, artistic means) are singular and unified, but their definition and existence is in fact the effect of transfers and absorptions. This phenomenon is what they call *remediation*: "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms" (1999, 273). If these earlier forms are still actively present among us or if they are only occurrences of what Charles Acland (2007) calls "residual media" is a question of technological change or elective affinity.

Therefore, remediation plays an important role in defining the idea of recycling in this context although its forms and denominations are rather vast: adaptation, manipulation, quotation, remix, remediation, serialism, appropriationism, simulations, mash-up, cut-and-paste, or simply copy-paste. All of them are different manifestations of the same idea of recycling images; all of them are part of what was called in various contexts the "Re- culture". Such diversity proves that recycling – as a concept and as a means – is not linked to a specific artistic trend, media, technique or time period. It is as actual as ever: it is rather the mark of an attitude and a way of doing things. Longing for the past is not a fissure, but *a feature* of the present.

Having long played an essential role in the development of art, cinema, media and culture, recycling has emerged also as a field of theoretical exploration. Thus, the idea of recycling is understood here in a wider sense, not only as a production means, but also as an analytical and critical thinking tool, as an instrument for approaching and reclaiming – equally with deference and irreverence – the established cultural models. The main consequence of the practice of freely borrowing and recirculating sources is that artists, producers and theorists are able to question, if not quite undermine, the established values such as originality fetishism, uniqueness, authorship and copyright. So, instead of narcissism and hermetic construct, recycling relies on networking and borrowing, on adaptation, free reference and intertextual commentary. In this process, both the sources recycled and the resulting products are seen not as terminals, but as networked nodes, as open narratives ready to be incorporated and reinterpreted in a new, recyclable discourse.

The articles of this issue of the journal *Ekphrasis* deal with the theme of recycling in the larger context of the digital age, taken more as a temporal framework than a strict technical or conceptual delimitation. The essays bring together a truly interdisciplinary approach while addressing questions such as: how scholars, producers and artists

mobilize the notions of adaptation, manipulation and quotation nowadays? Do the recent developments of new media technologies affect the act of recycling images? What role the new recycling methods play in cinema, visual arts, literature and mass media? What are the goals, expectations, means and limitations of recycling images in the digital age? Is recycling a possible catalyst for the emergence of new technologies and mediums? How recycling images acted upon the development of new audiences?

The essay lineup offers a range of analytical discourses that reflect a number of important issues related to the idea and practice of recycling and how they are articulated through adaptation, manipulation and quotation.

The first section, *Re-appropriating Cinema*, looks at the various ways in which contemporary cinema appropriates and re-appropriates previous models. The section opens with Doru Pop's essay that evaluates the myth-making processes in the history of film, claiming that we are witnessing the coming together of a myth-illogical universe, where Hollywood practices and narrative structures have reached a point of amalgamation with no return. Using the concept of *cinematic kakology* the paper develops a reading of the consequences of the absurd amalgamation of myths and mythological figures in contemporary cinema.

Agnieszka Rasmus' essay addresses the important role of remakes in film culture and their vital function in reflecting societal and cultural transformations via a British to American cross-cultural exchange (from the 1938 *The Lady Vanishes*, to the 2005 *Flightplan*).

Florence Bögelein's essay discusses the anamorphic representations in *Dogville* by Lars von Trier, a film dominated by repetitions, allusions and literary clichés and where intertextuality may be said to play a major role.

In his essay, Dan Curean analyzes the aesthetic, cultural and technological dimensions of the dialectical move that takes place in the last century from perception to recording, from vision to visuality, from the organic to the technologic function, represented by the transformation of Eye into the "Cinema-Eye".

The second section, *Poetics of Adaptation*, takes as its focus adaptation and its various applications, definitions and theoretizations. Using a comparative and intermedial approach, Claudiu Turcuş's paper has three objectives: to outline a typology of the representation of communism in literature and cinema after 1989, to analyse communist nostalgia via the novel and the homonymous film adaptation entitled *I'm an Old Communist Hag!*, and to circumscribe this type of adaptation through the concept of the "ethics of infidelity".

Carla Cariboni Killander explores the avatars of the narrator in three different mediums: theatrical monologue, film and comics. The lateral, rather than hierarchical, adaptations prove that the differences between various modes of artistic expression determine not only the specificities of each medium, but also the public expectations and reception.

Employing Polysystem Theory Elaine Barros Indrusiak's paper maps some of the contributions film industry has brought to the Brazilian literary and cultural systems. She argues that adaption of the literary works into new texts and to new readers, may renew and enrich the original text, thus performing what Walter Benjamin conceived as translation's major role: to grant the original text "afterlife".

Liviu Lutas's essay aims to answer the question "why" an adaptation is made by studying three particular cases: Jasper Fforde's novel *The Eyre Affair* (2001), Abdellatif Kechiche's film *Black Venus* (2010) and Peter Greenaway's film *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (2012). Concentrating on aspects related to immersion and self-referentiality, he concludes that these examples might even put into question the canonical definition of adaptation itself.

Heidi Hart's contribution focuses on Olga Neuwirth's ongoing re-adaptation of Alban Berg's opera *Lulu*. The article argues that the opera's sonic fault-lines open a space for a parallel, visual opera to emerge that allows the original to be heard less as a canonical work than as an open process in which music is an entry, not an end in itself.

Exploring stage adaptations of novels through Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Jane Sunderland argues for rejecting as far as possible any sort of "fidelity discourse", i.e. that the stage adaptation—as a recontextualisation in a new medium—should be "faithful" to its novel sourcetext in terms of plot, characters, dialogue and resolution, or even, arguably, in "theme" or spirit.

Focusing on the adaptation of a Norwegian theater play (Jon Fosse's *Nightsongs*) for the big screen (Romuald Karmaka's film *Die Nacht singt ihre Lieder*), Daria Ioan's paper proposes a comparison between the two artists' aesthetic styles and working methods, in order to establish the degree of compatibility between theater and cinema in this specific production.

The third section, *Remediating Visual Arts*, is concerned with the problems of recycling and remediation processes in the visual arts field. Horea Avram's essay addresses the problem of remediation and medium's cross-identification proposing the concept of In Between Frames as the main theoretical instrument. Analyzing Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80) and Adad Hannah's "video stills" he demonstrates that the use of an atypical temporality in defining the image, photography turns into film, and video aspires to the condition of photography – a way to recuperate, reevaluate, recite and recycle a medium by turning into its opposite.

Elizabeth Mix's essay offers speculations and insights about appropriation as an "alchemic" act. The author explores how both art history and popular culture is appropriated, manipulated and transformed by new media artist Jason Salavon via processes that include operations upon databases and the application of digital interference to recycled music, films, videos or TV.

The aim of the paper authored by Mara Rațiu and Bogdan Iacob is to analyze the process of "digitalization" of activist art practices following the case of the Cluj-based (artists) collective MindBomb. Examining group's images created via appropriation,

recycling, détournement or cultural jamming, the authors argue that the use of the Internet and social media to reach larger audiences is not only scope broadening, but it has also an impact on the very nature of art activism.

Nils Jean's paper explores the idea of digital debris in Internet Art (words typed in search engines, bits of obsolete codes, abandoned web pages, broken links, etc.), demonstrating how such instances of discarded, hidden, elusive and ephemeral pieces of information can be recycled and resurfaced in art practice.

Ruth Pelzer-Montada discusses different approaches to recycling images generated by diverse technologies, from historical print to digital video, taking the concept and practice of "translation" as a methodological tool. These approaches, she argues, not only extend notions affiliated with media and processes, they also question established values of originality, authorship and cultural conceptualizations of the copy.

In his article, Florin Ştefan proposes a reflection on the shifts occurred in contemporary art production and theory that marks the move toward what Nicolas Bourriaud calls "post-production". He proposes the term "nostalgic paradigm" to analyze this larger artistic strategy characterized by indetermination, fragmentation and recirculation of models.

Last but not least, in the *Interview* section Rodica Mocan discusses with multi-media artist Klaus Obermaier about technology, art, modes of production and spectatorial involvement. (This is the first of two parts of the interview; the second part will appear in the next issue of *Ekphrasis*.

Therefore, by marking a number of key issues – inevitably uneven and incomplete – related to the problem of recycling in arts, cinema, and media, the essays selected here offer important insights not only into the actual state of the theory and practice of recycling, but, even more, into our present and future past-oriented cultural conditionings. This research effort will hopefully contribute to open and reopen new fields of debate about and through the very concept of recycling. Since, we should keep in mind that recycling, in both practice and theory, means searching rather than finding solutions. Recycling proves that there is no definitive statement in art. It has never been. Recycling means rather to *activate* what is over there for us to use: forms, ideas, art pieces, mediums, models and concepts.

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Doru POP

Mythology Amalgamated. The Transformation of the Mythological and the Re-appropriation of Myths in Contemporary Cinema

Abstract

The paper evaluates the myth-making processes in the history of the movie-making industry, claiming that we are witnessing the coming together of a myth-illogical universe, where Hollywood practices and narrative structures have reached a point of amalgamation with no return. The classical migration of myths has become, in this third age of cinematic mythology, a manifestation of the re-mythologization by appropriation. Analyzing the effects of ideological use of mythology in cinema, the author takes a critical stand against the *mishmash of representations* in films today. Using the concept of *cinematic kakology* the paper develops a reading of the consequences of the absurd amalgamation of myths and mythological figures in contemporary cinema.

Keywords: Mythology, cinema, comic-books, Disney, Greco-Roman heroes, archetypes.

Brief considerations on the "fixed" nature of myth

Defining the myth-making process is a complex endeavor, yet it can be simply described by its three major and distinct manifestations: religious, psychological and cultural. Thus any myth can be analyzed using a given approach, stemming from the functioning of its content. Then sacred, or legend-like dimension, explains the narrative component. The psychological dimension includes both the sacred (or the spiritual) and the personal experiences with mythological consequences. The cultural role of the myths can be his-

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torical or applied to a specific cultural context. Albeit, before choosing any version of myth-making, there is an important distinction to be made. Since all myths are described as homogenous in their profound nature, manifest continuous in throughout the history of mankind, and persistent in culture and art we must ask if this definition is still functional. There is a classical definition, provided by the historian of religions, Mircea Eliade, which provided one of the most common models for this perspective: "A myth never disappears... it only changes its aspect and disguises its operations" (Eliade 1957/ 1967: 27). Eliade's view expresses this dominant understanding of the role played by myths in human culture; a myth is basically an original story, in the sense that it is a narrative about the origins of mankind. In this respect, any myth-making keeps a deep sacred role, even in contexts where the profane dominates the imaginary of the communities. The myth is not only as immutable as the "eternal sacred" in humanity, but it is also true (Eliade 1963: 5-6).

Carl Gustav Jung provided another classical description of the myths as "mythologems", better known as archetypes. An archetype is fundamentally manifested in recurrent myths, which can be traced in any number of manifestations, yet preserving the initial qualities. Even if the archetype is not a myth, there is an archetypal continuity of myths, traced by Jung within the unconscious of humanity, the collective consciousness manifested in symbols (Jung 1956). Following this immutable nature of myth, one of the most important descriptions of this archetypal functioning of myth-making comes from Joseph Campbell, who has condensed the heroic pattern into a single "monomyth". The hero undergoes his adventures then comes back, this is a single repeated plot: Prometheus, Ulysses, Jason, St. George they are all part of a stable archetypal structure (Campbell 1972).

A third major view on mythological functioning was represented by cultural critics like Roland Barthes. Mostly taking on a post-Marxist opinion and describing myths as carriers of ideology, this perspective presents myths as multi-layered structures, yet fixed since they code the representations of power structures in society (Barthes 1957). Once again, this means that the myth has a stable role and manifestation, it is a form of fixating the reality of social life into a narrative of some sorts. In this sense we can develop a mythological interpretation of cultural objects; myth operates within the boundaries of a popular culture founded on a re-representation of the "new" (politics, ideology) with the tools of the "old" (images, narratives, myths).

Cultural migration of myths – the Great Mother from Egypt to Christian lore

One important direction when approaching the interpretation of the imaginary (cinematic or otherwise) is to build upon the paradigmatic nature of the images themselves. The concept of the familiarity of images, borrowed from perceptual psychology, when used to understand the functioning of contemporary imaginary formations shows that there is direct link between cultural memory and visual recognition. We

are attached to those images which are familiar to us, we tend to use these images in order to organize our past, which lead to an *amalgamated imaginary* built by transferred values of various visual structures.

Clearly, mythological transference is not a trait of modernity, nor a novelty of post-modernity. The ancients were keen to conveniently pick up and re-use any myths that suited their religious needs. The appropriation by Rome of the whole Greek mythology (Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004) is the most notorious form of borrowing in the history of European culture, since the Romans moved wholesale not only statues and representation made by the Greeks, but also entire visual structures and mythological narratives into their own culture. Versions of their Greek counterparts permeated the Roman Empire (and, actually, some of the most important art forms of the Greeks are kept due to the Roman replicas).

Yet, in order to understand the longevity of an image and the amalgamation process one of the best examples is that provided by Jung: the Mother myth. Although Jung uses this myth to support his claims that there is a continuous meaning to stories in our collective psyche, one which has a constant content, which basically make it an archetype, the instances in which this myth appears indicate more than just re-occurrence. Following the historical path of the Mother Goddess, as indicated by two remarkable Jungian analysts, Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, takes us to the conclusions that the there is a "Myth of the Goddess" which can be traced from the early Upper Palaeolithic to the modern representations of womanhood and maternity (Baring and Cashford 1991/ 1993). For this approach there is a synthesis of mythological figures, not far from what Jung has described in "Psychological aspects of the Mother Archetype" as the transference of images. This is part of specific trait of any myth; its ability to be transferred from one generation to another, thus developing a "collective unconscious".

This "chain of mythological representations" takes us from the various representations of the different Mother Goddesses as virgin and like Persephone and Isis, to the Madonna iconography of the early Christian art. The continuity of borrowed forms of representation and the multiple sources of the image of the Mother of God, be it Cybele, Isis with Horus in her arms, makes it obvious that many qualities of the pre-Christian figures were exported into the early Christian representations (Belting and Jephcott 1994). For example the bear breasted Mother feeding the child that recrudesced by the late Renaissance is most likely to have been taken from the images of Isis breastfeeding Harpocrates on her lap, while Isis and Horus constituted a reference for the early representations of the Virgin and child. This perspective of cross-cultural migration of images generates a narrow interpretation of iconological transference.

Clearly all religions have imported (and exported) many of the visual structures belonging to other religious forms. Yet even more relevant is the fact that this continuous transfer of images and mythologies, which began in the earliest manifestations of human culture, is not over. As David Morgan extensively discussed the process, us-

ing examples from India, to Indonesia, from Japan to Nigeria, our contemporary religious manifestations are still part of a global visual transmutation (Morgan 2005). Images are circulating at an international scale and, even if most of the times this is a form of de-sacralization, religious imagery and imaginary structures are appropriated and enculturated.

But, in order to understand what is going on with the myth transfer, we must go beyond the simple hybrid myths, those which are recurrent in several cultures. Like the myth of Aphrodite, who is manifested as Ishtar-Astarte, with roots in many of the Eastern goddesses of love to the modern myths about beauty or the myth of the Flood, which crosses from the Sumerian story of Utnapishtim to the Semitic Noah, from the Navajo nation stories of the American Indians to the Chalchiuhtlicue stories in Mexico, these mere recurrent themes. The major problem becomes visible when these "adaptations" of old imaginary formations take "un-orthodox" manifestations in their cultural use and mythological practices. One of the best examples is the Christian story of the last supper and particularly Leonardo da Vinci's fresco. This is one of the most "exported" cultural product in modern visual media. From The Beatles promotion photo shoot to the sci-fi movie *Battlestar Galactica,* from the HBO series *The Sopranos*, to book covers (as is the case with George Carlin), from fashion design (as is with the advertisements for Marithé and François Girbaud) to various comics, they has been a multiplicity of uses of this Christian visual archetype. Contemporary visual artists are not simply recanting an "old" imagine. Contemporary photographers, painters and cinematographers, who are notoriously borrowing mythological narratives and transforming them into new aesthetic discourses, are putting these stories into contexts which are not only forms of hybridization. As is the case with Susan Dorothea White's "The First Supper", where Jesus and the apostles were substituted by different women of various races, or David LaChapelle's version of the *Last Supper*, represented in a totally mundane context, or the parodical case of Buñuel's *Viridiana*, one of the classical cinematic re-enactments of the subject, we are witnessing more than a simple appropriation.

Mythological representations and cinema

When dealing with myths in cinema the first temptation is to link the discussion to films depicting the Greco-Roman heritage. Sometimes called neo-mythologism (Winkler 2001), the process taking place within the mythological cinema is described the as the visual appeal of the supernatural in a world dominated by rationalism. The new-mythologization of the ancient stories is part of a deep need of humanity for the sacredness of myths.

This is where the interpretative process take on a positive role, the analysis of myths in cinema is done by attributing movies a "good" cultural role. This optimistic view of the role played by myths mixed in film narratives comes from the early interest for classical antiquity in literary studies and thus movies dealing with mythology are per-

ceived within their pedagogical function. In this respect, movies are simply instruments for teaching mythology.

The second perspective, also obvious in other works edited by Winkler, is to look for themes and tropes borrowed from mythology and simply transferred into the film narratives. Here the myth functions as an interpretative tool for cinematic storytelling. Typically, movies like *Star Wars* can be read as an extension of the Argonauts tale, in a film like *What Dreams May Come* the critics identify the story of Orpheus, and characters like Schwarzenegger in *Predator* are representations of Hercules (Frauenfelder 2005: 210-213). Even non-mythological movies can be described as "echoes" or "references" of mythological narratives, as is, for example *O, Brother Where are Thou* where some have identified the lineage of the Odyssey, or On the Waterfront, where critics found Christian elements. This view preserves the classical understanding of myths - they are *mythoi*, that is the Greek word for stories, simply narratives about people and places of the past which can be re-told.

This *re-telling* dimension of the "mythological cinema", as practiced by authors like William Ferrell, looks only at the recurrence of myths in contemporary culture. Movies can be described as modern stories of ancient sources, the premise of this connection being that of the continuity of mythological representations, since myths are extensions of human consciousness, they "travel" from ancient times to the present (Ferrell 7). Following the basic archetypal understanding of the role of myths, such interpretations rather describe "resemblances" between films, literature and myths, and not the deep transference happening. Thus *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a merely quest for the Grail, or, for that matter, *Jaws* can be seen as a primitive form of Moby Dick. In this sense, myths are adaptations, simple replications of older structures and storytelling paradigms.

For other authors (Singer 2008) film as myth-making is part of the Western civilization's permeability to ancient the mythological stories, like The Garden of Eden, the variations of the Pygmalion myth, The Beauty and The Beast or Orpheus stories. Cataloging the manifestations of various tropes can become an indicator of the process of mythologization. The interest for myth and mythology in cinema can be linked to the Victorian fascination with classical art and narratives. This interest grew with the development of mass produced images and is now part of our popular culture (Williams 2013). Clearly, the contemporary media function as instruments of mythologization. As Walter Benjamin has eloquently proved it, modernity is a copy oriented world, even the myths which are replicated in the modern representations are simply second-grade narratives, they are lacking their original aura.

Historically, the interest for mythological representations in cinema was described as following two major moments. According to Solomon, the first can be characterized by re-enactments (1897-1918), were the early "mythological movies", be it biblical (*Ben-Hur* 1916, *The Ten Commandments* 1923) or classical (*Odissea* 1911), are reproducing extremely known mythological scenes and transposing them onto the big screen.

The second moment was between 1952-1981, when Hollywood rediscovered classical mythology and the potential of myth adaptation (Solomon 2001).

I would argue that there is a third movement, beginning after 1981, when the Desmond Davis produced the first remake of the Clash of the Titans, later developing into a modern cinematic trilogy beginning with the 2010 3D saga directed by Louis Leterrier. Now "old myths" are not simply re-enacted for different audiences. My contention is that we are now in a third phase of the mythological representations. In this trend, the copy-like nature of the cinema mythologies brings with it the practice of multi-layered, multiple connections of meaning. In this sense, the myths are not simply de-territorialized, that is transposed into another field of signification only to create new meaning, but they become a part of an *amalgamation process*. As Zipes eloquently described how the modern fairy tales are simply transformed materials, stories produced by *colporteurs*, by peddlers of old narratives (Zipes 2006: 12), cinema is part of this effort of re-mythologization by appropriation. The argument of this interpretation starts with the fact that the roots of the contemporary mythological formations are located in the realm of re-writing, where truncation and abbreviation, dyslexic transformation and aberrant codifications, is more than just a de-sacralization of the world. We no longer use secular narratives with mythological content to replaced the "authentic" sacredness of the primitive ones. There is a "myth-illogical" manifestation of the mythological, where telling stories which are neither sacred, nor profane, manifested in incongruous representations and symbols without fixed meaning - sometimes even based on connections lacking contiguity – is a new form of peddling. The following discussion will analyze how the mythical amalgamation works, and how it provides multitudes of meanings and is continuously permeating our imaginary formation.

"Let each man be a Greek in his own way"

The imagination of modern man started its amalgamation when Goethe claimed a transformation of the German mind as a replica of the Greek mythological framework. Obviously, this has been a recurrent trend; the Greek myths and mythological figures have deep roots in the formation of our modern society. From the revival of the ancient world in the Renaissance, to the German Hellenism, to the advertising world today, we are surrounded by Greco-Roman images and representation. As it has been pointed out, famous brands and commercially successful products like Nike, use this connection between the modern sport activities and objects (like shoes) and old goddess (its winged version of victory). Sometimes the connection is not direct, as for Ajax (the cleaning product and not the hero of the Trojan war), where the link is lost in the meanders of contemporary myth-making. Finally from our rockets and space programs who carry names like Apollo or Mercury, to the use the Olympian torch and the commercial online practices like Amazon, we constantly return to mythology for meanings.

In this respect, we can say that we there is a modern mythological transformation process, a modernizing of the "old" mythological stories, of the classical narratives

about gods or heroes, so that they would serve contemporary (commercial, political, cultural) purposes. These are just old stories disguised into new storytelling practices. There is no changing of the structures of the myth, the "new myths" are not creating new expressions, they are only using the existing material for different purposes. In a sense the modernization of the classical myths equals their transformation into popular mythology. Dumbed down for the use of the average consumer, the grand stories of the past become part of modern myth-making by being reduced to stereotypes, to oversimplified manifestations of the expressivity of their ancient sources.

An important path of myths into the popular culture is taken by their modernization through cartoons and other graphic forms of storytelling. As Janet Wasko showed it, Walt Disney opened the path the for the re-appropriation of old narratives (Wasko 2001). As noted by many other authors, almost all the Disney stories (also those which are not directly taken from the Grimm brother's repertory) are at a certain level re-enactments of old myths, most of them referring directly to the Greek mythology. Snow White is nothing but Persephone re-designed (with Demeter as Evil Mother), or Hercules who is a simplified version of the ancient hero. Yet, as it will be developed more below, the Hercules franchise, beginning with the 1996 Disney animation, becomes relevant for the amalgamation process. In order to fit Hercules into the wider audience, the mythological figure is transformed into something completely detached from the original myth. In turn, this transformation is later exported into several other representations, as was the case with *The Legendary Journeys* TV series, where Kevin Sorbo played a Hercules which looked more like a fashion and body building character. Hercules is amalgamated into an appealing, Apollo-like hero, far from the original, brutal, thick bearded and heavy muscled figure represented in the Greek statues and pottery.

The same process takes place in the mythological universe of the "superhero" comics, as it was initially developed by Marvel and DC Comics, and later amplified by the cinematic mythology of the Marvel Studios. Although some authors have tried to prove the Christian roots of the comic book heroes (Dalton 2011), these heroic figures are extracted from the original context of heroes and demigods, that is the Greek and Roman legends. The "superhero" comics, as noted previously by Richard Reynolds, offer us a "modern mythology" which takes elements from several stories of the past and re-designs them for contemporary audiences. At this level, heroes like Spider-Man are nothing more than expressions of the old "regular guy" narratives, where "normal" human beings are called upon to serve humanity as civilizers. Just like the Greek heroes, Peter Parker is transformed by a supernatural intervention only to become himself a supernatural being – thus a demigod. Spider-Man is not different from heroes like Theseus or Perseus, who fight various monsters in order to save their fellow humans from oppression. Even the enemies of the modern day heroes are representations of the old monstrous manifestations. And, just like Superman, Spider-Man and many other comic book heroes are raised by foster parents, another trait shared

with Perseus and other Greek demigods. All these figures have their roots in early mythical representations, and, as indicated by another famous Marvel creation, the X-Men franchise, they are part of a re-creation of the old Pantheon into a new mythological imaginary.

Yet there is more to this re-mythologization since, as it is the case with X-Men, where professor Xavier is more than a paraplegic Zeus, he is an expression of a mixed figure, a by-product of the fascination for the Occult. The artificial and superficial re-enactments in the comic-book universe makes way to an amalgamated mythology, where there is a melange of Nietzschean philosophy with the gods from the Walhalla, where Golems and berserkers are mixed with Egyptian figures like Horus and the Judeo-Christian Messiah operates with the tools of technological witchcraft. This mixing up of narratives creates a *spandex* (Knowles 2007) mythology, one which is elastic and inclusive, opened to a more complex interpretation.

Mythology functions as a tool for ideology

In opposition to the idea that myth-making is a natural manifestation of humanity and that humans are producing myths as a primordial tool for expression (Tylor 1871), the transformation process we discussed leads us to another major function of myths, that of ideological instrument. As indicated by Adorno (together with Horkheimer), in the industrial culture of today myths have become simply ideological tools, instruments to convey a dominant discourse. The culture industry is based on blending aesthetic residues, mixing everything into a fog of their own meaning (Adorno 102). Following this line of argumentation, since any myth has a social and political content, one which we cannot understand independently from its context of production, the mixing of similar mythologies lead to the idea that old myths are destructed in order to create sameness.

The myths function as an "assamblages", in the tradition put forward by Deleuze and Guattari in their framework of interpretation. The nature of the assemblage is the linking of things which are not naturally linked together, by the force of the mechanic production of meaning in the contemporary reproduction based industries of the visual. Emptying the identity of the myth and then re-organizing it into a new body of meanings is a by-product of the mechanical society. We are machines of assembling, of connecting realities and significations which are otherwise separated (Deleuze and Guattari 1988).

More relevantly, the potpourri of elements mixed into the identity of these new mythological figures, as is becomes explicit in the case of the Disney characters, shows the profound inter-changeability of the mythological order created in cinematic representations. These are multi-layered cultural artifacts, stratified representations which allows them to be used as commodified good, designed for profitable global sales. These are not simply "mini-myths", versions for the use of kids, they are ready-made myths, for the use of commercial benefits.

The productivity of the ready-made myths created by Disney starting with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* remains one of the most re-used content in popular culture today. All the "new" Disney princesses are merely replicas of the initial illustration. From the early female characters *Cinderella* (1950) to the *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), from the "middle age" of characters like Jasmine (1992) or *Pocahontas* (1995), to the newest additions of "late Disneyzation" such as Tiana (2009) and *Rapunzel* (2010), there is a permanent mechanics of the replication, of re-shaping of the same traits and the reproduction of the same qualities. This ensures not only the commodification of the imagines, sold as dolls and children's toys, projected on screens and packaged as food products, it also ensures the ideological control of the imagination of women. The schema of the "primordial" princess, which was Snow White, presents the viewers with an ideal of femininity corresponding to a patriarchal scenario (missing mothers, caring fathers, marrying endings) which, according to the argument put forward by Marjorie Worthington (Worthington 2009), drives women for almost 100 years into the "marriage plot" and their submission to the male centered power.

As pointed out by Groys (2008: 166-67), this very appropriation of cultural objects is an expression of the capitalist ideological victory. As expansion of the political power, the ability of cinema to take and plunder any mythological structures and to use them as it sees fit is a form of occupying imaginary territories. This is a conquest of the past, in order to have it serve the purposes of the present. The mental territory of contemporary culture is not only privatized (for the benefit of the grand corporations like Disney), but it is simultaneously a carrier of ideology. This instrumentation is visible in other Disney productions. In *Beauty and the Beast* (1992), a re-telling of a Beaumont tale, the Beast becomes a rich (albeit secluded) nobleman, owning a castle and having many object-servants, who ends up loved by the lower classes. Also the "orphan story" (of almost all the characters) is a representation of the ideological power of modern myth-making. The orphan needs saving, and the saving of the orphan is done by accepting the social order.

Again, the first animated feature film in the history of cinema, which takes on a Grimm Brothers story without any appropriation scruples, is relevant for this discussion. With Snow White Disney has set the standards for the cinematic practices of appropriation, for the amalgamated mythological practices of the "factory of dreams". This so-called adaptation is simply an appropriated story, which, although belonging to the public domain, remains "closed" in the possession of the Disney company. Of course, as soon as the stories used by Disney started to fall into the public domain, others were following suit. In only one year (2012) there have been several takes on the old fairy tale: the ABC TV Series *Once Upon a Time* (starting 2011) *Mirror, Mirror* (2012) *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), *Snow White: A Deadly Summer* (2012), *Grimm's Snow White* (2012), *Blancanieves* (2012), which lead to the Disney's trade-marking the brand in 2013.

Ever since Snow White, the movie making industry has incorporated classical stories into its long line of misused storytelling. The re-appropriation operates by re-arranging the existing elements, by picking up "abandoned-ware" imaginary, and importing some of the most known visual. By colonizing the imaginary of the past, capitalist appropriation is picking up bits and pieces of myths and stories, then puts them into the assembling machine of the cinema industry, thus creating new organisms, which apparently indicate a unicity and coherence. This amalgamation is not a falsification of stories, nor is it a simulacra of reality. It is the bringing together of elements which do not belong together.

This comes against the hypothesis supported by authors like Jack Zipes, who consider that Walt Disney has "sanitized" the stories and folktales, by domesticating" the very nature of their subversive dynamics (Zipes 2006). There is rather a shameless destruction of myths in order to appropriate them, very close to the concept of Disneyfication proposed by Schickel. Alan Bryman take further this idea and develops the concept of "Disneyzation". Bryman's suggestion is that we are living in a world dominated by hybrid consumption (p. 57 sq), that is a consumption based society founded on variety rather than on homogenization (as is the case with a close concept, that of McDonaldization). Disney's the cultural forms are bringing together a variety of consumption forms, similar to those of the supermarket. Every institution is influenced by the Disneyzation, the universities and hospitals and even the Vatican start to look like Disney theme parks (Bryman 2004: 98) The merged spaces of Disneyworld correspond to a merged imaginary universe produced by the Disney movies and the Disney mythology. In this sense, the Disney myth-making is building an imaginary shopping mall, where there is everything and anything, without any natural relationship between the products. It is a multiplex of possibilities, a hybrid mythological space which can fulfill any desire, one where there is a general *mishmash of representations*.

From transcultural movie-making to cinematic kakology

The Asian mythology and culture had a long standing influence on Hollywood productions, with movies like *Star Wars* or *The Matrix* as proofs of this impact. Transcultural interchanges between the Asian culture and cinema indicate mutual transference, best illustrated by Kurosawa's the appropriation of European classical authors – his adaptations of Shakespeare (*Ran* – King Lear) or Dostoyevsky (*Hakuchi* – The Idiot) – and the subsequent use of his productions as inspirations for Westerns and other films (*Shicinin no Samurai/ The Seven Samurai* was re-invented into *The Magnificent Seven*).

Yet the recent changes in global cinema, characterized by a new hodgepodge of myths and symbols, show a turn towards a *mishmash of representations*, going beyond the simple interchanges. A relevant example is *Pacific Rim*, the 2012 Guillermo del Toro's film. This production proves the mechanisms of a troubling imaginary cacophony – something which can only be described as *kakology* (kakos, imago and logos), that

is total the amalgamation of imaginary objects. The movie mixes elements taken from other similar productions and mingles myths and narratives. Pacific Rim describes robots taken from *Transformers,* with the power source from *Iron Man*, who fighting monsters from *Godzilla*, using heroes acting like those in *Power Rangers* and using narrative tropes from films like *Blade Runner*, *Rocky, King Kong* or *Jurassic Park*. Del Toro's film mixes everything in a "rattle tattle" tale, where urban myths are co-joined with aimless representations.

The very name of the fighters/ heroes of the movie describes this pointless mix; they are monstrous and impossible hybrids between a German word (Jäger = hunter) and a Japanese one (Kaiju = monster). Thus the "Kaiju Jaegers", who kill creatures coming from another planet, sent directly through the core of the Earth, are re-enacting popular culture figures in a typical apocalyptic story. While the main characters are piloting huge robots, like those in Japanese anime films and the *Power Rangers* TV series, they establish neural connections similar to those of the characters of *Avatar* and are fighting creatures which look as if they were borrowed from *Jurassic Park* - or simply dinosaurs which grew up around the reactor at Fukushima nuclear plant. Even the functioning principle of the giant robot, which, we are told, is controlled by two people, each coordinating his hemisphere, becomes pointless, since there is another robot, called Crimson Typhoon, which is "driven" by Chinese triplets!

The cinematic kakology operates with multi-layered stereotypes. As seen before, the first level is visual; the robots are re-appropriated images from reality mixed with stereotypical mythology. The main, "rebel" robot, is called Gipsy Danger and looks like the Empire State Building (since it is a representation of the American independent spirit); the Russians drive a semi-primitive robot called Cherno Alpha, which takes pieces from a Soviet tank; while the Australians run a super-robot named Striker Eureka, which functions similarly to a Rover. The nonsensical path taken by the Mexican director started with *Hellboy*, which was a more successful attempt to put together elements from video games, comics, and popular science magazines, all looking like colored plastic toys and future gifts in "happy-meals". If the Hellboy series creates an almost logical series of connections between the elements, in *Pacific Rim* there are series of explanations completely disjoined both in time and in space. For example the argument is that the dinosaurs existed because there was a previous attempt to colonize Earth, failed due to... the good weather conditions. There is no clear understanding of the chronology of events – were the dinosaurs destroyed by the Kaijin, or they were their illegitimate children, since they look very much alike?

The second level of melange, the narrative amalgamation is even worse. The film mixes chaotically elements from other cinematic mythologies. This is the case with the planetary Apocalypse brought by the reptilian aliens – allowing the crocodilian monsters to fight mega-robots. Yet the narrative kakology takes us to another level of storytelling ramblings. Travis Beacham, the screenwriter of this movie (relevantly enough,

he has written *Clash of the Titans*) is using half-digested ideas taken out Jules Verne, pseudo-scientific movies and children's films. The amalgamation is simply infantile when the Kaiju and the Jaegers are fist fightingc - why should the be boxing, when humans have nuclear weapons? More so, why not use the Power Rangers type of swords all the time? Why walk on the ocean floor when they could swim (since they have atomic engines)? Why an alien culture having a technology so advanced uses mindless creatures to colonize their desired planet? Why a humanity who managed to make such powerful mechanical creatures is on the brink of destruction by the Kaijin? The simple answer is that our modern day mythologies are conglomerates of meaningless representations reproducing endlessly the same imaginary structures.

When Campbell developed the concept of the "hero with a thousand faces" he certainly did not have in mind the mixed-up amalgamation of God and Superheroes in the contemporary cinema. As Grant Morrison explained in a recent book, the superheroes are so important in the contemporary world because they operate in an empty context, they exist in a world in which the gods are gone, replaced by celebrities acting like super-gods (Morrison 2012). And in the pantheon of late modernity, or *videomodernity*, we have a place for all the deities, no matter in which mythological universe these supernatural beings existed. They can come from the Greco-Roman world or the Asian steppes, these pagan gods live alongside with other incompatible ancient divine entities, like those of Christian extraction. All together, in turns, they coexist with the gods of Walhalla and the new deities from our own time.

One of the most relevant Marvel narratives, The Avengers, created by Stan Lee, manifests the same excess of super-gods and super-heroes per square inch (in terms of comic book publishing). The Avengers are a mixture of characters putting together Iron Man, Ant-Man, Wasp, Thor and The Hulk, in a series of adventures where the Nordic god Thor is fighting alongside Captain America, joined by Hercules, Rogue and later even Wonder Man. This ensemble of amalgamated heroes and gods was brought to screen by director Joss Whedon (Marvel's The Avengers 2012). Whedon puts together all the superheroes and creates a jumble of action, conflicts, twists and confrontations between various heroes, who were dominating lately the popular cinema. The film becomes a visual excess of mythologizing – by the use of excessive special effects, and an added excess of fiction and superficiality. However, the movie reached staggering sales of 1.5 billion dollars internationally, with an initial budget of 220 million. This proves not only how profitable super heroes are, but also how popular the amalgamation of images and narratives has become. The story takes the viewer from the Asgard of the Eddas to to the modern day New York, where a Chitauri alien invasion is expected. In this chaotic melange, Iron Man bickers with Captain America, then fights with Thor fight with the green hero Hulk emerging as victorious. This is the typical dyslexic mythological make-up, nothing is in place, nothing matches, nothing fits together, while everything mixes indiscriminately.

"Spoof-o-logy", or the parodic re-appropriation of myths

Boris Groys used the term *appropriation art* to describe a preferred instrument of the postmodern thinking and creativity. Appropriation, explicit from the early modern art of Andy Warhol, to the latest productions in contemporary film industry (Groys 2008: 8-9), is practiced as a transformative intervention on existing forms. Creating almost paradoxical manifestations by changing the use of objects is a characteristic of the contemporary art. Here the creation of any new image turns, in fact, into a form of radical criticism towards the initial object (as was the case with Duchamp's work) and an expression of the discontent towards the "original" or, for that matter, any originality.

In cinema it was Mel Brooks, the "grandfather" of cinematic parody, who illustrated best how the mechanism of ironic appropriation works; by the derisive mutation of the initial work, parody, today a totally separated cinema genre, thrives withing the boundaries of intertextuality. The film parody is nothing more than a manifestation of the *pastiche*, as Jameson has put it (1992), which is in turn part of the postmodern mindframe. The classical mutation of meanings practiced by Brooks through the use mockery, has put the foundations of the "spoof". His movies, starting with *Blazing Saddles* (1974), a parodical re-appropriation of the westerns, to *Space Balls* (1987) where various materials from *Star Wars* and other sci-fi movies is incorporated, to *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993), with the re-digesting of the quest and adventure genre, follow the logic of re-enactment. Since the spoof does not exist without the original, it is constantly forced to make references to the initial forms.

The tradition of Brooks, which continues today with the movies of Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer, has become an incongruous mix of half-digested references, in a mix-up of amalgamented clichés. Friedberg and Selzer, in a series of movies like *Epic Movie* (2007), *Meet the Spartans* (2008), and more recently *The Starving Games* (2013), show how instead of the parodic treatment of old materials, the amalgamation becomes a source of degraded intertextuality. Actually the intertextuality becomes sexual-textuality, since most of the times the amusement is not only breaking the limits of logic, but also the common sense. In the amalgamated universe of second-hand mythology there are no more distinctions, no more codes (sexual or social), and the sheer destruction and re-construction of meaningless situations is the only purpose. In these movies Spiderman is witnessing a strip tease performed by Mystique (from X-Men), in a the melange of tropes and narratives which allow the same character to move from sequences from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, to episodes in which he is transferred from *Borat* to *Superman*, from Jack "Swallow" of the Caribbean, to the *Da Vinci Code* and even *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Of course, everything is spiced up with gratuitous sexual innuendos and scatological humor.

A more primitive version of this re-appropriation can be found in one of the most vulgar films of this kind: *Your Highness* (2011). Written, acted by Danny McBride, this production indicates the transmutation of mythology in contemporary visual cul-

ture. The comedy of McBride not only reaches heights of sexual innuendo, disgusting and vulgar references to scatology, but it also practices the most debased form of mythological amalgamation. *Your Highness*, a film starting as Brooks-esque parody of *The Princess Bride*, mixed with the typical "comedy of fools", a sort of *Dumb and Dumber* in medieval mise-en-scene, becomes a total mishmash of nonsensical references. For example in a scene where the hero, Thadeous, kills the mythical Minotaur, he is unable to cut a horn as a souvenir, thus he decides to mutilate the monster's penis and to wear it as a necklace. Or, when he wants to convince the wise wizard to help with his initiation journey, he provides the man with a thorough masturbation under the magic robe! Or, when he discovers that his squire, Fabious, is a traitor, he shows everybody that the man has a vagina, so this becomes another good opportunity for nudity and, more importantly, exposing the viewers, for several minutes, and from several angles, this absurd amalgamation of identities. The climax of the movie, a pseudo-irony of the Highlander films, takes us to the ill-inspired moment of "The Fuckening" - not to mention the ending of the movie with a final masturbation, void of any sense.

Finally the best example of how appropriation work properly is the *Shrek* franchise - *Shrek* (2001), *Shrek 2* (2004), *Shrek the Third* (2007) and *Shrek Forever After* (2011), with the prequel *Puss in Boots* and some extras (mostly holiday specials) *Shrek the Halls* and *Scared Shrekless* together with several short films (*Shrek in the Swamp*; *Thriller Night*; *Donkey's Caroling* and others). This is one of the most prolific production in recent cinema, and is extremely relevant for the discussion about the functioning of myths in contemporary visual culture. Mixing characters taken from Perrault, like Puss in Boots, with Rumpelstiltskin, an antagonist borrowed from the Brothers Grim, with witches and humans as equally evil participants, *Shrek* puts a spin on the traditional fairy tales, making amalgamation its central axis. As noted before, Shrek is the typical postmodern story, where the melange of fairy tales is based on a reversal of identities – an *Orcus* is a god of the underworld, who is usually killed by the hero, not the other way around.

Without trying to expand on this extremely challenging topic, this narrative is an very relevant case for the "ethology of crossbreeding" in contemporary cinema making. The "métissage" practiced by the creators of *Shrek* stems from the mythological hybridization of our visual culture. Elements from several classical narratives are appropriated for the benefit of a new production, in an indistinctive mixture of composing parts. Shrek, who is clearly an anti-hero, since he lives as a marginal and has no friends, is accompanied by a mule, Donkey. His universe is populated be numerous fairy tale characters, which most of the times have nothing to do one with another. Such is the coexistence of Pinocchio and the Big Bad Wolf, of Farquaad, the invented antagonist, with Gingy the Gingerbread Man, who later fights in gladiator-like battles. Everything is a melange in Shrek and the politics of métissage is explicit from the first installment – the first Shrek ends with the ogres marrying and the fire blowing

Dragon, who is actually and Dragoness, also ends up marrying the Donkey. In the second Shrek, she makes half donkey babies, dronkeys with flying abilities. Nothing is immutable in the logic of amalgamation. This is the case with Fiona, the Ossian ogre who is mixed with elements from Rapunzel and Sleeping Beauty, has traits from Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Breauty and Rapunzel, yet she is coexists as friends with all of them, including the transvestite Doris, the Ugly Stepsister. This mingling of identities is even more explicit in *Shrek the Third*, when, by the magical intervention of a absent minded Merlin, Puss in Boots and Donkey are inter-changed.

No identity is stable in this new mythology; Prince Charming and his mother, the Fairy Godmother, are ruthless social climbers; King Arthur is simply Artie, a Pendragon who does not want to be a hero; Rumpelstiltskin becomes an expression of an extortionist and of a dictator, sharing similarities with Lord Farquaad. Not only that Prince Charming is a reversed figure, since the "Prince" was a Disney creation from the start, but in the postmodern culture logic of the bricolage, the mingling is always inter-textual. Puss in Boots, who also appeared in one of the earliest Disney production, is later transformed in the third movie, as the fat Puss, the duelist who has become obese and lazy (behaving like a decrepit Marlon Brando). And since Shrek take place in Far Faraway, a parodical reference to Hollywood, almost all the myths and characters of the contemporary cinema productions are re-appropriated, in a total transformation of identities, where the boundaries of fiction are moving beyond metafiction, into a total cross-referencing. Shrek brings together elements from almost all the Disney productions, it gives way to parodic re-appropriations of movies like The Princess Bride and Robin Hood, it criticizes Hollywood practices and narrative structures, becoming the ultimate expression of the contemporary *myth-illogical* practices.

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Agnieszka RASMUS

"I know where I've seen you before!" Remaking Gender, Class, Nationality and Politics from *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) into *Flightplan* (2005)

Abstract

This paper addresses the important role of remakes in film culture and their vital function in reflecting societal and cultural transformations. It looks at one particular case study of British to American cross-cultural exchange: *The Lady Vanishes* and *Flightplan*. Comparing British stereotypes from the past in Alfred Hitchcock's 1938 comedy with contemporary Hollywood preconceptions in Robert Schwentke's 2005 remake, it shows how the issues of class, nationality, gender, race and politics are presented in films set almost seventy years apart, especially that each of them punctuates an important moment in history and thus inevitably becomes an expression of the then current societal concerns.

At first glance it seems that *Flightplan*'s sole purpose is entertainment. When equipped with the knowledge of the source text, however, we can see that most of the conflicts present in the earlier work resurface in the update. Even though Robert Schwentke's *Flightplan* was openly compared to a claustrophobic Hitchcock thriller, the screenwriters, Peter A. Dowling and Billy Ray, claim to have written an original script. Still, if one googles the two titles together, it becomes obvious that in the digital era viewers spot any "hidden" remaking practices that soon become common knowledge. This indicates that the similarities between the two films are not accidental but could rather serve as reference-points. Following from that, if Hitchcock's amusing comedy can be read as a political allegory of the Chamberlain Era, the same may apply to its remake, in which case *Flightplan* emerges as one of the critical voices of the Bush-Cheney administration.

Keywords: Remake, Hollywood, Hitchcock, *Flightplan, The Lady Vanishes,* gender, class, race, nationality, politics.

"I know where I've seen you before!" shouts the heroine of Hollywood action-packed thriller *Flightplan,* Kyle Pratt, when she spots the possible kidnappers of her daughter on board an aircraft. This feeling of déjà vu also accompanied some viewers who saw the film upon its release in September 2005 and others who have watched it since on DVD because

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Flightplan bears an uncanny resemblance in terms of narrative patterns and key scenes to Alfred Hitchcock's 1938 comedy *The Lady Vanishes*. When you google the two titles together, you get 45,700 hits that in one way or another relate to the two films' unique bond. Starting with a Wikipedia page whose entry on *Flightplan* announces in its opening paragraph that the movie was based on *The Lady Vanishes*, through to numerous film blogs, unofficial reviews, and imdb.com user comments with 38 reviews out of 584 making a direct connection between the two films and numerous others referring to Hitchcock's influence on *Flightplan's* look and atmosphere more generally. Many also point to the links between *Flightplan* and other titles, e.g *Bunny Lake is Missing*, *Into Thin Air*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Frantic*, *Dangerous Crossing*, *The Forgotten*, *Panic Room*, and even *L'Aventura*. Finally, a short mash-up video on youtube.com juxtaposes two key scenes from Hitchcock's and Schwentke's movies to show how they mirror each other.

This should not be surprising as the Hollywood film industry has always sampled ideas, attempting to capitalise on the success of earlier works. The practice is as old as the film industry itself. For instance, writing about Hollywood remakes in the 1950s Druxman notices, "Possibly the best reason for redoing classic films is to adapt these vintage stories to new screen techniques [...]. The coming of sound, for instance, inspired the studios to film their more popular pictures again [...]. The advent of colour and, later, the wide screen, prompted additional remakes of properties that would be enhanced by these new processes" (Druxman 15-18). In a similar fashion, with the development of digital technology in the 1990s came the need to revisit older titles to "do them justice" by means of special effects. Thus, while it is hard to disagree with Leo Brody's observation that "Our time is particularly heavy in remakes [...]" (Brody 332), it seems that their proliferation is not a recent phenomenon. What is new, however, is their visibility made possible thanks to the unprecedented access to digital film material and a vibrant online culture. Writing about "convergence culture," Henry Jenkins observes that "If old consumers were isolated individuals, the new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, the new consumers are now noisy and public" (Jenkins 19). The digital era may or may not have revolutionised cinema, but it has definitely revolutionised the extent to which viewers disseminate information. Whether seen critically as "the cult of the amateur" or positively in terms of participatory culture, the rise of the figure of "the film geek" (see: *Reinventing Cinema)* means that viewers are now often better informed when writing about films than professional critics. They too are able to judge, compare and tell others if they spot any hidden remaking practices as the case of *The Lady Vanishes* and *Flightplan* clearly shows.

Remakes are also more visible thanks to the academic scrutiny they have enjoyed in recent years. There have been numerous publications dedicated to the study of Hollywood remakes of foreign films: Japanese (*Japanese Horror Films and their American Remakes*, 2013), French (*Encore Hollywood*, 2008 and *Double Takes: Culture and Gender in French Films and Their American Remakes*, 1998), and Norwegian ones (*Same But*

Different: The Success and Failure of Two Hollywood Remakes of Norwegian Films, 2009). Still, the linguistically and culturally complex issue of American remakes of British films has not received adequate attention. When language is no barrier and both films are still engraved in public memory, and/or are easily found online as illegal downloads/fragments on YouTube, updating is motivated by factors other than reviving an old classic, looking for a safe financial investment or exploiting unknown originals. Inevitably, film-makers, producers, stars and viewers alike become part of an intricate web of communication, knowledge and information, the process wherein the remake often beckons for comparison, containing parody, pastiche, and/or homage. Most importantly, such remakes turn out to be a particularly fertile and rewarding ground on which to examine British to American cross-cultural exchange, transformations within the film industry and the way they are reflected on the screen. In other words, as Michael Brashinsky puts it, remakes provide "us with countless clues to the medium, the culture, and ourselves […]" (Brashinsky 163).

This paper discusses one particular case study that exists, or rather "co-exists," within the English-speaking world: *The Lady Vanishes* and *Flightplan*. It addresses the important role of remakes in film culture and their vital function in reflecting societal and cultural transformations on the screen and beyond. It attempts to look for reasons why particular texts are revisited at particular times and to what extent one can continue to talk about hidden remaking practices in the digital era. Furthermore, comparing British stereotypes from the past in Alfred Hitchcock's 1938 comedy with contemporary Hollywood preconceptions in Robert Schwentke's 2005 remake, it shows how the issues of class, nationality, race, gender and politics are depicted in films set almost seventy years apart, especially that each of them punctuates an important moment in history and thus inevitably becomes an expression of the then current societal concerns. Finally, it tries to answer if Hollywood has made any attempt to address the problem of race, gender, religion or class-based preconceptions in the modern era of political correctness.

The Lady Vanishes derives from at least two sources. It is an adaptation by Sidney Gilliat and Frank Launder of Ethel Lina White's novel *The Wheel Spins.* Moreover, as Michael Wilmington points out, "the film's premise has a real-life antecedent: the disappearance of a young woman's brother during the 1880 Paris Exposition, at a hotel where everyone denied his existence because he had died of plague" (Wilmington). The film had been remade once before by Hammer Film Productions in 1979 but on that occasion the title was kept, the story followed Hitchcock's script closely, and the project was promoted as a remake of an acknowledged classic. With *Flightplan*, the problem of remaking is more complex for a number of reasons. First of all, the screenwriters of *Flightplan,* Peter A. Dowling and Billy Ray, claim to have written an original script. Secondly, as pointed out above, viewers have traced other possible sources of Schwentke's film, showing an intricate web of inspirations that further challenges the traditional notions of "original" and "copy." Out of all the titles mentioned, Otto

Preminger's *Bunny Lake is Missing* is an obvious contender with the story of a mother whose sanity is gradually questioned as she is looking for her daughter whom nobody has seen. In Hitchcock's, however, there is a missing adult. Furthermore, one could argue against the link between *The Lady Vanishes* and *Flightplan* on the grounds of their respective genres: comedy and thriller, but genre switching is not uncommon in remakes and can serve as a powerful indicator of political, social and cultural changes (see for instance the remake of *Stepford Wives* with its camp aesthetics and upbeat happy ending against the bleak vision of the earlier version). When one examines closely the two films' deeper structures, it becomes obvious that the striking similarities between them cannot be dismissed as purely accidental.

Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* is a thriller/espionage/comedy about a young woman called Iris. Most of the action takes place on a train where she befriends an old governess, Miss Froy, whose role in the film has been compared by many critics to that of Iris's surrogate mother. When Iris wakes up from a nap, she discovers that the lady has vanished without a trace. All the passengers claim that they have never seen the old woman and that Iris must have imagined her. Despite constant rebukes, she continues her search and is given a helping hand by a young man called Gilbert. When their attempts prove futile, she begins to succumb to the idea that the whole thing was just a figment of her imagination or a result of concussion caused by a flowerpot that fell on her head just before she boarded the train. Reconciled, she goes to a dining car where she previously had tea with Miss Froy and notices the old woman's writing on the compartment window. This boosts her confidence in her sanity and at the same time confirms her suspicion that the passengers are lying and must hence be part of a conspiracy. Eventually, after many mishaps, Iris's persistence allows her not only to find the whereabouts of the kidnapped elderly lady, but also to save the woman's life and possibly prevent an international conflict from being ignited.

Robert Schwentke's *Flightplan* from 2005 is about a woman in her early forties, Kyle, who is travelling with her six-year-old daughter by plane. When she wakes up from a nap, she discovers that her child is missing. Worse still, when she begins her desperate search, she is confronted by passengers and an unremitting flight crew who claim that they have never seen the girl and that she was never even on board the plane. They persuade her that she is mentally unstable and delusional and that her hallucinations are caused by the recent death of her husband and child. As Kyle begins to concede, she looks at the window pane next to her seat and notices her daughter's drawing. This prompts her to start her search all over again as now she suspects that some members of staff and passengers might be part of a conspiracy. Eventually, after many mishaps, the mother and daughter are reunited and additionally Kyle foils a potential hijack plan.

Despite significant alterations in the script: the train is substituted for a plane and the mother-daughter relationship is reversed, the essential structure remains virtually unchanged: the search for a missing person whose age connotes vulnerability, con-

spiracy, kidnapping, confined space, the protagonist as a female detective, the theme of madness and falling asleep, the writing on the window pane, the reunion of two women, and the evasion of international conflict/hijacking. Additionally, the authors of the script appear to include a veiled tribute to *The Lady Vanishes*. In Hitchcock's film there is a motif of a German conspiracy to instigate global conflict in Europe (incidentally, Robert Schwentke is of German origin); in the derivative, the heroine is an aircraft engineer who travels from Berlin, where, as it later turns out, her husband was murdered. Furthermore, in both films, the vehicles are delayed due to unexpected heavy snow, which creates narrative as well as visual doubling.

The Lady Vanishes is an important work in Alfred Hitchcock's portfolio being in many ways a threshold film. To a large extent it may even be seen as both Hitchcock's farewell to England and his passport to America as it proved to be a huge hit on the other side of the Atlantic, winning the New York Critics' award in 1938. Thus, it is no surprise that the film becomes a jovial satire on his countrymen by playing with numerous stereotypes of Englishness as represented here by mostly two social classes: the middle and upper class. It also addresses the issue of class oppression and division, which Charles Barr identifies as a "dominant theme in Hitchcock's film, the basis of the savage behavior that underlies its comedic surface" (Barr). This reading is further supported when one considers Hitchcock's own background as the son of a tradesman and John Houseman's memories of him as "a man of exaggeratedly delicate sensibilities, marked by . . . the scars from a social system against which he was in perpetual revolt and which had left him suspicious and vulnerable, alternately docile and defiant" (qtd. in Barr).

The stereotypical Englishness is best exemplified by two bachelors, Caldicott and Charters, the representatives of the upper class, with their stiff-upper lip, immaculate manners even under heavy duress, pickiness, understatements, love of cricket, fear of women, xenophobia, ignorance of other cultures and languages, and, finally, fondness for routine and order. Their contempt for local cultures, languages and sensitivities is so out of place and incongruent with their circumstances that it makes for most of the comedy in the film. For instance, both men are so much into cricket that they pretend never to have seen the old lady fearing that they may miss the match in Manchester if Iris stops the train. They are also annoyed to find out that not all foreigners speak English and that abroad things do not run exactly the same way as they do at home.

To provide a variant to representatives of well-to-do classes, Hitchcock also shows local peasants from an unnamed Balkan country who appear to spend most of their time folk dancing and playing traditional instruments. Still, to challenge that stereotypical image of the happiness of simple rural life, it appears that some of them are dancing on demand, forced to perform their folk rituals for the pleasure of Gilbert, who collects rural songs – a hobby worth admiring for its importance in preserving folk art for posterity, but at the same time a possible comment on class division and class relations. Gilbert's own class status is hard to read, but judging by his easy man-

ner, lack of financial concerns and his accent, he must be a member of at least the upper middle-class.

While the representatives of various classes are humorously and/or stereotypically sketched out, Hitchcock breaks away from the stereotypical representation of gender by having a strong heroine who is an active agent rather than a passive damsel in distress in need of saving. Iris, whose telling name reveals her detective-like function, instigates the search for the lady and is prepared to go to all measures, and even risk her own life, in the pursuit of the truth. In fact, an alternative interpretation of the title could suggest that in her stubbornness to find Miss Froy, she herself loses her "ladylike-ness." Already at the beginning of the film her rich girl's panache and confidence are misinterpreted by Caldigott and Charters as an indication of her American nationality. As Barr observes, their comment "registers a gulf which is based less on class than on gender: for women to be so in control is outlandish, and thus un-English" (Barr 191). Being the daughter of a wealthy manufacturer, she is about to marry a bankrupt aristocrat to help him balance the books and enable her father to climb the social ladder. At the end, she chooses to marry Gilbert, thus refusing to be a pawn in this traditional English transaction.

Hence, in more ways than one, Iris is not a conventional heroine but one of Hitchcock's most interesting women that defies many critics' assumptions of the directors' apparent misogyny. Her stubbornness, courage, persistence as well as her refusal to be subjugated to the male version of the story according to which her hysteria is unfounded and typically feminine contradict the conventional representation of gender and could be seen as indicative of changes taking place in pre-war Britain. According to Sue Harper, in the cinema of the late 1930s, Margaret Lockwood, who plays Iris, belonged to "An emergent cluster of actresses [who] counterbalanced the socially residual effect of the 'ladies'." She calls them "wholesome sensible girls" whose role was to "give the audience confidence in modernity – to let them see that women could be both brisk and pure. 'Wholesome girls' had the double function of comforting and challenging the viewers, who were being gradually acclimatised to newer, more combative female types" (Harper 142-143).

The old lady herself is another playful joke based on stereotypes. Although for most of the film we presume her to be an innocent sweet governess who always travels with her own favourite tea as an obvious sign of English peculiarities, pickiness and fondness of the beverage, at the end we discover that she is in fact an agent under cover. Thus, this apparently benign sweet old granny who carries an important message about a secret pact between two European countries that could shape the course of history is a James Bond in a skirt – or rather a comedic prototype for another Englishwoman defying gender stereotypes, M, played by Judi Dench in the James Bond franchise from 1995-2012.

When looking at other nationalities in the film, it soon becomes obvious that *The Lady Vanishes* is a clever political allegory. Other nations are as cartoon-like and ste-

reotypically drawn as the English are, providing not only comedy but also a sharp political comment on Nazi Germany and its allies. There is an evil neurosurgeon, Dr Hartz of Prague, who speaks with a German accent and is the mastermind behind the plot, and a couple of Italians, a magician and a baroness married to the Minister of Propaganda – both implicated in the kidnapping. However, Hitchcock's criticism is mostly directed at English members of the upper-class. Their complete refusal to join in the search for Miss Froy or to even admit that they have actually seen her has been interpreted as a comment on the Chamberlain Era with Britain turning a blind eye to the progressively dangerous political situation in Europe. Its ambiguous if not sympathetic attitude to Germany is also shown when Caldigott and Charters praise an ill-intentioned officer of apparent German origin for his perfect English accent and are pleased to find out that he is a fellow Oxford boy.

Still, although critical of the English at first, towards the end of the film Hitchcock has almost all of them, including Charters and Caldigott, reunite in the fight with the oppressors. The English opposition is greatly outnumbered and significantly consists of three men and three women. In this gender balance Charles Barr sees an almost prophetic vision of "the national reorientation required for the 'people's war' to come." Interestingly, the only person who refuses to help is judge Todhunter, the representative of the upper-class whose behaviour can be read as "the epitome of seedy ruling class treachery" (Barr 198-200). As Barr notices:

> the year of *The Lady Vanishes*, 1938, was also the year of the Munich agreement, and it is tempting to see Todhunter's waving of the white handkerchief, in a futile attempt at appeasement, as a sharp parody of Neville Chamberlain waving the white paper of his agreement with Hitler on his return from Munich, but the film was completed early in the year, many months before Munich, so it is a case of life "reflecting' the film rather than vice versa. (Barr 202)

What happens when Hitchcock's screwball espionage romance is turned into an action-packed Hollywood thriller? At first glance it appears that the issues of class, nationality and gender seem to play a minor role in *Flightplan* whose primary concern appears to be entertainment. Contrary to expectations, when equipped with the knowledge of the earlier work, we can see that most of the conflicts resurface in the update although for obvious reasons they take on a new form and meaning.

First of all, whereas the issue of class divisions does not apply in the American remake, there are nevertheless clearly-marked divisions based on financial status. Thus, the film features numerous lingering shots emphasising differences between economic and business class. When Kyle's persistent requests to search the plane for her missing daughter are finally met by the captain, all the passengers are annoyed. Yet it is a male traveller in business class who makes a sarcastic remark, "It's not like she lost her palm pilot!" Still, whether passengers travel business or economy class, it is clear that most of them are unsympathetic and unwilling to become involved in her quest. In *The Lady Vanishes*, the passengers' refusal to help was triggered by a number of rea-

sons, from political to private and trivial such as missing a cricket match. In *Flightplan*, the lack of cooperation can be read as a bleak comment on society in the new millennium where collective responsibility and a sense of community have been replaced by self-interest and individualism.

Flightplan's most striking and most interesting re-imagining of the source film lies, however, in its treatment of gender. It shows how the representation of women has changed in seventy years and, most importantly, its current status quo in Hollywood. The film is primarily a Jodie Foster star persona vehicle. It is a continuation of her previous roles initiated by her ground-breaking portrayal of FBI agent Clarice Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), the importance of which for feminists and lesbian groups cannot be underestimated. Since then, playing roles of strong though often victimised women in a male-dominated world, Foster has established herself as a powerful feminist icon on screen and an important player in the Hollywood industry: an actor, producer and director. In *Flightplan*, in contrast to her English lady-like prototype, Kyle does not need a male companion to back her up. Her husband is dead and the paternal figures of authority on board – the captain and the Air Martial – are shown as either weak or corrupt. Kyle is a propulsion engineer in her 40s with visible wrinkles and no make-up on to hide them from view, presenting what until recently was a very unlikely image of the main lead in an action thriller.

Still, Jodie Foster's character occasionally borders on caricature. The role was initially written for a male lead, but upon Brian Grazer's suggestion, the part was given to Foster and the script was subsequently rewritten for her. The gender ambiguous name, Kyle, was retained. The final product seems an uneasy mix of two stereotypes that do not sit comfortably with each other. On the one hand, we have Kyle with her motherly concern, warmth, gentleness, confusion, and vulnerability associated with the genre of melodrama. On the other hand, we have a bullet-dodging character whose cunning, physical strength and acrobatics are larger than life and typically associated with the over-the-top and self-reflexive style of Hollywood action flicks with their formulaic one-liners, low-angle shots and slow-motion explosions. As *Flightplan* does not shy away from such a stereotypical representation of the hero typically coded as male, the effect can be unintentionally amusing.

When it comes to the stereotypical portrayal of nationality, it made perfect sense in *The Lady Vanishes* where characters travel across Europe, allowing Hitchcock to depict passengers' reactions to and experiences of new cultures and languages as they travelled across different territories, crossing national borders. When it transpires that they have become unwilling participants in an international military conflict that they do not quite understand, they wish to escape the alien and unfriendly lands and return home to the safety represented in the penultimate sequence and the familiar sight of Victoria station. Although it is difficult to experience border crossing when in mid-air, through its focus on the passengers' fear and suspicion of racial minorities present on the plane, *Flightplan* appears to be making a comment about America's fear of border

violation as a result of post 9/11 paranoia. As Judith Butler aptly explains, the events of 9/11 led most Americans to make a new and shocking discovery that the national borders of The United States were permeable and that violence could come from the outside (Butler 39).

Upon realising that her child may have been abducted, Kyle's immediate suspicion falls on the only two Arabs on board. Although one of them reacts very passively, the other protests their innocence and is clearly enraged by her accusations. Kyle, however, insists that he be searched and interrogated. When the Air Martial protests that he cannot accuse the only Arabs on board of a criminal conspiracy, she answers, "I don't give a shit about political correctness." Despite the fact that no evidence is found, from then onwards the Arabs are abused verbally and physically by other passengers. In reaction to their public humiliation, one of them challenges, "Anyone else have [sic] any questions for me? Then I guess you have to find a few other Arabs to harass?"

It is difficult to ascertain what the producers of the remake were trying to achieve. On the one hand, they could be accused of typical Hollywood racial profiling and political incorrectness as the Hollywood film industry has repeatedly cast Arabs in stereotypical roles of either terrorists or sex maniacs, as Jack Shaheen observes in his book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2001). As the title of his recent publication indicates, *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs After 9/11* (2008), the tragic events of September 11 and the ensuing governmental policies seem to have provided the movie business with a new licence to further exploit anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiments.

Flightplan is extremely topical in its 9/11 allusions. At the time of its release in 2005 it was the second Hollywood film to break the taboo of cashing in on America's tragedy by bringing to the screen a story that bore similarities to real-life events. There is no doubt about the fact that the film plays on the audience's post 9/11 fears. As the screenwriter, Billy Ray, admits, "We take advantage of the level of paranoia that's out there now" (Ray). For example, Foster's character demands that the plane be searched on account of new procedures following the attacks. Passengers regard non-white ethnic minorities on board with prejudice, suspicion and fear. They also, on a smaller scale, represent and demonstrate the prerogatives of the US governmental policy of "Indefinite Detention." They are easily provoked when faced with unexpected difficulties and also quickly jump to conclusions. They react with anxiety and rage, expressing "a radical desire for security" and a need for "a heightened surveillance of Arab peoples and anyone who looks vaguely Arab in the dominant racial imaginary, anyone who looks like someone you once knew who was of Arab descent, or who you thought was" (Butler 39). According to Butler, the media and government authorise and increase racial hysteria, encouraging individuals to be on a constant look-out for alien elements without specifying what they are and how one could protect oneself from them. As a consequence "everyone is free to imagine and identify the source of terror" and "an amorphous racism abounds, rationalized by the claim of 'self-defense'" (Butler 39).

On the other hand, however, as the two Arabs turn out to be innocent, *Flightplan* could be praised for toying with and subverting the viewer's own prejudices and preconceptions resulting from post 9/11 trauma. When Kyle rescues her daughter from the burning plane, the only passenger to approach her is the Arab she previously mistreated. He picks up her bag, hands it over to her and they make eye contact. Kyle smiles at him gently. This could be read as a gesture of reconciliation, an expression of sympathy and a mutual recognition of what it is like to be misunderstood and unjustly abused. It also explains why *Flightplan* is on Jack Shaheen's list of recommended films in *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs After 9/11* for its positive portrayal of Arabs in the post 9/11 cinematic imaginary.

Finally, if Hitchcock's amusing comedy can be read as a political allegory, can the same apply to its remake? According to Douglas Kellner, who analyses key films of the 2000s as a reaction to the horrors of the Bush-Cheney era, "Films can display social realities of the time in documentary and realist fashion, directly representing the events and phenomena of an epoch. But films can also provide allegorical representations that interpret, comment on, and indirectly portray aspects of an era" (Kellner 14). *Flightplan,* whose story pretends to be about a terrorist attack with a couple of Arabs as all too obvious contenders for the terrorists eventually features a benevolent looking, white, middle-class air martial as the main villain of the piece. Instead of protecting the plane and its passengers against harm, he is in fact exploiting their fear and manipulates the feeling of panic on board to his own advantage. His reasons, however, do not seem to be political. They are entirely motivated by greed. Is it possible to read his condescending words to Kyle "You know, people will think what I tell them to think. That's how authority works" as a veiled comment on the Bush-Cheney administration of the period even though Kellner does not include this title in his analysis of Hollywood political critiques?

The answer may be found in Ron Suskind's article published in The New York Times exactly a year before *Flightplan* opened in America at the time when it was still in its production stage. The author of "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush" recalls:

> In the summer of 2002, after I had written an article in Esquire that the White House didn't like about Bush's former communications director, Karen Hughes, I had a meeting with a senior adviser to Bush. He expressed the White House's displeasure, and then he told me something that at the time I didn't fully comprehend – but which I now believe gets to the very heart of the Bush presidency.
>
> The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality – judi-

> ciously, as you will – we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do." (Suskind)

It seems likely then that the creators of *Flightplan* contrived a narrative which not only echoes the events of the era but also represents its key political players. Guided by Hitchcock's prior text, we become clued up to discover much more than is apparent at first viewing as the film can then be read less directly and more allegorically. Considering the proliferation of other works that critically engaged with the governmental policies of the time in a more or less obvious fashion, for instance, *Crash* (2005), *The Deal* (2005) and *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005), it is possible to see *Flightplan* in a larger context as another such voice. It is therefore not an accident that Hitchcock's film about a potential military conflict was revived at the point when America saw George W. Bush sworn in for his second term as President, which is poignantly reflected in the change of genre from the light mood of the earlier work into a menacing and dark thriller whose happy ending feels too forced and cliché to counterbalance the lack of security, paranoia, and a prevailing sense of loneliness, fear and corruption. Thus, remakes not only show the potential of earlier works to generate new versions but also, by introducing changes, become a comment on societal and cultural transformations.

Today's viewers can no longer be seen as isolated individuals with a limited access to film material or knowledge who need to rely on the professional critic. They are part of a vibrant online culture whose collective intelligence and competence are a sign of modern times. Even if Roger Ebert does not spot any "hidden" remaking practices in *Flightplan*, they soon become common knowledge thanks to those viewers who circulate their findings worldwide on film blogs, forums and data bases. In the case of *Flightplan*, the producers want to have their cake and eat it. Not having obtained the rights to the earlier film, they brand their product an original work. Yet, by including all too obvious references to *The Lady Vanishes,* they have ensured that *Flightplan* enters a more interesting critical discourse by profiting from its remake-of-the-classic status with critics and audiences in the know relishing in this feminist and political Hitchcock re-write. Looking at user comments on imdb.com, it seems that this strategy has worked. On the one hand, we have viewers entertained by this action-packed movie or enraged by its convoluted plot; on the other hand, we have those who see it as a rewarding update of a known classic and those for whom it is little more than a poor Hitchcock imitation. Looking at the reviews and scores placed by people who recognize *Flightplan* as the remake of *The Lady Vanishes*, eight give it five out of ten stars, thirteen less than five stars, and eighteen six or more stars, thus showing that the film's remake status has been generally perceived rather positively as these viewers found pleasure in the act of comparing the two works. Moving away from Druxman's opinion that "The biggest 'cross' that the producer of a remake must bear

is his audience's memory" (Druxman 24), the viewers' own responses would support Linda Hutcheon's dictum that what lies at the heart of the pleasure of adaptation is exactly that: repetition with variation, recognition, remembrance and change (Hutcheon 4). The case of *Fligthplan* and *The Lady Vanishes* proves above all Brody's assertion that "It is the audience, or the audiences, that decide what is variable and what is unchanging in art, what vanishes and what lasts, what can be revived and what remains dead. Only one member of that audience is the remaker, and only one is the critic" (Brody 333).

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Florence BÖGELEIN

Recyclages apocalyptiques : Vers un héroïsme de la conscience dans Dogville de Lars von Trier

Résumé

Cet article propose d'examiner le film *Dogville* du réalisateur danois Lars von Trier (sélectionnée au festival de Cannes en 2003) sous l'aspect du scénario qui se veut, de prime abord, recyclé. Dans l'Amérique des années Trente, Grace (Nicole Kidman), une jeune et belle femme, pourchassée par des gangsters est recueillie par Tom (Paul Bettany), un jeune et bel homme, von Trier donne à voir un film désarmant par sa construction, jusqu'à réaliser une épopée moderne, ayant adapté les diverses anamorphoses de la représentation : non seulement cinématographiques mais aussi théâtrales et romanesques. Répétitions, allusions explicites, clin d'œil entendu, clichés littéraires appuyés ou poncifs : c'est bien le domaine de l'intertextualité qui forme la trame de cette intrigue.

Mots clés : *Dogville*, Lars von Trier, Antonin Artaud, recyclages, adaptations, cinéma et mythes, utopie et théâtre, cruauté sociale, manipulation des spectateurs, responsabilité.

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Intertextualité et cruauté

Le réalisateur danois Lars von Trier est l'auteur de cette œuvre sélectionnée au festival de Cannes en 2003: *Dogville*, météorite inattendue de la pensée actuelle, pèlerinage aux sources de la cruauté, de la répétition et du délire. Mais sous l'aspect d'un scénario qui se veut, de prime abord, recyclé : dans l'Amérique des années Trente, Grace (Nicole Kidman), une jeune et belle femme, pourchassée par des gangsters est recueillie par Tom (Paul Bettany), un jeune et bel homme, von Trier donne à voir un film désarmant par sa construction, jusqu'à réaliser une épopée moderne, ayant adapté les diverses

anamorphoses de la représentation : non seulement cinématographiques mais aussi théâtrales et romanesques. Répétitions, allusions explicites, clin d'œil entendu, clichés littéraires appuyés ou poncifs : c'est bien le domaine de l'intertextualité qui forme la trame de cette intrigue.

Ce film retrace l'arrivée de Grace qui espère trouver un refuge, une terre d'accueil, en la petite ville de Dogville, où elle est d'abord bien reçue mais qui lui impose de garder son statut d'étrangère. Champs clos des affrontements, enclos des impuissances jalouses, Dogville est au cœur des *Rockies*, des Montagnes Rocheuses et habité par de « de braves gens». C'est après une mise en demeure communautaire organisée par Thomas Edison Jr., écrivain en devenir et prétendu philosophe, qui s'autoproclame à cette occasion conscience morale de cette bourgade, que Grace est tolérée sous conditions. Von Trier se plaît à recycler des personnages types aux noms évocateurs, il se sert ainsi de plusieurs espaces pour en soutirer des citations au sens large du terme. Si *Dogville* est plaqué sur les procédés cinématographiques et techniques actuels, les références en font un *film patchwork*.

Dès l'abord, on retrouve une citation relative au romanesque intégrée au film par le biais de la narration puisque le narrateur, de même que le découpage en chapitres, sont des réminiscences de la structure littéraire anglaise, dans la lignée du romancier victorien Charles Dickens. Le narrateur, qu'incarne la voix-off, semble affirmer que le monde ne se raconte pas tout seul. Le prologue, très écrit, étonne alors les spectateurs et les guide, de même que le narrateur, véritable rhapsode qui présente la tragédie qui va se découvrir chapitre après chapitre. Il ordonne le rythme de cette narration et donne une force au récit.

Manifestement, l'arrivée de Grace à Dogville, qu'elle croit lieu édénique, évoque à la fois les pastorales antiques, les romans et séries américaines prônant un idéal de vie pure à la campagne, dans la lignée de *Little House on the Prairie*, voire la tradition antérieure du roman américain de la moitié du XIXe, comme *La lettre écarlate* (1850) de Nathaniel Hawthorne : c'est un monde manichéen. Mais Grace découvrira au fur et à mesure que le temps passe qu'il n'existe aucune terre promise au sens biblique et que la campagne ne s'apparente plus aux pastorales. Von Trier fait œuvre de novateur en rassemblant par le biais de citations, de références pluridisciplinaires, un corpus culturel qui n'était pas cruel à l'origine mais qui le devient sous sa caméra.

Von Trier aime à métisser son film avec des ressources qu'il recycle également des films américains comme *The Godfather*. L'intertextualité contribue ainsi à la mise en valeur de l'espace cinématographique. Ce que ne savent ni Tom, ni les spectateurs, c'est que le chef de la pègre n'est autre que le père de Grace qui recherche sa fille dans le but de reprendre leur conversation sur l'arrogance. Grace, désormais esclave sexuelle du village, en appelle alors à une apocalypse vengeresse finale, dans un ultime coup de théâtre, avec l'aide de son père : elle décide de l'extermination même du village. Von Trier recycle et manipule les mythes adoptés par nos sociétés, comme celui d'une

vie heureuse à la campagne, et comme on va le voir, notamment celui de la vengeance comme évidence.

Si dans *Dogville* les mythes consolateurs d'un paradis bucolique et de la bonne conscience sont cruellement détruits, le film se termine néanmoins par le mythe d'une apocalypse générale décidée par Grace mue d'un sentiment de vengeance. Il y a là un double risque, celui pour les spectateurs de rester enfermés dans l'idée de la ville parfaite et le mythe de la sainte, ou celui de la construction d'un nouveau mythe de la cruauté non seulement désirable mais aussi inévitable, sans moyen d'être questionné : les spectateurs se vengent par personnage interposé, la victime se devant de devenir un bourreau. Il s'agit dès lors de mettre en lumière la manière dont le recyclage participe de la construction des spectateurs : manifestement cette cruauté répétitive et lucide oblige les spectateurs à un héroïsme de la conscience, car il leur faut choisir et donc être responsables afin de sortir du mythe cruel. Mais quel espoir l'humaine condition peut-elle avoir face à cette apocalypse vengeresse finale lourde de menaces ?

Recyclage du « Théâtre de la Cruauté » artaudien

Von Trier regarde ces fragments littéraires, théâtraux, et cinématographiques qu'il adapte en un *patchwork* textuel et visuel afin de donner aux spectateurs une interprétation du monde actuel. Selon Stig Björkman « *Dogville* est une histoire qui défie l'isolationnisme et la xénophobie » (Björkman : 2003, p. 40). Ce film se prête ainsi à plusieurs visions concomitantes : satire politico-sociale, une enquête presque ethnographique sur les milieux marginalisés comme le montrent les photographies du générique de fin commandées par Roosevelt pendant la Grande Dépression... *Dogville* fut tourné dans un hangar faisant ainsi se superposer les univers du cinéma et du théâtre. Mais comment s'entremêle « hangar », « théâtre » et « cruauté », dans l'esprit des spectateurs ?

La cruauté naît d'abord de la vue plongeante sur cette maquette de village où les rues, esquissées sur le sol, adaptent la structure architecturale d'une maison de poupée, ou pire, l'organisation interne d'un parcours expérimental dévolu aux cobayes de laboratoire (Figure 1).

Figure 1 : *Dogville* (2003) de Lars von Trier.

Les protagonistes n'évoluent donc pas dans un théâtre de la liberté, mais bien dans le « Théâtre de la Cruauté » d'Antonin Artaud, dépeignant un monde absurde et cruel. Les personnages sont condamnés à vivre ensemble dans un décor, un monde vide où chacun se mure dans sa solitude et ses illusions.

De fait, je vais étudier en quoi la répétition et le recyclage sont des éléments de la cruauté de ce film, en relation avec la propagation de mythes de la cruauté dont l'origine plus largement semble être le « Théâtre de la Cruauté » d'Antonin Artaud, comédien, poète, interné près de dix ans en hôpital psychiatrique à son retour du Mexique en 1936, tel qu'il l'a défini dans *Le Théâtre et son Double* : en effet, la cruauté dans *Dogville* passe toujours par la théâtralisation, ce qui crée une relation particulière entre le public, le film et le réalisateur. C'est la cruauté, au sens de la théâtralité délirante d'Artaud et au sens pur, qui submerge le film. Von Trier en revivifiant ce Théâtre trace un tableau caustique, voire désespéré, de notre mode de vie, de nos rapports sociaux et de nos attentes profondes.

Le dessein du théâtre n'est pas d'être réaliste, étant lui-même une anamorphose, il donne à voir des images qui en engendrent d'autres dans l'esprit des spectateurs : c'est en cela qu'il est particulièrement approprié à la lecture des différents mythes qui traversent le film et à la manipulation des spectateurs : c'est au public d'interpréter. Von Trier, à l'aide d'une esthétique théâtrale, met en scène des personnages enfermés physiquement et mentalement, englués dans leurs préjugés. En adoptant et adaptant la théâtralité, le réalisateur met alors en lumière les dangers de la représentation, où les spectateurs se trouvent confrontés à la représentation aliénante liée à l'enfermement mental et à la représentation artaudienne libératrice, mais assurément cruelle, du « Théâtre de la Cruauté ». En recyclant « le Théâtre de la Cruauté » artaudien, il s'agit pour von Trier de questionner les spectateurs, à savoir si la démocratie ou/et l'intelligence peuvent éliminer la cruauté de la société, ou encore, comme le pensait le philosophe des Lumières Jean-Jacques Rousseau, si la cruauté est intimement liée à la vie en société. Le fait même d'être en société condamnerait non seulement les êtres mais encore tout ce qui existe : le monde serait dégradant. Il existe également un moyen terme moins essentialisant qui poserait que la société que nous connaissons est cruelle et pour certaines raisons, sans supposer qu'elles soient inéluctables.

Le théâtre est le décalque dans l'ombre du monde réel et c'est dans cette oscillation permanente, dans *Dogville*, entre illusion de la réalité et utopie théâtrale, qu'opère la prise de conscience des spectateurs. Si l'espace théâtral naît des illusions du monde, von Trier met en lumière les dangers de toute représentation et de nos attentes de spectateurs grâce à l'utopie théâtrale (irréelle) représentée. La roue minière à laquelle le village enchaîne Grace devient le symbole même de son asservissement physique et moral. Ainsi, le moindre objet présent acquiert une aura symbolique, ceci étant une caractéristique du théâtre dont la reproduction au cinéma fait son petit effet. Les spectateurs évoluent non seulement dans un monde vide, mais également vide de sens, par exemple, dans *Elm Street*, la rue de l'Orme, jamais il n'y eut d'arbre. Le décor est par

conséquent un accessoire. Le lieu de rassemblement de ce village est la « Mission de Jérémie » du nom du Prophète sévère. Mais il est dit qu'il ne viendra jamais. De cette mission, les spectateurs ne perçoivent que le toit, la cloche, la porte et les bancs. *Dogville* révèle donc un certain nombre de paradoxes : le décor ne peut qu'être utile, mais ne sert à rien. Il est hautement symbolique et en même temps vide de sens. Il importe de remarquer que : « L'espace ludique est constitué de l'espace que le comédien crée par son déplacement ; il est relatif au déplacement de celui-ci » (Souiller, Fix, Humbert-Mougin, Zaragoza : 2005, p. 445), ce dernier se réduisant au hangar, il en résulte que les personnages sont condamnés à stagner, physiquement et mentalement, comme Martha : « il faudrait que je réfléchisse à ce que vous pourriez faire, étant donné que je suis moi-même sans occupations ».

Artaud fait d'une épidémie de peste l'allégorie même d'un théâtre qu'il nomme « le Théâtre de la Cruauté ». Artaud passe sa vie à l'élaboration d'un Théâtre « qui nous réveille : nerfs et cœur » (Artaud : 1978, Tome IV p. 82). L'aspect sanglant n'est plus qu' « un tout petit côté de la question » (Artaud, IV, p. 98) et en matière de cruauté dans l'art, suivre Artaud, c'est donner à la cruauté une aura de lucidité. Mais ce Théâtre n'est pas dénué de risques :

> Il y a là un risque, mais j'estime que dans les circonstances actuelles il vaut la peine d'être couru. Je ne crois pas que nous arrivions à raviver l'état des choses où nous vivons et je ne crois pas qu'il vaille même la peine de s'y raccrocher; mais je propose quelque chose pour sortir du marasme, au lieu de continuer à gémir sur ce marasme et sur l'ennui, l'inertie et la sottise de tout. (Artaud, IV, pp. 80-81)

Il affirme dans son ouvrage *Le Théâtre et son Double* qu' : « il semble que par la peste et collectivement un gigantesque abcès, tant moral que social, se vide ; de même que la peste, le théâtre est fait pour vider collectivement des abcès » (Artaud, IV, p. 30) car « sous l'action du fléau, les cadres de la société se liquéfient. L'ordre tombe » (Artaud, IV, p. 15). En effet, Artaud pense le théâtre comme forme et source de cruauté sociale :

> Étant donné le théâtre tel que nous le voyons ici on dirait qu'il ne s'agit dans la vie que de savoir si nous baiserons bien, si nous ferons la guerre […]. Il est rare […] que le débat s'élève jusqu'au plan social et que le procès de notre système social et moral soit entrepris. Notre théâtre ne va jamais jusqu'à se demander si ce système social et moral ne serait par hasard pas inique. (Artaud, IV, p. 40)

Le théâtre grec fut à l'origine un devoir civique, c'est pourquoi le concept de société est si important. Lors de la conférence qu'Artaud donne en janvier 1947 au Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, il accuse la société :

> Acte d'accusation contre ce monde,
> mettre en avant les envoûtements.
> Qui je suis ?
> Je suis Antonin Artaud,
> mais j'ai toujours souffert des hommes,
> plus exactement de la société. (Artaud, XXVI, p. 69)

Artaud voit surtout dans le théâtre la performance physique d'un acteur, un *bouc émissaire* de la société, dans ce qu'il considère être un rite sacrificiel de l'acteur. A la différence du cinéma, au théâtre les spectateurs sont face à des acteurs qui jouent sur une scène, lieu consacré et espace rituel dévolu à la représentation. Le théâtre implique un acteur en chair et en os, sur une scène ou des tréteaux, en contact direct avec le public. L'acteur de théâtre est, autrement dit, en situation d'insécurité. Il est manifeste que l'acteur de théâtre est en quelque sorte plus nu sur la scène que ne l'est un acteur de cinéma car il n'y pas d'enregistrement, de second essai, contrairement au cinéma. En effet, il semble nécessaire de théâtraliser le cinéma pour obtenir cette insécurité.

Le théâtre est depuis son origine un prolongement profane de rituels sacrés ou magiques qui eux aussi contenaient une part de *catharsis*, puisque manifestement l'homme évolue dans sa relation au sacré, l'humanité progresse dans son aventure prométhéenne, dans l'élaboration de ses mythes. Représentation mentale, le mythe a besoin pour cette raison de prendre appui sur un medium, le théâtre, cela à cause de son rôle public. En outre, le théâtre permet de préserver la polyphonie des discours : plusieurs voix donc plusieurs lectures, le mythe englobe et magnifie la parole. L'anthropologue Claude Lévi-Straus écrit dans « La Structure des Mythes » :

> On vient de distinguer la langue et la parole au moyen des systèmes temporels auxquels elles se réfèrent l'une et l'autre. Or, le mythe se définit aussi par un système temporel, qui combine les propriétés des deux autres. Un mythe se rapporte toujours à des événements passés : « avant la création du monde, » ou « pendant les premiers âges, » en tout cas, « il y a longtemps. » Mais la valeur intrinsèque attribuée au mythe provient de ce que ces événements, censés se dérouler à un moment du temps, forment aussi une structure permanente. Celle-ci se rapporte simultanément au passé, au présent et au futur. (Lévi-Strauss, texte annoté par Benware : 1955, pp. 428-444)

Le mythe social est selon Lévi-Strauss une projection dans l'intemporel, qui tend vers l'essentialisme, ou bien est poussé vers lui. Mais, avec *Dogville*, on ne parle pas de mythes recyclés originels ou grecs : les mythes de la cruauté se révèlent être des mythes sociaux contemporains. La cruauté essentielle est dès lors pensée comme cruauté envers les mythes anciens qu'elle entend combattre et détruire. C'est là tout le paradoxe de la cruauté et l'un des principaux dangers de la représentation et des répétitions dans *Dogville* : la cruauté est protéiforme, à la fois destructrice des mythes et mythe potentiel. En effet, si le mythe social est détruit par la cruauté, elle risque de devenir un mythe à son tour. Cela signifie aussi que le mythe de la cruauté tente d'ériger la cruauté en un mythe immuable et sans moyen d'être questionné. Mais si la cruauté est un mythe que l'on peut détruire, il faut néanmoins prendre garde de ne pas ériger la cruauté en un mythe aussi essentiel, inhabitable que ne l'est le mythe de la bonne conscience dans *Dogville*.

Afin de mettre en lumière que la répétition et le recyclage participent dans *Dogville* de la cruauté, je vais étudier un concept majeur : celui de l'utopie, qui inclut notam-

ment celui de l'hospitalité et de la responsabilité. Mais ce concept est également un mythe, un absolu que l'on peut détruire, au moyen de de la cruauté. C'est aussi la perspective de Lévi-Strauss qui pense les procédés du mythe comme un genre d'essentialisme brisé :

> Le mythe se développera comme en spirale, jusqu'à ce que l'impulsion intellectuelle qui lui a donné naissance soit épuisée. La croissance du mythe est donc continue, par opposition avec sa structure qui reste discontinue. (Lévi-Strauss, texte annoté par Benware : 1955, pp. 428-444)

La cruauté est bien un absolu que l'on peut détruire, comme von Trier détruit le mythe de la bonne conscience et celui du bonheur essentiel : évolue-t-on alors dans d'autres mythes ? Le mythe tente de répondre aux interrogations d'une nation sur son identité, soudant une communauté éclatée, les mythes éclairent l'avenir en lui donnant une signification compréhensible et particulièrement cruelle dans ce film.

Manipulation et utopie sociale

Avec *Dogville*, Lars von Trier brise l'illusion de la représentation et engendre une réflexion à la fois sur ce qu'est une représentation, sur les dangers de la représentation et sur l'acte même d'aller au cinéma. Il remet notamment en question nos représentations mentales idéalisées de la vie en société, visions que la société renvoie d'elle-même à l'origine de fantasmes collectifs. Ces représentations symboliques deviennent alors des mythes : mythe de la réussite individuelle, du bonheur familial… Manifestement, dans ce film, les mythes se lient à l'utopie :

> C'était tomber dans un piège que de s'imaginer pouvoir créer ou importer une mythologie pour fonder un nouveau vécu collectif. N'est-ce pas d'ailleurs une utopie que d'investir l'acte théâtral du pouvoir d'instaurer, à lui seul, une unité, si elle ne préexiste pas dans le groupe, du pouvoir de faire vivre des mythes - d'y faire « croire » - s'ils ne sont pas le produit du fonctionnement « naturel » d'une pensée collective ? (Saison : 1998, p. 207)

Avec *Dogville*, premier jalon de sa trilogie (inachevée) dite « américaine », von Trier tente de recycler les images mentales que génère la société, notamment celles d'une vie pure et heureuse à la campagne.

Parfois, les scènes de *Dogville* sont bucoliques, prônées par Nicolas Poussin avec *Arcadie*. Ainsi, von Trier recycle un Âge d'Or, comme a pu le prôner la série américaine culte adaptée de *Little House on the Prairie* (1935) de Laura Ingalls Wilder, *flashback* dans un passé immortalisé par la caméra, dans une utopie pastorale et agricole : on désherbe les buissons de groseilliers qui donnent de si bonnes tartes avec cette odeur de cannelle, nostalgie de l'enfance, plaisirs innocents à l'abri de la rumeur montante du monde. Grace et Tom vont-ils se marier et avoir beaucoup d'enfants ? Dogville peut ainsi se concevoir comme l'image typique d'un village et plonge alors le film dans un imaginaire collectif : celui du *locus amoenus*, métaphore latine d'un paradis bucolique.

Le réalisateur vise à stimuler l'imaginaire des spectateurs qui peuvent se remémorer les pastorales antiques, fantasmant l'éloquent amour des bergers, mâtinées de la tradition des grands espaces vierges américains, le *Wild West*.

Dès l'abord, les spectateurs pensent évoluer dans une utopie sociale, en effet, la caméra est focalisée sur Thomas Edison Junior, du nom de l'inventeur prolifique de génie. S'il s'illumine, dans un premier temps, de l'aura de la puissance fictionnelle de cette désignation, il est néanmoins appelé Tom par l'ensemble des protagonistes. Il a un père, médecin à la retraite, et s'il est censé soigner les corps, Tom veut quant à lui améliorer le comportement de ses congénères et continue-t-il « purifier l'âme humaine ». Les spectateurs savent, grâce aux commentaires de la voix-off, que cette utopie communautaire se révèlera un leurre puisque Tom, dès le début du film, se plaît à donner « une nouvelle défaite humiliante aux dames » à son « ami d'enfance » Bill. Ainsi, au fur et à mesure du film, Tom se révèlera n'être qu'un imposteur, impuissant à parler comme un chef, impuissant à aimer d'une manière adulte et responsable. Néanmoins, il s'autoproclame moraliste et organise des réunions auxquelles les villageois participent.

Suivant les conseils de son ami Tom, Grace travaille gratuitement afin de s'intégrer. Mais les traits péjoratifs des villageois sont ancrés dans leurs mœurs. Cette utopie sociale est à son acmé lorsque Tom, qui finalement se verrait bien en commissaire politique, érige le groupe d'habitants en tribunal populaire à vote à main levée. Le verdict est d'abord favorable à Grace qui continue à travailler pour des habitants qui n'ont aucune vergogne à commencer à l'exploiter. Ce rituel d'assemblée va se répéter à divers stades du film et ira en se dramatisant jusqu'à un procès parodique : les villageois décident démocratiquement d'exploiter Grace. Les cadeaux qu'elle a reçus au moment du verdict ne sont que des appâts, des leurres quant à l'état d'esprit des villageois. C'est une société fermée qui souhaite continuer à vivre en autarcie, comme l'affirme Madame Henson : « on n'est pas des gangsters, on ne se mêle pas des affaires des autres, on ne demande rien à personne. »

Ces villageois semblent interrogateurs et presque accablés : une affiche accuse Grace d'être une braqueuse de banques, dommage qu'elle ne soit pas venu avec l'argent. Evidemment, il y a fort à parier que le village lui aurait réglé son compte. Ils se posent sans doute une autre question : qu'a-t-elle fait de cet argent ? Déception visible sur les visages : elle n'a pas pu voler cet argent puisqu'elle était *réfugiée* chez nous. Mais l'affiche est une condamnation *in absentia*, voire presque une mort sociale ; Grace est une criminelle, ou peu s'en faut, et avec elle on peut tout se permettre. L'être humain, ou plus précisément l'étrangère qu'est Grace aux yeux des villageois, se trouve dès lors réduit à sa valeur matérielle, une marchandise. Tom explique à Grace que : « d'un point de vue purement matériel ta présence est devenue plus coûteuse », cela afin de justifier le fait que les habitants de Dogville veulent une compensation. Ben troque ainsi la dignité d'être humain de Grace, contre un service trivial, le transport en camion et la raison en est qu'il « ne peut pas casser les prix ». Les illusions premières de Tom : « ce serait rendre un service à ce pays que de faire preuve de plus de générosité

et d'ouverture » sont balayées par les réactions des habitants, puis celles de Tom lui-même. C'est pourquoi, si Edison Senior affirme benoîtement que « nous avons tous le respect de l'être humain » Tom, dans un accès de lucidité, répliquera alors que : « ça, nous ne serons probablement jamais fixés là-dessus ».

Esclave sexuelle du village, Grace est alors sauvée par son père, qui n'est autre que le chef de la pègre : adaptation de *The Godfather* (1972), film mythique de Francis Ford Coppola, mettant en scène Marlon Brando dans le rôle de Don Vito Corleone, en quelque sorte un nouveau « Dieu le père » à qui l'on doit culte et obéissance. Von Trier déclara de l'acteur incarnant le père de Grace :

> James Caan est un formidable acteur, c'est vrai qu'on l'associe facilement aux rôles de gangsters depuis *Le Parrain*, mais c'est avant tout un très bon acteur. (Björkman : 2003, p. 37)

James Caan, qui en 1972 jouait Sonny Corleone, le fils assassiné du chef de la mafia, revêt cette fois le costume du *Parrain*. La société est pensée par von Trier comme une meute de chiens et comme il l'affirme à Stig Björkman :

> Je suis très content des répliques à la fin, entre Grace et son père, où il est dit que les hommes sont comme des chiens et qu'elle répond que les chiens ne choisissent que leur nature et qu'il faut les pardonner. Et le père réplique : « *On peut apprendre aux chiens beaucoup de bonnes choses, mais si on les pardonne chaque fois, ils suivent leur instinct.* » (Björkman : 2003, p. 37)

L'homme est désormais pensé comme un chien pour l'homme, adaptation dégradée de la célèbre formule, reprise par maints philosophes et écrivains, « l'homme est un loup pour l'homme ». Grace se venge alors des villageois en les exterminant. Pourtant cette vengeance signe la défaite de Grace, à supposer qu'elle était sincère, ou bien, si elle ne l'était pas, la condamne comme manipulatrice. En effet, Grace est un personnage à multiples facettes.

Les spectateurs évoluent ainsi dans une utopie, étymologiquement *le lieu de nulle part*, construction imaginaire d'une communauté humaine pensée comme parfaite et qui pourtant devient l'incarnation de l'inhumanité. Il est légitime dès lors de parler d'une utopie négative, c'est-à-dire d'une *dystopie*. Lorsque l'utopie s'effondre, cela oblige les protagonistes et les spectateurs à repenser leur *meilleur des mondes* (Voltaire, *Candide*, 1759) et avant tout leur rapport à l'Autre et donc à l'hospitalité. Selon Mireille Rosello dans son ouvrage *Postcolonial Hospitality, The Immigrant as Guest* :

> Hospitality is both proposed and imposed by normative and prescriptive discourses that seek to be obeyed as laws of hospitality: they try to police the limits of what is acceptable or forbidden, morally or politically desirable. Simultaneously, hospitality also exists through constantly reinvented practices of everyday life that individuals borrow from a variety of traditions – from what their parents have taught them, from what they identify as their own traditional background – and practices are sometimes similar to, sometimes different from, a supposedly shared norm. (Rosello : 2001, p. 6)

En effet, Grace qui voit en Dogville un refuge, est acceptée sous la condition explicite de garder son statut d'étrangère au village. Les habitants ont voté l'acceptation de Grace parmi eux, mais lorsque celle-ci se trouve accusée d'être une braqueuse de banques, malgré le fait qu'elle n'a pas quitté Dogville, l'attitude des villageois change à son égard. Lorsque Grace dit alors à Tom « je crois qu'il faut que vous votiez », sous-entendu, le bien-fondé de sa présence, ce dernier lui répond : « pourquoi ? On ne peut pas procéder à des votes, comme ça, à tout bout de champ. » Comme le précise Alain Montandon, dans son étude sur *L'Hospitalité : signes et rites* :

> soit qu'on espère arriver à l'assimilation, donc à la levée du statut d'étranger, soit au contraire, comme il arrive souvent dans le cas de l'immigré, que celui-ci ne soit toléré qu'avec réticence, en attendant de le persécuter, de l'expulser, ou même de le menacer dans son existence physique. On pourrait appeler l'hospitalité ce statut intermédiaire d'hostilité temporairement interrompue. (Montandon : 2001, p. 14)

Par le biais du personnage de Grace, von Trier recycle la notion de péché, et donc de châtiment, de punition et de rédemption. Grace suivant les conseils de Tom s'est proposée d'aider les habitants à réaliser des menues tâches dont finalement ils n'auraient pas besoin et en dépit de sa (prétendue ?) gentillesse, sera asservie par la force que ne devrait pas revendiquer un peuple libre selon la déclaration universelle des droits de l'Homme, le droit du plus fort. De même que lorsque Grace emprunte le chemin des groseilliers, Ma Ginger est là pour lui rappeler narquoisement : « je pensais que vous étiez contente d'être ici ».

La vengeance apocalyptique : une évidence ?

Les personnages et les spectateurs évoluent donc dans le mythe d'une cruauté sociale essentielle. Si Grace prône la liberté et l'égalité : « on a tous le droit de profiter un peu de la vie », elle découvre finalement qu'elle est exclue de cette harmonie, que les habitants ne lui accordent pas les mêmes droits qu'eux. Finalement, en tant qu'étrangère au village, Grace est exclue du mythe du bonheur essentiel, elle ne peut prétendre aux images mentales de bonheurs que génère la société. En dépit de son travail pour la communauté, son statut d'étrangère reste un prétexte à leur frénésie haineuse. Jason, le fils aîné de Véra, en a une conscience aiguë : « vous voulez que tout le monde vous aime pour ne pas devoir partir ».

Dans la scène qui suit, Véra demande à Grace de faire la leçon à ses enfants afin de se rendre à des colloques à Georgetown. C'est alors que Jason déchire les pages de son livre d'étude, Grace demande à ses jeunes sœurs de sortir de la maison afin de s'entretenir avec lui : il se dit méchant et demande à recevoir « une bonne raclée ».

> Jason - Je sais pourquoi tu ne me prends plus jamais sur tes genoux.
> Grace - Pourquoi ?
> Jason - Parce ce que je suis méchant.
> Grace – Oh, allons. Tu dois avoir tes raisons j'imagine.
> Jason - Je suis méchant avec tout le monde. Avec mon petit frère aussi. Et lui, il est trop petit pour pouvoir se défendre. C'est pas bien.

> Grace - Non ce n'est pas bien.
> Jason - Je l'ai bien cherché, je le sais. J'ai mérité une fessée. [Refus de Grace] […] J'ai vraiment mérité une bonne raclée. En plus, je n'aurai plus aucun respect pour toi si tu ne me donnes pas de fessée. […] Alors, quand maman rentrera, je serais peut-être obligé de lui dire que tu m'as tapé. […] Si tu me l'a donnes, la fessée, personne n'en saura jamais rien. […] J'ai donné un coup de pieds dans son berceau, c'est pas de ma faute s'il n'a pas basculé. [Grace lui donne une fessée.] C'est pas assez fort, faut taper plus fort, c'est une punition. […] Tu veux pas que j'aille au coin, histoire de me faire honte ? […] Voilà papa !
> Grace - Déjà ?

Les spectateurs comprennent que la petite cruauté physique que réclame Jason met en lumière une grande cruauté mentale : Jason manipule Grace, la menace de mentir à Véra. La position de Grace devient alors insupportable face à ce jeu sadomasochiste intenable. Cependant, le plus intéressant dans cette scène, c'est que c'est exactement le procédé de Grace envers les habitants de Dogville. En effet, cette scène répète parfaitement le comportement ambigu de Grace, mettant Dogville dans cette même position insupportable : elle accepte de travailler sans se faire payer, accepte d'être humiliée par les habitants. Les spectateurs culpabilisent car est-ce vraiment cela qu'être Saint ? Néanmoins, lorsque le village la prend aux pieds de la lettre, la bourgade disposant de Grace, cela dérape. Le jeu sadomasochiste de Jason et de Grace finalement conduit à l'extermination et l'annihilation même de Dogville. Grace est une tentation à laquelle les villageois n'ont pas résisté.

Mais ce film composite offre également aux spectateurs une autre interprétation de Grace : elle aurait donné à chaque membre du village une chance de sortir de cette prison, de leur enfermement physique et mental, mais ils n'auraient pas su la saisir. Par conséquent, ce n'est plus Grace qui serait emprisonnée, otage, mais bien les habitants de Dogville, puisqu'elle pourrait s'échapper. Sa force réside dans le fait même de rester selon une perspective chrétienne, d'ailleurs tout un intertexte biblique entoure le film : Grace est constamment comparée à une pomme, elle sera violée dans un jardin, son père veut crucifier le chien Moïse… Ce film se présente alors comme un récit pédagogique, dont l'origine dans La Bible est le Mashal, un récit énigmatique rassemblant des anecdotes de la vie quotidienne qui oblige à s'interroger, et notamment sur le Jugement Dernier : l'Apocalypse clos le corpus biblique et *Dogville*. La Bible est un texte fondateur, une œuvre de référence, qui a valeur de loi en instaurant un équilibre spirituel et social, fondant une foi et se présente ainsi comme un facteur de cohésion sociale : cette œuvre développe une cosmogonie, une origine du monde. Lars von Trier s'autorise certaines distorsions afin d'adapter cette œuvre aux préoccupations contemporaines, il change ainsi de contexte. Selon Camille Dumoulié :

> Ce dont les mythes ont besoin pour vivre, ce dont a besoin la clôture pour être justifiée, c'est de héros qui, ne cessant d'affronter les monstres mythiques et d'ouvrir des brèches dans la clôture, finissent par y trouver la mort. Et il en va

> des mythes comme des têtes de l'Hydre : plus on les coupe, plus ils repoussent. Chaque héros qui meurt renforce le système de cruauté sur quoi se fondent la culture et la société. […] Alors, son évasion manquée eût été la meilleure justification de la clôture et du rite. (Dumoulié : 1992, p. 151)

Lars von Trier recycle et critique de cette manière à la fois le puritanisme et la vengeance comme a pu les décrire Nathaniel Hawthorne dans *La lettre écarlate* (1850). Cette œuvre dépeint la vie d'Hester Prynne et du pasteur Arthur Dimmesdale qui vivent un amour caché, reconnu coupable d'adultère par la société, même si Hester fut abandonnée par son mari qu'elle croit mort. Elle rachètera ce que la communauté estime être une faute, par la souffrance physique au prix de la lettre écarlate A appliquée au fer, et morale car elle est mise au ban de sa communauté d'origine. Grace, à l'instar d'Hester, se substitue à la représentation de Jésus, découvrant l'essence de la solitude angoissée, exclue du groupe social. La solitude de Grace rappelle celle du Christ abandonné dans le Jardin des Oliviers, contrepoint du verger de pommiers de Chuck. Le Christ sur la croix est un mythe cruel et lorsqu'il est pensé et construit comme un mythe, il devient dès lors le fondement même de la société, autrement dit, il devient social et élabore des images qui structurent la société. Mais cela fait aussi que nous sommes toujours sous le regard du supplicié. A l'instar de Jésus, Grace accepte de souffrir pour racheter l'humanité, mais elle comprend qu'il n'y a plus d'humanité à sauver. Cependant, elle n'était pas obligée d'aller jusqu'au bout pour comprendre cela et le savait probablement.

Grace décide ainsi seule qu'il n'y a plus d'humanité à sauver, anticipant désormais la fin de l'histoire des villageois. Selon Grace, les habitants doivent être punis pour leurs méfaits. Le film pourrait donc encourager, manipuler les spectateurs à faire qu'ils acceptent l'action meurtrière de Grace comme quelque chose de bon, en un nouveau mythe consolateur de la cruauté. Grace annonce une punition exemplaire et qui se traduit par une spectaculaire élimination qui se voudrait *purificatrice*. Mais si Grace accepte cette position, ce nouveau mythe cruel, les spectateurs quant à eux doivent se réveiller et voir les prémices d'une nouvelle éthique, celle d'une cruauté lucide qui oblige dès lors les spectateurs à un héroïsme de la conscience. Certes, on ne peut pas vivre dans un mythe d'une communauté idéale, on ne peut pas se réfugier dans cette fausse idée du social : mais est-ce une raison pour se réfugier dans la destruction ?

Si la communauté parfaite n'est pas une option où s'enfermer, l'apocalypse finale comme évidence non plus. Il faut choisir et donc être responsable pour sortir du mythe. En effet, cette apocalypse n'est ni donnée, ni choisie par Dieu : elle est un choix humain et c'est aux spectateurs de choisir, de vouloir sortir du mythe et finalement de toute histoire donnée par avance. C'est une position cruelle et inconfortable car les spectateurs sont seuls face à ce choix. C'est un public qui n'accepte pas la vengeance comme une réponse évidente, qui accepte ce paradoxe : que la bonté et la sainteté ne soient pas des absolues, qu'il n'existe pas d'absolu dans la vie. Il faut dès lors accepter qu'il n'y a pas de position sociale parfaite et que la sainte-martyre puisse aussi être animée de sen-

timents contradictoires. C'est aux spectateurs de décider, de réfléchir à ce qu'ils peuvent faire afin de construire une société meilleure. Et n'accepter ni les mythes consolateurs, ni la destruction, c'est être responsable.

Vers un héroïsme de la conscience

Dogville participe au recyclage, à l'adaptation de récits mythiques en diffusant les types offerts par la littérature et le cinéma, en les mettant en scène, d'où les dangers de telles représentations. Il est légitime de se questionner à savoir si les spectateurs pourraient voir dans ce film une métaphore de nos sociétés modernes, une vigie qui nous mettrait en garde d'une manière pessimiste : la violence finit par triompher[1]. Après l'entretien décisif avec son père dans la voiture, la vie humaniste de Grace se transmute en force violente et sans merci. Maurice Blanchot dans *L'entretien infini* écrit qu':

> instinctivement, nous sentons tous le danger qu'il y a à chercher la limite de l'homme trop en bas, où elle est pourtant, à ce point où l'existence paraît, par la souffrance, la misère et le désespoir, si privée de « valeur » que la mort s'en trouve réhabilitée et la violence justifiée. Il est inévitable que, lorsque l'histoire et la pensée cherchent le commencement au niveau de l'extrême bassesse, la violence de la mort se dégrade elle aussi et atteint cette démesure qui lui est particulière, où elle s'unit à la facilité du grand nombre et devient le comble de l'horreur en devenant ce qui n'attire ni l'horreur ni même l'intérêt, quelque chose d'aussi insignifiant que « l'acte de trancher une tête de chou ou de boire un verre d'eau. » (Blanchot : 1970, [1969], p. 270)

Apparemment beaucoup de spectateurs ont applaudi cette l'apocalypse finale[2], voire y ont vu une apologie pour une guerre sans limite *post* 9/11[3], étant donné la date de sortie du film.

Mais pourquoi donc les spectateurs pensent être en porte-à-faux avec *Dogville* ? Où se trouve le tressautement de l'image, non pas dû à une projection défaillante, mais à une distanciation que non seulement l'œil mais aussi l'esprit saisissent ? En effet, cela serait mal lire le film que de le lire ainsi : von Trier nous amène à rejeter cette position vengeresse car *Dogville* est pris en charge par la voix-off de John Hurt, sycophante ironique et lucide. La voix-off prend parfois le rôle des spectateurs en posant des questions : « d'où lui étaient venues ces menaces ? » se demande-t-il alors, lorsque Grace prédit que plus personne ne dormira dans le lit qu'a souillé la jeune June. Néanmoins, il influence les spectateurs puisqu'il emploie le terme « menace » au lieu d'une simple idée ingénue. Ainsi, son point de vue tente d'orienter notre perception. La voix-off commente le moment de l'ouverture des rideaux de Jack, véritable dévoilement intérieur, et son acceptation de sa cécité en tant que « provocation douteuse » de Grace. Cette voix traduit, interprète voire déconstruit les images : devant la détresse de Grace, Ben le transporteur accepte de la cacher dans son camion moyennant finances, payées *cash* et par anticipation ; alors que Ben affirme : « Je veux pas profiter du malheur des autres », la voix-off commente ensuite : « Ben aurait fait un aller-retour au volant de

son camion en Enfer pour dix dollars ». La lucidité de la voix-off s'impose alors aux spectateurs et les délivre des images. Cette voix finalement se présente comme un double de la figure du scénariste, connaissant et anticipant les divers protagonistes, mais ne sachant pas toutefois la suite de la trilogie annoncée par Lars von Trier et qui reste à écrire. Cependant, alors que Grace se mue non seulement en bonne de chaque famille, mais aussi en objet sexuel du village, attachée comme une chienne, les spectateurs se surprennent à rire en entendant la voix-off commenter ainsi ces viols nocturnes : « c'était presque aussi gênant que si un paysan se soulageait avec sa vache. Mais guère davantage. »

Les spectateurs effarés par certaines scènes de ce film se demandent pourquoi ils ressentent cette *vis comica*. Sans doute que l'humour de Lars von Trier y est pour quelque chose. Le théâtre est un procédé ritualisé : ritualisation de la parole, répétitions… et c'est cette densité des signes, avec toutes leurs ambiguïtés, que Lars von Trier recherche dans *Dogville* et dont il se joue, élaborant des parodies sur un mode biblique. Ainsi, la voix-off affirme à propos de Grace qu' : « elle pendait là sur sa branche, telle la pomme du jardin d'Eden, une pomme mûre, prête à éclater », son père pense crucifier le chien Moïse, le personnage de Tom évolue d'ailleurs de l'enfant prodigue au traître Judas… Ce sont aussi les paraboles parodiques, comme celle de Tom : « on ne plante pas un graine n'importe quand, on ne plante pas une graine en hiver » dont le but est de s'attirer les faveurs de Grace. Mais cet humour a tôt fait de se muer en un humour sardonique tourné contre son objet, contre son auteur et contre les spectateurs.

Le rire est également engendré par le fait que ce film métadiscursif est ironique à l'égard de la littérature, l'exemple de Grace disant à Tom qui souhaite faire l'amour : « ils peuvent nous tuer d'un instant à l'autre, ce serait une fin romantique à souhait », autrement dit, Lars von Trier joue non seulement avec l'horizon d'attente du public, mais aussi avec les codes littéraires traditionnels : s'agit-il d'une fin à l'eau-de-rose dans un film noir ? Les personnages se nomment Jason, Olympia, Athéna… jusqu'au chien Moïse, sans qu'ils aient pourtant cette aura caractéristique de ces figures mythiques.

Cet humour libère les spectateurs du poids de la cruauté en même temps que les spectateurs peuvent être effrayés de leurs propres réactions. L'accumulation de situations tragiques est ainsi dynamitée par cet humour, parfaite illustration de la définition du comique selon Henri Bergson, « du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant » (Bergson : 1985, [1900], p. 38), en un raffinement de la cruauté au sens où les spectateurs n'ont plus d'empathie, et qui finalement ronge le public dans son être intime au fur et à mesure, selon la formule d'Artaud évoquant un « *HUMOUR-DESTRUCTION* » (Artaud, IV, p. 88). En matière de comique dans le théâtre, suivre Eugène Ionesco qui fut un maître dans ce domaine, c'est affirmer que « le comique étant l'intuition de l'absurde », il est donc « plus désespérant que le tragique » (Ionesco : 1966, p. 61). L'humour est donc « plus désespérant » car il tue le mythe : certes les mythes sont cruels mais le plus cruel est peut-être de tout détruire avec humour, puisque finalement, il semble difficile au mythe de survivre à l'humour.

C'est en s'ouvrant à la totalité des esthétiques actuelles, valeurs culturelles diverses et partagées, que le réalisateur nous fait plonger, et le monde dans lequel nous vivons, dans ce drame à multiples entrées. Von Trier laisse cependant un peu trop de choix, de possibilités, contrairement à *Salò ou les 120 Journées de Sodome* de Pier Paolo Pasolini, par exemple. En effet, la voix-off ne prend pas en charge l'ensemble de *Dogville* afin de rendre visible et plus intelligible ces dangers et les spectateurs peuvent avoir la sensation de se perdre dans ce labyrinthe de recyclages, dans ce « bouillon de culture » pluridisciplinaire où de multiples facettes sont abordées. Et peut-être que l'ultime cruauté du réalisateur envers le public est de lui laisser la libre interprétation de ces représentations : responsabilités nouvelles ou avenir sans espoir ? Il n'est pas anodin que von Trier ait réalisé *Melancholia* (2011). Manifestement, dans *Dogville*, la destruction des mythes de la cruauté pourrait aussi impliquer leurs remplacements par un contre-mythe tout aussi cruel et néfaste, celui de la mélancolie.

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1 *Dogville* aurait inspiré le tueur Anders Behring Breivik, tuant 69 personnes par arme à feu le 22 juillet 2011, selon: http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/cinema/attaques-en-norvege-reaction-de-lars-von-trier-sur-dogville_1017045.html.

2 « To judge from the responses I've observed, the audience may even be longing for vengeance » dans HOBERMAN, James, « Our town », *Sight and Sound*, February 2004, vol. 14, n° 2, p. 27.

3 http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/dogville. « What with all the repeated references to characters wanting to protect their community, or the hypocritical Tom stating that he is there « to do the thinking » for Grace, it's easy to read *Dogville* as a post-9/11 satire of American oppression and our country's misguided notions of Christian charity. »

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Claudiu TURCUȘ

Recycling and Confronting *Ostalgie* under the Romanian Transition. *I'm an Old Communist Hag* – an Unfaithful Adaptation

Abstract

Using a comparative and intermedial approach, this paper aims: 1. to outline a typological overview of several literary and cinematic modes of representing communism in the Romanian society after 1989, highlighting, at the same time, the identitarian clichés pertaining to the transition that are inherent therein; 2. to focus analytically on Dan Lungu's novel *I'm an Old Communist Hag!* (2007) and the homonymous film directed by Stere Gulea (2013), examined in terms of communist nostalgia, a theme that is present in both artistic products; 3. to theoretically circumscribe the type of adaptation particularized by Gulea's cinematic rendition, by reference to the concept of the "ethics of infidelity" (Leitch 2010).

Keywords: Post-communist nostalgia, adaptation, identity, Romanian transition, Dan Lungu, Stere Gulea.

In the Romanian society, the period of transition from communism to a chaotic and ambivalent capitalism was marked not only by an inefficient sluggishness insofar as the creation of democratic institutions was concerned, but also by a gradually outlined dynamics of identitarian representations. In the 1990s, amidst post-communist euphoria, but in the absence of professional publishers and coherent funding mechanisms, both literature and the cinema were left in abeyance, being of secondary concern. Romanian culture had more important things to do: it had to face its own past – a somewhat normal task after forty years of communism. The

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consequence of this moral duty was tantamount to an influx of memoirs or memory-related works. Before being addressed from a historiographical standpoint, the biography of the recently concluded communist period was subjectively filtered and televised.[1] Disquieting carceral testimonies, censored confessions or "drawer," unpublished epistles – some of these were authentic, others were just fuelled by resentment, victimization, mystification or proffered denunciations (freely, at last). Thus, it is not surprising that only in 2004 did a book entitled *Reabilitarea ficțiunii* (*The Rehabilitation of Fiction*) appear (Simuț 2004). After more than a decade during which memory had become repetitive and, at times, had sanctioned lynch law, it was time for an alternative filter of identitarian representation. Exeunt the (auto)biographical pact, enter the fictional pact.

The Screen of Transition

A new generation of fiction writers and directors who had barely come of age under communism made the transition from biography to story. However, while the testimonial stage had been marked by the oppressive memory of those who had experienced the traumas of the past, the narrative stage was bound to keep its allegiance to the present. As the transition to democracy gained ground as a topic on the politicians' agenda and as a social reality, relating back to communism could occur only in a screened manner – by reference to the dominant ideology of the period. Thus, the perspective enabled by the transition generated a denouncement of the convention or ideological screen whereby communism had been represented, that is, appropriated. The authors of the films/novels I shall be referring to here do not assume an authorial narrative convention, but transfer such responsibility onto the characters, uncovering their own conventionality. The mind-set of the present provides the imagological and narrative backbone of a defunct era: communism can be caught glimpses of, therefore, *via* clichés engendered by the transition.

In outlining a possible typology based on the principle of representing communism through the lens of the post-communist transition, we might dub the first category thereof "the black book of communism." Cristian Mungiu's second film, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007) and Lucian Dan Teodorovici's latest novel, *Matei Brunul* (2011), fall under this category. Both chart two exemplary stories about characters whose lives were marked by communism. Resorting to emblematic themes and genuine tragic clichés, Mungiu the director paints a fresco of the repercussions that clandestine abortion could engender in Romania during the 1980s, while Teodorovici the novelist describes the life of a promising young man, ruined by Gulag; both the film and the novel depict a detached, albeit no less intense image of the past. This is a mature perspective on communism, from the vantage point of the post-communist transition. It is not by chance that the two representations have been appropriated in the West as identitarian versions that are symptomatic[2] of the Romanian society as a whole.

The second category might be generically entitled the "pink book of communism."[3] Representing a sort of bitter idealization of life under communism, childhood games amongst the derelict socialist blocks of flats and adolescent love requited in the context of absurd educational constraints are evoked as fragments of diminished normality. According to the American publisher of the novel written by the brothers Filip and Matei Florian, *Băiuțeii* (2006)/*Băiuț Alley*, "Every day life is recounted through their young eyes. Their story is one of childish naivety set against a backdrop of life imposed by communism." Things are a little more tense in the film directed by Cătălin Mitulescu, *How I Spent the End of the World* (2006), which nonetheless has a happy end. Lilu, the seven-year old protagonist, has failed to assassinate Ceausescu as planned, and Eva, his sister, who is 10 years older than him, clandestinely emigrated shortly before the end of the communist world. The agony of a bygone time becomes the feast of a marginal community whose members live fully only through their offspring. With hindsight, looking back at communism from the angle made available by the transition, it becomes clear, thus, that ideology could be countered not only by flouting it, but also through the triumph of innocence.

The third option for retrospectively representing communism from the perspective of the transition – the "grey book" – is one that we might call burlesque. In the episodes of *Tales from the Golden Age* (directed by Cristian Mungiu & Co., 2006), parodying quotidian life situations under communism imbues the narrative plots with comic realism. Each short film reconstructs one "urban legend" from the period of the Ceaușescu regime, decanted by the collective mind as representative of that era. As burlesque farces from another world, the stories in *Tales from the Golden Age* entail, as a first impulse, the recognition of the communist archetypes, followed immediately by identitarian distancing in a humorous vein. Derision essentializes the past and creates distance. Such a film is, in fact, a very effective export product, emphasizing the idea that the separation of the Romanian society from communism is now complete, since it can revisit its past with such laid back detachment. From this viewpoint, the film seems to be an illustration of Marx's remark whereby "man separates from the past with a loud and irreverent laughter."

A humorous character, in her own way, is the protagonist of the film *I'm an Old Communist Hag!* (2007) by Dan Lungu. This time, however, parody has another function. Emilia, the protagonist of the novel, is emblematic of the category of *(n)ostalgic* citizens during the Romanian transition. In the context of Dan Lungu's novel, the proper sense of the term is strictly denotative, meaning "a [useless] sentiment for an irretrievable temporality and/or a longing to return to a totalitarian system" (Sadowski-Smith 1998: 1). The subversive meaning of the concept, adequate to the German space after the fall of the Berlin Wall – "consumers of *Ostalgie* may escape the dominant order without leaving it" (Berdahl 1999: 206) – can only tangentially be ascribed to the imaginary of *I'm an Old Communist Hag!*.

The novel is constructed according to a relatively predictable scheme. We are in the 1990s: Emilia, a low-income pensioner, lives in an apartment in the province, with her husband Tucu, as their daughter Alice is away in Canada. The long moments of solitude – as the husband retreats in the countryside, for a few days a week, to raise livestock and grow vegetables – occasions the woman's sundry memories of her youth, spent under communism. Lungu diegetically alternates her memories with diverse moments of the present. The choice is strategic: Emilia talks to Alice about elections (the daughter trying in vain to convince her to vote for the Liberals), to Rozalia (the bourgeois seamstress who is trying to recover her estates, confiscated by the communists) and to Aurelia (a former co-worker, whose memories of communism are different from hers). However, Lungu's novel is the centre of gravity in Emilia's mythologized past, which becomes both a sort of compensatory universe, counterpoised to the present of the this transition, and an opportunity for questioning her existential values.

The book has sparked conflicting reactions. Leaving aside the fact that some commentators have simplistically associated the protagonist's nostalgia with the author's own perspective, the question of who is Emilia, really? has received radical answers:

> "Dan Lungu writes, unperturbed, in the genre of socialist realism, but reverses the polarity of values. Communism becomes thus the bad guy – which is good for Dan Lungu's political orientation, but is not so good for his literature: for the defective blueprint remains the same." (Iovănel 2007)

The novel is considered biased, as every scene does nothing but illustrate the thesis of communism's nefariousness. The rationale behind this type of argument is as follows: through these lenses, Emilia appears not as a genuine character, but merely as an ideological puppet: however attached to the communist values she might want to come through and however nostalgically she might reminisce about them, she manages to decant only a discordant image of those times. Her nostalgia is parodied by repetition, the point of this narrative and ideological game being the denunciation of communism, responsible not only for the mystification of memory, but also for sabotaging the transition itself:

> "In a scene from the hag's childhood, the girl who will become a hag is playing in a wagon of wheat [losing her little hat]. Well, not just playing; she reflects Romania's exploitation ratio at the hands of the Soviet Union. Wheat is not innocent: it is part of a shipment of five carloads that the Romanians give the Soviet brothers in exchange for a single carload of wheat ('In the Soviet Union, scientists have invented much better wheat. That is why the Soviets, like elder brothers, have decided to help us. We give them five carloads of bad wheat, and they give us one carload of good wheat, for seed'). After a while, the little hat will be recovered from the car filled with Romanian wheat that the Soviets will be returning to the Romanians as 'much better', Soviet wheat. [...] Almost every page contains such a verticalization of the thesis. (Iovănel 2007)

The idea is that one cannot empathize with such a falsely naïve consciousness, since, under the guise of Emilia's allegiance to communism, there lies concealed the rhetoric of radical anticommunism, according to which, the failures of the transition are due to such retrograde attitudes. The poor woman's nostalgia becomes thus a kind of pathological symptom of a society that cannot break away from its infamous past. *Emilia* are all those who cannot adapt to the new realities because their make-up was vitiated by communism.

The problem with this interpretation comes from the fact that, still, the novel does not go through with illustrating the overturned socialist-realist scheme. If it did, the protagonist would have to be "come round" and be persuaded to convert to capitalism, understanding eventually that she cannot keep living in the past. What removes the novel from this scheme is precisely the fact that Emilia's sole project resides in "reviving the past" (Lungu 111). Progressive to the end, she conceives the future as an ingenuous utopia. She would like to restart the metal confections factory where she used to work as a young woman, but she is discouraged by her former co-workers. However hard we might try to associate this propensity with Emilia's at least partial change of mentality, the argument falls through because this is a flat character, anchored in the past, and not a round character. She does not adapt, but seeks to adapt the present to the past.

Obviously, Dan Lungu does not take on Emilia's nostalgia as his own authorial perspective. Still, it would be questionable, to say at least, if he used his character merely to place himself amongst inveterate anticommunists. At this point, phenomenology becomes just as important as ideology. The author simply allows his character to manifest herself. And in this, at times, implausible manifestation – for her ideological speculations are sometimes too specialized – Emilia manages an "outstanding feat: she internalizes communist identity amidst an exclusively capitalist ideology" (Borza 2011). Among the various memory flashbacks, transcribed by Lungu in various registers – ranging from the sentimental to the burlesque – the protagonist has a self-reflective, almost dialectical moment, which problematizes her concept of communist identity:

> "I used to regret those times, the people I had been surrounded by, the joy, the solidarity, but I don't know why, all this nostalgia could hardly be labelled *communist*. I mean I might know. Maybe because in the old days, we called communists those who gave fiery speeches during boring, long meetings. Those who stuck to the party line without seeing left and right, without a care for people and without understanding the particular situations. For us, it was not the party members who were communists, but the politricks and the zealots. I did not regret those guys. Now the communists were the ones who had lied, who had taken by force, put people in prison, tortured them, and so on. I was neither. What kind of a communist was I? But if those were the communists, did it mean that I wanted communism without the communists? But was communism possible without "those kinds of communists"? If not, did I still want communism? [...] I no longer wanted to be one, but I was. Can you be one without wanting to be one?" (Lungu 55)

Emilia's dilemma is that she fails to recognize herself in the proximate genus of the communists either in the sense of that era, or according to the definition provided by the transition paradigm. She feels her identity as a specific difference. Therefore, her communist nostalgia seems to have no object. Instead, it does have content. While labels are misleading, what she experienced in her life remains: that harmless comfort, those modest holidays, the minuscule flat in which she had raised a child, the proletarian parties, the sufficient salary, the gas tank from the Party. But Emilia finds it difficult to rank herself amongst the communists, for she contributed nothing to this system, she was only the beneficiary of a polity that gave her a reasonably decent urban life. As far as she is concerned, communism did have, though, an "understanding for particular situations." The statement from the end of the quotation – "Can you be one without wanting to be one? " – should be interpreted not as the expression of her identitarian doubt, but rather as a subtle dissociation in relation to the evil side of communism, which Emilia does not ignore, nor gives it its due weight. What she regrets is not an ideology, but the social order that "had arranged a quiet sewer for her youth" (Gorzo 2013). Reduced to her stance as a puppet in Dan Langu's anticommunist script, Emilia's nostalgia loses its introspective, even self-questioning consistency. This dimension of her discourse is not, indeed, alien to the novel. Rhetorically non-homogeneous, the flux of her memory frequently has melancholic-argumentative overtones. As a victim of the transition, Emilia makes a swift, pragmatic reckoning and deems that she used to live a better life under communism. A diminished, but safe existence is preferable, in her view, to an uncertain transition, dominated by poverty. Thus, Dan Lungu maintains both stakes of the story. By indirectly parodying Emilia's flashbacks – rendered in free indirect style by the protagonist – the writer emphasizes the absurdity of communist (n)ostalgia, and in light of the character's advocacy of communism, she is given an existential complexity that counters the any suspicion against an authorial slanted totalitarianism.

"The Ethics of Infidelity"

Recently, in 2013, the arguments of the "communist hag" were revived in a screened version of Dan Lungu's novel. The film spawned an interesting polemical debate[4] between two generations of intellectuals regarding the way in which the Romanian society should relate to its communist legacy. Before analysing the arguments sparked by the film, it should be noted that the director Stere Gulea and the script co-writers Lucian Dan Teodorovici and Vera Ion substantially changed the story of the source text, and this requires a conceptual clarification of the idea of fidelity in film adaptation.

In the classical approach, methodologically consecrated by George Bluestone's book, *Novels into Film* (1957) and extended including in recent approaches (Cartmell & Whelehan 2007), the fidelity criterion served to reinforce the meaning of the novel or to assist in the teaching of literature through film. The overarching assumption of these approaches is that in relation to literature, film representations have a lower sta-

tus. The degradation of film as a medium is indirectly supported by the constant appeal to the idea of mimetic fidelity. The maximum that the cinema can do is to (visually) illustrate the narrative with accuracy. Fidelity turns thus from a correlative principle into an axiological criterion. Being, by nature, by-products/derivatives, whose fidelity is questionable, adaptations have only one chance of maintaining relevance, that is, their value: to be as reverent as possible.

On the other hand, the acknowledgment of infidelity as an essential principle in analysing the relationship between novels and films coincides with a kind of return of the repressed in adaptation studies. Recent approaches (Leitch 2010; Westbrook 2010), informed by respect for the cinema as a medium, do not exclude fidelity – for denying it would suspend the relevance of the comparison – but turns it from a valorising mechanism into a hermeneutic barometer. The idea would be that there is no point lamenting the lack of fidelity of a film in relation to a novel, but that one should question and seek to explain the stakes of the infidelity and the purposes of the adaptation. Based on one of Terry Eagleton's remarks about the Derridean concept of the "text" – "'Textual means that nothing stands gloriously alone'" (2010: 26), Brett Westbrook defines adaptation as a field of "glorious plurality" (44). As long as the meaning is not exclusively embedded in the source text, but in the process of adaptation, infidelity can also become significant in a hermeneutic sense.

Thomas Leitch speculates on the ethical potential of the idea of fidelity, demanding, symmetrically, an "ethics of infidelity," relevant to the reception and assessment of adaptations. He argues that:

> „the main things that have been enjoined historically in specifically ethical terms to be faithful are husband and wife, either because a woman's adultery betrays her husband's pecuniary investment in her under the Mosaic law, or because both spouses have a duty to re-enact Christ's faithfulness to the church in an analogy expounded in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. Yet because 'contracts *create* transgressions,' as Tony Tanner argued thirty years ago, the possibility of adultery, arousing both condemnation of a heroine like Emma Bovary who violates the marriage contract and an empathetic understanding of her avid reaction against the stifling bonds of marriage, provides both a basis for the bourgeois novel, which incorporates 'a tension between law and sympathy' and the seeds of its dissolution. […] The possibility of adultery is also productive because it 'effectively renarrativizes a life that have become devoid of story'" (Leitch 66).

The argument set forth by the professor from the University of Delaware unravels three constants distributed in a causal manifestation. The first – *transgression* – is inscribed in the very nature of the marital contract as the latency of infidelity. The second – *re-narrativization* – marks the consequence of the breach of contract by one of the spouses, a consequence that leads to an amendment of the contract. Finally, the third – which is two-headed: the *condemnation* or *empathy* – envisages the reception of the

breach of fidelity and, implicitly, of the contract rescission, conveying the effect of the former two. By transferring this reading key onto the concept of adaptation, Leitch concludes that the latter

> "depends on infidelity not merely in a negative sense, at the failure to adhere to a pledge of fealty, but in a positive sense, as a response to an injunction to be fruitful and multiply untrammelled by repressive social laws and mores" (66).

The problem of the analogy between a marriage contract and the one established between the source text and the adaptation text appears, according to Leitch's scheme, at the reception level. As cultural products arising from the confluence of at least two creative consciousnesses and involving at least two different media, adaptations require a comparative approach that inevitably leads to a polarization of value judgments. But this symmetry of axiological opposites – condemnation vs. empathy – raises a fundamental question: what is the responsibility of an adaptation? Should it be faithful to the source text or should it be free and imaginative? In other words, which prevails? The criterion of precedence or the criterion of innovation? The categorical answer given by an entire tradition of adaptation studies is as predictable as it is paradoxical: as Leitch writes, "The ethical imperatives of adaptation, whenever they have been articulated, have all been on the side of fidelity" (66). Therefore, axiological symmetry remains, as it were, a simulacrum, since the axiological verdict rests on the side of fidelity. Mimicry sparks "empathy" and creativity attracts "condemnation." Plurality betrays its ambiguity. The justification of such a discriminatory situation, Leitch believes, derives from the fact that the hermeneutics of adaptation has built and consolidated its discourse mimicry by predicating it on the concept of artistic mimesis, derived from Plato and Aristotle, which is an essentially ethical concept. The romantic conception whereby art is a product of the imagination failed to impose itself precisely because it lacked the ethical weight. Therefore, as regards the reception of adaptations, the rigidity of the contract has stifled the latent tension of transgression. When the latter manifests itself, according to this reductive view, a rule is violated, a text does not open. Precedence grants authority and democratic concepts such as intertextuality, appropriation, or remake remain functional only between "non-derivative" texts.

Leitch fails, however, to mention yet another paradox. This concept of the – albeit conservative – fidelity of adaptation has manifested itself, after all, since modernism. Alienated though the hermeneutists of adaptation may have become from romantic poetics, they are always ready – based on the criterion of innovation/novelty – to value yet another Joyce, Camus or Kafka. On the other hand, modernism is no longer mimetic either: it has atomized its ethics into rebelliousness and, later, into irony. Benefiting fully from infidelity – by denying tradition – modernity undermined its ethics by approaching the idea of adaptation (a field marked, in fact, by the dialectic tension between fidelity and infidelity) through the rigid filter of a slanted aestheticism. This is just one of the possible and also plausible explanations of the "resistance to theory" (Westbrook 25) – in adaptation studies – that has still not been

sufficiently overcome either by poststructuralism or be more recent, culturalist approaches. However, in the terms of Umberto Eco, if fidelity prudently outlines the interpretation limits of an adaptation, infidelity provides the fertile grounds for a work opening out and lending itself to adaptation. The title of a book announcing the triumph of subjectivity in the Romanian literary criticism of the 1960s – *Infidel Readings* (Manolescu 1966) – seems symptomatic not only as a methodological option in the study of adaptation, but also for the textual relationship that it establishes. This code for appropriating the domain creates, I believe, the premise of the desideratum whereby "rather than solely adapting adaptation to theories, theories also need to adapt to adaptations" (Elliot 32).

"I'm talking about my life". A Family Story

Returning to Stere Gulea's film *I'm an Old Communist Hag* (no exclamation mark), what is worth mentioning is the director's intuition as regards the perspective on adaptation. In one of his interviews for the Romanian newspaper *Adevărul,* when asked about the relationship between the script and Dan Lungu's novel, Gulea answered: "It's a struggle. [...] You have to break up with it so that you may re-approach it" (Gulea 2013). Probably without having read Thomas Leitch, the Romanian director appears to have taken over the latter's terms. He takes the breach of contract to its utmost consequences, even postulating his separation from it (the break-up), which he understands as a condition of its (re)appropriation. The term Gulea uses is not at all an innocent one in adaptation theory. Julie Sanders has used to make a broader distinction, functional in the field of intertextuality and rewriting:

> "An adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original. […] On the other hand, appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain." (Sanders 2005: 26)

According to the conceptual framework imposed by this dissociation, not just any appropriation can be an adaptation by default, but any adaptation requires a minimum amount of appropriation. Adaptation remains under the auspices of mimicry, while appropriation marks out the territory of creativity, which has freed itself from the "constraints" of the source text.

Stere Gulea says more or less the same thing, trying to answer those who accused him of having produced a film that swerves too far away from novel. His plea for a substantial degree of autonomy is quite clear: "I wrote a script. Will the film, in itself, stand or not? I think it is inevitable: the film, as it is, is it consistent with what it proposes? Does it hold?" the director urges one not to circumvent the comparison with the novel, but to capture its specific appropriation thereof. He does not ignore the adaptation process, but stresses the fact that his film is something else in relation to the novel, a distinct artistic product ("[a] decisive journey away").

Unlike the novel by Dan Lungu, which remains stuck in the memory of the communist past, Stere Gulea's film opens with a flashback from the protagonist's adolescence, as she gets off a rural bus and reveals her identity to a man who has probably waited for her. But the black-and-white frame is suddenly interrupted by the sound of an old telephone, the mise-en-scène comes to colour and life, and the woman (Luminița Gheorghiu), whom we initially see from behind, absorbed in sticking some photos in an album, responds – at first quietly, but later by becoming animated – to the news that she will receive a surprise visit. We understand that she has been speaking to her daughter Alice, who will arrive together with her husband Allan from America in just a few days. The first scene introduces us visually into a warmly lit interior, acquainting us with a socialist domestic space onto which the modesty of the Romanian transition has been superposed. The second scene presents Tucu (Marian Râlea), the protagonist's husband. He returns home from his rural farmstead (we learn that he was there from the previous phone call). The man goes to the market to fetch some more supplies, which he will claim to be his "own production," cheerfully greets his neighbours and – in an memorable frame that captures the burlesque Romanian inventiveness – he hangs his shopping bag onto the hook of an improvised micro-crane, which will slowly climb towards the fourth floor in a splendid vertical traveling. Finally, the following two scenes (the evening discussion in the bedroom and the reckoning of the expense budget in the morning) thematically mark Gulea's film. The central theme of communist memory, so striking in the novel, is here replaced by the family theme. While Lungu had relegated the concrete meeting between the two generations to half a page, reducing it to a conflict over the telephone about the 1996 elections, Gulea narratively develops precisely this ellipse of the novel. By exploring the meeting between the two parents and their daughter, accompanied by her husband, the film adaptation breaks out of the adaptation frameworks, decidedly entering the unpredictability of appropriation.

The most important consequence of the thematic mutation imposed by the director's perspective is that the narrative perspective no longer belongs exclusively to the protagonist. The mythologized microhistory from the novel gets atomized, in the film, into several fragmented micro-histories. Emilia is no longer the sole representative of the Romanian transition. Besides her, there are several other complementary or antagonistic voices. In this regard, the most powerful scene of the film takes place while the characters are seated at table. In a cramped atmosphere, in the protagonists' house, those invited include not only the intimate guests – Alice (Ana Ularu) and Allan (Collin Blair), but also Emilia's sister, Sanda (Anca Sigartău) and Mrs. Stroescu (Valeria Seciu), a painter turned seamstress under communism because she had a "bad file." The turning point anticipating the climax scene and, in a sense, the entire film is prepared by Gulea through montage. A noisy setting, presenting the reception of the guests amid popular music playing discretely in the background, in which compliments are uttered, nonsense is discussed and, in principle, there is much bluster, is followed by a

framework dominated by total silence. The characters' attention is draws by some TV news that informs them about the exhumation of the Ceaușescus. Camera switches from the TV screen, offering a wide shot of the diners' faces. The silence is shattered by Alice, declaring herself appalled that Ceaușescu and communism still provide news subjects of national interest. The naiveté of the young woman receives the father's ironic reply, announcing her tongue-in-cheek that if he were to run again, Ceaușescu would win the elections. This occasions the start of an almost political dispute:

> "Alice: Really, Mom, are you going to vote for the communists?
> Emilia: So you tell me, who should I vote for?
> Alice: But have you forgotten the meat queues that went all the way around the block?
> Emilia: What we got by, our fridge was full of everything. No one starved to death and people did not die hungry in the street like they do now, people with small children.
> Alice: Maybe they died, mother, but we didn't hear about it.
> Emilia: We would've heard.
> Alice: How could we have heard when we had two hours of TV broadcasting a day. OK, tell me so that I can get it: What was this awesome thing communism did for you?
> Emilia: Communism made blocks and gave me an apartment for free to raise my child in it. It built factories, I had a secure job.
> Alice: And capitalism would also have built blocks and factories.
> Emilia: Mansions for thieves!
> Alice: Oh, mom, I thought you were just pretending, but you're more of a communist than I thought.
> Emilia: Well, I gave myself away. I'm an old communist hag. What can I do? I know I worked honestly and I did not hurt anybody.
> Mrs. Stroescu: It's not that, Mrs. Ciorcilă. Communism was an absurd, utopian system.
> Emilia: It may have been, but I'm talking here about my life. About my youth, and it's there, in that communism. What shall I do now, forget it?
> Mrs. Stroescu: And mine is there too and it wasn't cheerful at all, ma'am (44.40-46.12)

In Gulea's imaginary, the transition accommodates multiple perspectives on communism. The nostalgia of the resigned Emilia, the revolt of the emancipated Alice and the sadness of the discrete Mrs. Stroescu are particularized versions of existential choices, which essentialize various layers of mentality during an advanced transition. The fact that these views are polemically shared in a family context suggests the polarization of the perspectives adopted on the totalitarian past at the level of individual biographies. This process of converting controversy into intimacy is, in fact, characteristic of Gulea's style, as he uses the "audiovisual language of family entertainment,

[meant, insofar as the audience is concerned] to keep any of the members of any family in a comfort zone" (Gorzo 2013).

On the other hand, *I'm an Old Communist Hag* is a "film about our anticommunist tropes. The past – reactivating nostalgia or, conversely, states of rebellion – seems to be further and further removed: it is becoming hazy, blurred. The communist past is no longer actual, but people [...] behave as if it were" (Burța Cernat 2013). Such a well-argued conclusion would not have been possible if Stere Gulea had not appropriated narrative time too, thereby bringing about yet another fundamental shift in relation to the novel. Very inspired, the director brings the story up to date, lifting it from the confusion of the 1990s into the economic crisis of the years 2008-9. Thus, there arises the possibility that Emilia's nostalgia may not remain as thick as Dan Lungu envisaged it.

If micro-histories are multiple, macro-history also has a recalibrated dynamics. The myth of communism, so ridiculous in Emilia's reminiscences, but so relevant for her existence and her inner life, silently collided – in the novel – with the myth of the West, of European integration, of prosperity that can only come from the West. The nostalgia for communism was the negative example, which held the Romanian transition in place. By telling the story of young people who return defeated from the American paradise – as they have lost their jobs and the bank threatens them with foreclosure – Gulea interrogates this myth of the West. While this is obvious to almost any spectator, the director proves much more subtle and enjoyable when he presents the autochthonization of capitalism. Sanda's peddling of useless, garishly kitsch objects or the subsistence boutique from Celestin's balcony outline a domestic universe converted into a bearer (pseudo)capitalist matrix. Also, after he decides to sell the country house to help his daughter, Tucu remains baffled when the real estate agent speaks to him using the language of the crisis (in its turn an economic as well as imagological export 'product'). Explaining the situation to Emilia, the man becomes confused and outraged: "No one's buying, no one's selling. It's all dead. Everyone is waiting. What the hell are they waiting for?".

Stere Gulea's film steers away from the latent or programmatic anticommunism – depending on the angle – in Dan Lungu's novel. It depicts a late transition, in which the nostalgia for communism and the revolt against communism, as well as the still illusory despair capitalism coexist. However, the film escapes from the competitive logic of ideologies, revealing a burdensome naturalness, a sort of reconciled resignation. These people who lose their apartment for 15,000 dollars that they will give her daughter so that she may pursue the American dream, "clench their teeth, don't fight, don't jump at each other's throats, have nothing to reproach one another" (Gulea 2013). It is that humaneness that no longer takes the place of any convention, of any persuasion. After having dreaded her entire life the idea of returning to the country, Emilia does not hesitate one moment when it comes to sacrificing her urban illusion for her

daughter's sake. The film ends on an inspired note, with the image of the two parents in a car stuffed with their savings. An old carpet, which almost covers the windshield, and a green cage stand out in the frame: their modest captivity in a worn-out urbanness. Tucu and Emilia laugh their hearts out poking fun at the film "Life in communism," in which both were extras, and on the radio it is announced that Ceaușescu's DNA has been confirmed after exhumation, so he can continue unhindered to rest in peace. The camera focus rises gradually, shooting a panoramic overview, from a helicopter, of the dismantled industrial areas that preserve the ruins of a communist society, stuck in transition, and conceal the survival of people who have been defeated, but continue to live their lives with dignity.

Conclusion

Therefore, addressed through the clichés of transition in the prose fiction and the cinema produced since 1989, condemned, idealized or regretted, communism remains a landmark of the Romanian identitarian representations. Dan Lungu's novel, *I'm an Old Communist Hag!*, synthesizes, through the theme of nostalgia, a defensive, past-ridden existential version, which is assessed against the opportunities of the transition, and capitalizes upon its ideological bankruptcy at a time when anticommunism dominates the political agenda of the "good" intellectual milieus. By contrast, Stere Gulea's film uses an "ethics of infidelity," appropriating rather than merely adapting the novel. References to the late transition are made this time through the family theme, and nostalgia is just one of the possibilities of relating to communism. Gulea's post-ideological critique reveals that humanity is broken, but still sufficiently strong to face its own illusions and (n)ostalgia.

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1 The most important television project dedicated to the Romanian gulag and the Romanians' resistance against communism was the much publicized documentary film directed by Iulia Hossu Longin, *The Memorial of Pain*. It was launched by the Romanian Television in 1991 and it has so far aired 120 episodes, consecrated to the Romanian carceral space and the Romanians' opposition to the communist regime.

2 "Ce livre c'est Amélie Poulain chez les Soviets, Candide dans la République populaire roumaine," as Marine de Tilly writes about the French edition of the novel *Matei Brunul*. "Filmmakers in countries of the former Soviet bloc have been using their new freedom to tell at last the stories they couldn't tell then […] The film has inspired many words about how it reflects Romanian society," according to Roger Ebert, writing about *4,3,2*.

3 In 2004, a short-fiction anthology edited by Gabriel H. Deculbe came out (Iași: Versus), gathering several works of autofiction that evoked childhood/adolescence under communism.

4 Nicolae Manolescu and Vladimir Tismăneanu have responded caustically to the three-part article signed by Bianca Burța Cernat (*Anticomunismul românesc postfatum*, in "Observator Cultural," no. 691-693/2013), blaming the new generation of intellectuals for harbouring radical leftist views.

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Carla CARIBONI-KILLANDER

Avatars d'un narrateur à travers les médias: Tim Tooney, Max Tooney et Mickey Mouse

Résumé

Le monologue théâtral par l'auteur italien Alessandro Baricco, *Novecento*, publié en 1994 a fait l'objet de deux adaptations: en 1998 Giuseppe Tornatore a réalisé un film en langue originale anglaise, *The Legend of the Pianist on the Ocean*; en 2008, Baricco lui-même, en collaboration avec le dessinateur Giorgio Cavazzano et le scénariste Tito Faraci, signe l'adaptation en bandes dessinées *La vera storia di Novecento*, qui paraît dans l'album nr. 2737 de *Topolino*, la majeure publication Disney italienne.

En problématisant une approche qui accorderait le statut de norme au texte source (Hutcheon 2006, Albrecht-Crane C. & Cutchins D. 2010) et en prenant en considération divers parcours de lecture possibles (rien ne garantit au fond que le texte source soit lu en premier), notre article se propose de situer ces trois médias dans un contexte qui tienne compte de leurs relations latérales, plutôt que hiérarchiques. L'aspect qui sera investigué en particulier est celui de la situation énonciative et des modalités de la prise de parole du narrateur, qui sont différentes dans chaque média. Ces différences, qui sont fonction des conventions génériques, des horizons d'attente des publics visés et des spécificités de chaque média, conditionnent en retour la réception. Pour éclairer l'aspect sélectionné, nous réaliserons une lecture au ras de ces trois textes qui permettra de montrer le pouvoir heuristique d'une comparaison intermédiale. Nous montrerons notamment comment les adaptations n'essaient pas de reproduire le *même*, mais le déclinent chacune à sa manière.

Mots clés : Narrateur filmique, situation énonciative, texte source, adaptation.

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RECYCLING IMAGES
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Le monologue théâtral d'Alessandro Baricco, *Novecento*, a été publié en 1994. On y raconte l'histoire d'un pianiste exceptionnellement habile, appelé Danny Boodmann T.D. Lemon Novecento qui naît sur un navire, y passe toute sa vie et, ayant renoncé à en descendre, meurt à bord lorsque le navire, tout déglingué après avoir servi d'hôpital flottant pendant la Deuxième Guerre, est dynamité. En 1998 est apparue la première adapta-

tion sous forme de film, *The Legend of the Pianist on the Ocean*, réalisé par Giuseppe Tornatore[1]. Dix ans plus tard, en 2008, dans l'album numéro 2737 de *Topolino*, la plus grande publication Disney italienne, apparaît une adaptation en bandes dessinées, par Baricco lui-même, le dessinateur Giorgio Cavazzano et le scénariste Tito Faraci, intitulée *La vera storia di Novecento* (La vraie histoire de Novecento)[2].

Il serait tentant d'entamer notre analyse de ces trois médias en affirmant que les deux adaptations sont fidèles au texte original. Aussi simple qu'elle puisse paraître, une telle affirmation a des implications théoriques de taille, car parler de fidélité comporte qu'on souscrive à l'idée de la priorité du texte source en tant que norme par rapport à laquelle les adaptations se laisseraient évaluer et interpréter. Selon Christa Albrecht-Crane et Dennis Cutchins, une telle vue serait responsable de la stagnation théorique qu'on observe aujourd'hui dans le domaine des études d'adaptation : « Most noticeably, scholars in adaptation studies continue focusing on the issue of «fidelity» to a precursor text as a means to understand an adaptation's scope and worth » (2010:12). A partir de l'étude séminale par Bluestone en 1957, basée sur des romans canonisés, se serait consolidé, selon ces auteurs, le jugement selon lequel l'œuvre littéraire, en tant que texte adapté, serait qualitativement supérieure au produit de l'adaptation, le film, dont la valeur se laisserait dès lors mesurer à l'aune de sa fidélité à la source[3]. Ce jugement se serait subrepticement frayé un chemin jusqu'à nos jours :

> Unwittingly, he [Bluestone] defines an adaptation's scope and quality in terms of its allegiance to the primacy of the source text. With Bluestone as their intellectual progenitor, many contemporary scholars in adaptation studies likewise claim to reject "fidelity" as a marker of an adaptation's success, but more often than not perpetuate a dedication to the literary values underlying "adaptation." (2010:12)

Sans juger nécessaire de défendre encore l'idée que le cinéma, au même titre que la littérature, appartient de plein droit au domaine de l'art, nous partageons l'avis selon lequel les présupposés à la base de la notion de fidélité doivent être mis en question, et cela pour différentes raisons. L'idée même d'une transposition fidèle présuppose qu'il y aurait une essence transposable en tant que telle, ce qui a pour conséquence de nier la centralité du travail interprétatif, constitutif de toute adaptation. L'étude d'une adaptation risquerait de se réduire à un « exercice in negativity », selon l'expression d'Albrecht-Crane et Cutchins (2010:16), visant à saisir les points de déviance par rapport à un original supposé parfait.

Pour une autre raison cependant l'application du critère de fidélité peut s'avérer insatisfaisante. Ce critère présuppose que l'on adopte le point de vue de la production des œuvres. Pour peu qu'on change de perspective et qu'on prenne en compte les modalités de la réception, les notions de priorité de la source et de fidélité de l'adaptation perdent leur intérêt : pour revenir à l'exemple qui nous occupe ici, il est évident que tous les lecteurs n'assimilent pas les trois œuvres dans l'ordre chronologique de leur parution. Dans le processus de la réception, les œuvres communiquent entre elles

selon un ordre non préétabli ; la priorité du monologue de Baricco ne représente dès lors qu'une possibilité parmi d'autres. Notre choix sera donc d'appréhender ces trois œuvres comme existant non pas l'une *avant* l'autre (ainsi que le suggère le mot *source*), mais l'une *à côte de* l'autre, simultanément ; la communication qui s'établit entre elles, à travers les divers parcours de lecture possibles, advient sur le mode de la réciprocité. Nous appellerons le film et la BD les deux adaptations et le monologue de Baricco le texte adapté, pour signaler le type de relation qui nous occupe, sans pour autant accorder au monologue le statut de texte norme.

En faisant cela, nous allons nécessairement situer ces trois œuvres dans un contexte relationnel. Ainsi que le souligne Linda Hutcheon : « When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works » (2010:6). C'est donc bel et bien dans le vaste domaine de l'intertextualité, ainsi que Genette l'a définie et explorée dans son ouvrage de 1982 *Palimpsestes*[4], que nous nous situons. Selon Albrecht-Crane et Cutchins, la notion d'intertextualité, en mettant l'accent sur les relations de différence et de dialogue, devrait permettre de résoudre l'impasse d'une critique de l'adaptation trop centrée sur les relations de hiérarchie : « […] intertextuality can be used as a theoretical adrenaline to achieve a «more flexible» and expansive approach to writing on adaptation, an approach better able to take into account a wider, less hierarchical range of artistic and (pop) cultural sources » (2010:101).

En entérinant la remarque de Brett Westbrook, selon qui « The absolute given of all adaptations studies is comparison » (2010:25) et en refusant d'accorder le rôle de norme au texte source, nous allons donc procéder à des comparaisons à différents niveaux afin de mettre en lumière quelques aspects centraux des textes, les expliquant les uns par rapport aux autres. Le fait qu'il s'agisse de trois produits médiatiques différents, ayant chacun à sa disposition des ressources techniques spécifiques et devant satisfaire à des attentes différentes du côté du public visé, ne fait qu'augmenter le potentiel heuristique de la comparaison. Parmi les différences qui s'imposent à l'analyste, celle concernant la situation d'énonciation et les modalités de la prise de parole de la part du narrateur nous semble crucialement importante afin de saisir la spécificité de chaque texte et c'est donc sur elle que portera plus précisément notre analyse. Passons donc pour commencer à une présentation générale de quelques ressemblances et différences entre les trois œuvres.

Le spectateur et le lecteur qui seraient passés à côté de l'information au sujet du texte adapté fournie à la fois dans le générique d'ouverture du film et sur la couverture du numéro de *Topolino*, le reconnaîtraient quand même sans aucun doute (le *re-* signalant bien évidemment la nécessité d'une connaissance préalable, sous quelque forme que ce soit). En vérité, indépendamment de l'ordre dans lequel un récepteur prendrait connaissance de et s'approprierait ces trois œuvres, il remarquerait à n'en pas douter qu'elles entretiennent une relation de ressemblance. Cela tient au fait que les grandes unités de contenu de l'histoire racontée sont les mêmes.

La distinction genettienne entre histoire et récit, qui entérine la dichotomie entre fond et forme, apparaît délicate dans la perspective des études d'adaptation, si l'on considère qu'elle postule indirectement l'existence d'une essence stable et facilement identifiable, l'histoire, qui serait autonome et se laisserait appréhender indépendamment du récit qui la véhicule. Or, reconnaître l'autonomie d'une adaptation consiste précisément à affirmer qu'elle est le produit d'une interprétation par le biais de laquelle l'histoire, parce qu'elle est racontée d'une autre manière, devient autre. Ainsi s'expriment à ce sujet Albrecht-Crane et Cutchins :

> The story, so to speak, is never separate from the telling**.** There is no such thing as an abstractable (or extractable) essence of a novel or film that can be adapted to a new medium so that one may say, «It›s the same story, it›s just told in a different way». Any «retelling» of a story is a new story because the text has been interpreted by the «reteller.» (2010:18)

Il n'en est pas moins vrai que ce qui déclenche le mécanisme de la reconnaissance de la part du récepteur ce sont vraisemblablement des éléments appartenant au niveau de l'histoire[5] : tel ou tel épisode ou séquence d'épisodes, tel ou tel personnage ou groupe de personnages engagés dans une situation donnée, tel ou tel détail plus ou moins remarquable. Si le récepteur n'est pas mis en état de reconnaître ces éléments de l'histoire renvoyant à ne pas s'y méprendre à un autre texte absent dont il a une connaissance préalable, il ne sera pas conscient d'avoir affaire à une adaptation, mais prendra le texte adapté pour un texte nouveau en tout point. Théoriquement douteuse, la notion d'histoire est donc opérationnellement utile, lorsqu'il s'agit de rendre compte de la réception d'un texte adapté[6]. Si c'est d'abord l'histoire que le lecteur *re*connaît, c'est qu'il l'a préalablement *connue* : elle doit donc pouvoir être isolée et décrite.

On constate donc que les grandes unités de contenu de l'histoire racontée sont les mêmes dans le monologue, le film et la BD : le cadre (l'histoire se déroule sur le navire Virginian croisant l'Océan Atlantique), les personnages principaux et quelques-unes de leurs caractéristiques (en particulier le personnage principal, Novecento, doté d'une extraordinaire habileté de pianiste et – fait remarquable – n'ayant jamais quitté le navire) ; l'épisode au cœur même de l'histoire, accompagné de quelques détails singuliers (le duel de piano entre Novecento et le roi du jazz, Jelly Roll Morton – appelé Jelly Blackspot dans la BD). De cet épisode du duel, gagné par Novecento après la troisième et dernière *ronde*, sont conservés la structure justement tripartite ainsi que le détail de la cigarette (cigare dans la BD) utilisée par les duellistes comme un instrument permettant de mesurer leurs talents hors du commun (les cendres ne tombent pas de la cigarette allumée que le roi du jazz a posée sur le bord du piano, signe de la souplesse sensuelle de ses mains sur le clavier ; quant à Novecento, après avoir joué le dernier morceau, il allume une cigarette par contact avec les cordes surchauffées du piano, preuve s'il en est de sa virtuosité). Dans les trois cas, on fera exploser le navire.

Peu importe par quelle œuvre il aura commencé, le récepteur reconnaîtra, sur la base de ces données communes, les deux autres.

Ce même récepteur sera probablement sensible en même temps à la présence de quelques différences de taille entre les trois œuvres. Celles-ci peuvent au moins en partie être mises sur le compte de la nécessité de satisfaire à différents horizons d'attente du côté du public visé. Le lecteur de la BD s'attendra par exemple à ce que Novecento, le trompettiste, le capitaine du navire et le roi du jazz qui défie Novecento, qui sont interprétés par les personnages peuplant l'univers de Mickey Mouse (respectivement Dingo, Mickey, le commissaire Finot et le Fantôme noir ; Minnie est présente aussi, dans le rôle de narrataire de l'histoire racontée par Mickey) maintiennent des traits typiques de ces personnages[7]. Dingo (dont le nom est devenu Danny Boodmann P.P. Pippo Novecento, Pippo étant le nom italien de Dingo) doit, dans son rôle de Novecento, emprunter des traits à ce personnage, tout en gardant quelques-uns des siens, s'il faut que le lecteur le reconnaisse. Le lecteur reste au fond dans l'incertitude quand il s'agit de savoir si Dingo *joue* Novecento ou s'il *est* Novecento. Dans cette rencontre intermédiale, Dingo et Novecento échangent réciproquement des traits, donnant naissance à un être hybride : Novecento/Dingo est un être paisible, simplet et toujours content, mais c'est aussi un pianiste exceptionnel, ce qui est un trait inédit. Quant au capitaine du navire (qui s'appelle Basettoni, le nom italien de Finot), à deux reprises il se réfère au métier de commissaire de police : d'abord, planche 4 p. 18, à gauche ci-dessous, pour constater, en réponse à Mickey qui a remarqué son attention aux détails, qu'il aurait effectivement pu faire un bon policier ; ensuite, planche 15 p. 29, à droite ci-dessous, pour exprimer son regret de ne pas être, justement, policier (exaspéré par le chaos qui règne à bord, Finot aurait mis tout le monde en prison, dit-il, s'il avait été policier[8]) :

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Ces allusions, qui constituent un clin d'œil en direction du lecteur, lui rappelant l'identité connue de Finot, consolident en même temps son identité acquise : le lecteur sent que la frustration de Finot de ne pas être commissaire de police est authentique. Transposée dans l'univers de Mickey, l'histoire de Novecento laisse ainsi son lecteur suspendu entre la reconnaissance du familier et l'apprentissage du nouveau[9].

On constate également que la BD, conformément aux conventions qui règnent dans le monde de Disney où les rapports de parenté restent plutôt dans le flou, fait l'économie du passé de Novecento et de l'origine de son nom – éléments qui occupent une place centrale à la fois dans le monologue et dans le film – ou plutôt en confie l'exposition à des versions aussi fragmentaires que contradictoires, mises dans la bouche des gens de l'équipage, aux planches 18 et 19 (pp. 32-33). Étant donné que ce passé est triste (alors qu'il était nouveau-né, Novecento, abandonné sur le navire par sa mère, vraisemblablement une émigrante voyageant en troisième classe, a été élevé par Boodmann, le marin qui l'a trouvé et qui meurt tragiquement dans un accident, le laissant deux fois orphelin à l'âge de huit ans), sa suppression est doublement nécessaire.

Le fait que *Topolino* s'adresse surtout à un public de jeunes lecteurs doit en effet être pris en compte si on cherche les raisons de quelques aspects qui caractérisent seulement la BD. L'épisode de la descente à terre de Novecento, qui ne se réalisera jamais, est significatif à cet égard. Dans le monologue et dans le film, Novecento, qui a passé trente-deux ans à bord, annonce un jour soudain à son ami trompettiste qu'il descendra à terre, une fois le navire arrivé à New York, pour voir la mer. Face à la stupéfaction de son ami, Novecento explique qu'il s'agit de voir la mer depuis l'autre perspective, celle de la terre ferme. Tout perplexe qu'il soit, l'ami reçoit la nouvelle avec joie : Novecento va enfin vivre une vie normale. Mais au moment de descende à terre, Novecento marque un temps d'arrêt à la troisième marche de l'escalier, après quoi il se retourne et remonte à bord. Sur l'épisode tombe le silence entre les amis. Ce n'est que juste avant l'explosion, lors de sa dernière rencontre avec le trompettiste, que Novecento lui explique les raisons de son choix, dans un passage où se condense l'essence paradoxale et symbolique de ce personnage que l'étendue sans bornes des rues de New York effraye, alors qu'il a vécu toute sa vie sur un océan infini, sans attaches, sans passé et bientôt sans futur. Ayant sublimé ses désirs et vivant sans patrie, sans parents, et nulle part chez soi, Novecento est libre et universel comme la musique qu'il joue. De cette épaisseur existentielle qui caractérise Novecento à la fois dans le monologue et dans le film, reste, dans la BD, l'excentricité. Au moment de descendre à terre, Novecento revient incessamment sur ses pas sous prétexte d'avoir oublié des vêtements (tout à tour chapeau, manteau, écharpe, bottes et débardeur en laine). Il renonce définitivement à son projet lorsqu'il constate qu'ainsi emmitouflé il a trop chaud. Le jour où Mickey se décide à aborder le sujet, lui demandant pourquoi il ne veut pas descendre, Novecento évite tout simplement de répondre. Cet épisode prépare l'épilogue : Mickey devra affronter l'entêtement de Novecento qui refuse toujours de quitter le navire alors qu'on s'apprête à le faire sauter en l'air. La BD simplifie donc la psychologie du personnage en proposant une version pour ainsi dire allégée de sa problématique existentielle, qui soit conforme aux exigences du genre et qui puisse être reçue par un public de très jeunes lecteurs. Le *happy end* de la BD répond évidemment aux mêmes exigences.

Passons donc à considérer la situation d'énonciation et les modalités de la prise de parole de la part du narrateur mises en place dans les trois versions. En dépit des différences dans la manière de traiter la focalisation qui tiennent intrinsèquement aux divers médias, on peut affirmer que l'histoire est toujours racontée du point de vue de l'ami de Novecento, le trompettiste dans l'orchestre du navire, appelé Tim Tooney dans le monologue et Max Tooney dans le film ; ce personnage est personnifié par Mickey lui-même dans la bande dessinée, où il garde son nom, Topolino en italien. Si le récit du narrateur dans le texte adapté surgit spontanément, adressé à une audience seulement imaginée, dans les adaptations on assiste à la création d'un cadre dialogique où ce récit se trouve inséré et motivé.

Dans la BD, les premières vignettes montrent Mickey et Minnie de dos, face à la mer.

L'explosion du navire, qui est ancré au large, occupe la première vignette de la deuxième planche. Dans la dernière vignette de la deuxième planche, Mickey annonce le récit qui, signalé par le titre en gros caractères « La vera storia di Novecento », ne débute véritablement que dans la vignette suivante, avec la planche 3 (p. 17). Avec les deux premières planches s'établit ainsi le cadre dialogique à l'intérieur duquel se situe le récit fait par Mickey à Minnie. Ce récit est jalonné de cartouches jaunes, au nombre de 48 qui, comparables aux insertions de voix off dans un film, ont la fonction de rappeler le contexte de la situation énonciative qui encadre le récit. Voici l'exemple de deux vignettes de la planche 26, p. 50[10]:

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Le cadre, caractérisé par la présence de Minnie, apparaît à quatre occasions au cours du récit (planches 9 p. 23, 20 p. 34, 28 p. 52 et 33 p. 57). Dans la toute dernière planche, on apprend que Minnie est chanteuse et qu'elle s'apprête à embarquer sur le nouveau navire, où elle va se produire dans l'orchestre où joue Novecento. Le *happy end* est donc complet : non seulement Novecento aura survécu, comme nous le verrons, mais dans l'horizon qui s'ouvre à la fin du récit, un futur lui est promis que Minnie va partager, cette dernière changeant ainsi son rôle de personnage narrataire en personnage acteur.

Il est intéressant de remarquer que le lecteur de la BD qui connaît déjà le film ou le monologue croit que Novecento meurt dans l'explosion, montrée dès la deuxième

planche (p. 16), aussi contraire que cela puisse lui paraître par rapport aux conventions du genre, où la mort n'a pas droit de cité. Dans la vignette après l'explosion, le ton mélancolique de Mickey qui s'adresse à Minnie étaye cette interprétation. Mickey dit en effet à Minnie : « Sob ! j'aurais peut-être pu… j'aurais dû faire une autre tentative! J'ai peut-être mal fait de rendre mes armes ! »:

En dépit de l'adverbe « forse », *peut-être*, qui modalise l'énoncé, le lecteur devine la gravité des conséquences de l'échec auquel Mickey se réfère, sans toutefois en connaître la nature. Une surprise au second degré, liée au constat d'une entorse faite au genre, sera réservée exclusivement à ce type de lecteur averti[11]. Le lecteur naïf, lui, qui n'aura enregistré au début que l'explosion d'un navire, sans pouvoir soupçonner que quelqu'un se trouve à bord de celui-ci, n'éprouvera un sentiment d'inquiétude pour le sort de Novecento qu'à la planche 41 (p. 65), lorsque Mickey, exaspéré par l'obstination de l'ami qui, assis sur une caisse de dynamite, refuse de quitter le navire, le plante là en disant : « Tant pis pour toi, alors ! » (la vignette, reproduite à gauche ci-dessous, occupe la dernière case, en bas à droite da la planche, à droite dans le volume, une position dont le rôle de « charnière essentielle du récit entretenant un suspense particulier qui encourage le lecteur à tourner la page » a été mis en lumière par Baroni, 2007:330). Dans la première vignette de la planche suivante (42, p. 66, à droite ci-dessous), réapparaît le cadre du récit. Face au navire qui achève de s'écouler, Mickey exprime son affliction à Minnie : « C'était la dernière occasion de le faire descendre à terre, au moins une fois… et moi je l'ai ratée !» :

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L'association se fera rétroactivement avec l'explosion et le ton mélancolique de Mickey face à ce spectacle. Cette inquiétude, que le lecteur averti n'éprouve pas, étant donné que le sort de Novecento lui est déjà connu, sera de courte durée toutefois, car ce personnage réapparaît déjà trois vignettes plus bas, toujours à la planche 42[12] : il est sain et sauf car, comme on l'apprend maintenant, il a attendu que la construction d'un nouveau navire soit terminée pour pouvoir s'y transférer, juste avant la destruction du vieux Virginian. Le lecteur naïf aussi bien que le lecteur averti comprennent alors que le ton mélancolique de Mickey était tout simplement dû à son regret de ne

pas avoir pu convaincre Novecento à descendre à terre, alors qu'une bonne occasion s'offrait. Si le lecteur averti partage la surprise de son homologue naïf face à ce retournement inattendu au niveau de l'histoire, s'estompera par contre en lui l'effet de surprise lié à la conscience générique ; en effet, aucune entorse n'a été faite au genre. Il est donc clair que la lecture de la BD suivra un parcours émotif différent en fonction du statut de texte adapté ou de texte tout court qu'elle revêt pour le lecteur. Le final dans la BD consolide certains traits de caractère de Novecento (son excentricité et son entêtement) et résume l'essence de ce personnage, qui quitte la scène doté des mêmes attributs qu'il possédait d'entrée de jeu : un pianiste d'exception vivant une vie sans soucis sur un navire. Le monde de Disney reste un monde à l'abri du malheur.

Dans le film, le récit est également encadré. Le personnage de Max Tooney est montré en ouverture du film lorsque, affaissé sur un escalier, tout seul avec sa trompette, au moment où il vient de terminer son récit, il évalue ce dernier, en une sorte de monologue intérieur. La voix qu'on entend est la concrétisation de ses pensées récapitulatives. Le film orchestre ensuite le récit en menant de front trois situations narratives, qui apparaissent de manière intermittente, chacune suivant sa progression propre, selon des étapes qu'il revient au spectateur de remettre dans le bon ordre ; on les appellera des fils narratifs :

- Le premier fil est représenté par des flash-back, occupant la plus grande durée du film, qui montrent les événements au cours des années avant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale vécues par Max Tooney et Novecento sur le Virginian.

- Le deuxième fil est représenté par les scènes où est montré le cadre dialogique principal à l'origine du récit que constituent les flash-back : après la guerre, quelques années après avoir quitté le Virginian, Max Tooney se trouve dans la boutique d'un marchand d'instruments musicaux, à qui il vient de vendre sa trompette, et lui raconte l'histoire de Novecento. Les insertions de voix off dans toutes les scènes de flash-back (à l'exception de la scène du duel) sont donc interprétables comme des commentaires accompagnant le récit d'événements fait au marchand. On doit supposer que les visites de Max Tooney dans la boutique du marchand sont au nombre de trois (pour lui vendre sa trompette ; pour chercher un disque avec l'enregistrement de la musique de Novecento, en pleine nuit, juste avant l'explosion ; pour lui raconter l'épilogue, après l'explosion)[13] ; une continuité se crée entre elles, assurée par le retour du cadre spatial de la boutique et par la présence des deux personnages.

- Le troisième fil est constitué par le projet de Max Tooney de sauver son ami. Ayant découvert, lors de sa première visite chez le marchand, que ce dernier est en possession d'un disque avec l'enregistrement de la musique de Novecento trouvé par hasard dans un vieux piano dans sa boutique, et ayant appris par le marchand que la provenance du piano est un navire-hôpital au port de Plymouth, Max Tooney se rend à cet endroit. Il constate, une fois sur place, que les opérations de démantèlement du navire délabré sont bientôt terminées et qu'on s'apprête à le dynamiter. Soupçonnant que

Novecento se trouve toujours à bord, il prend contact avec le personnel du port préposé aux opérations de destruction afin qu'on l'autorise à monter à bord pour chercher son ami[14]. Une première tentative de le retrouver échoue et Max se verra obligé de corrompre un gardien afin de pouvoir faire une deuxième et dernière tentative. A cette occasion, il aura avec lui le disque (prélevé lors de la deuxième visite à la boutique du marchand, en pleine nuit), déterminé à utiliser la musique comme appât. Max finit par dénicher Novecento, a un entretien avec lui, dans la semi-obscurité de la cale chargée de dynamite, après quoi les deux amis se donnent une accolade et prennent définitivement congé l'un de l'autre. L'explosion se produit après cet entretien.

La scène suivante, qu'il faut imaginer temporellement proche de la mort de Novecento, nous ramène dans la boutique d'instruments de musique : le silence recueilli du marchand d'instruments qui vient d'apprendre l'épilogue macabre de l'histoire de Novecento, à laquelle Max Tooney vient d'ajouter le chapitre final, est comme une caisse de résonnance qui en amplifie la tonalité dysphorique. Si le marchand est le narrataire principal, une partie du récit de Max, notamment celle incluant le flash-back avec l'épisode du duel, est faite en revanche au fonctionnaire monté avec lui sur le navire. Ce flash-back est en effet encadré en amont par la scène où ce fonctionnaire, accompagné d'un assistant, monte avec Max Tooney sur le navire et, en aval, par la scène où le fonctionnaire qualifie l'histoire d'incroyable et, s'adressant à son assistant, s'exclame: « He's so good at telling tales !» Dans ce flash-back aussi, on entend la voix off du narrateur commenter l'histoire.

Ces trois fils narratifs s'entrelacent tout au long du film. La scène d'ouverture du film, où Max Tooney est assis seul avec sa trompette, clôt la temporalité mise en place par le cadre dialogique : après avoir échoué dans sa tentative de faire descendre à terre Novecento et après l'explosion du navire, le trompettiste vient de quitter le marchand qui, ému par l'histoire qu'il vient d'écouter, lui a en effet rendu sa trompette. Ici, la voix du personnage, concrétisation de ses pensées, ne s'adresse plus qu'à nous spectateurs, ouvrant ainsi un espace métaleptique.

Si le contexte dialogique mis en scène dans le film et dans la BD a sûrement pour effet de déterminer et de justifier une prise de parole qui, dans le texte d'un monologue, peut se nourrir d'elle-même, cette différence s'avère toute théorique si on considère la forte dimension dialogique que possède le monologue de Baricco. Il est même vrai que le mot monologue doit être compris ici davantage comme parole ininterrompue que comme parole qu'on s'adresse à soi-même. Le narrateur s'adresse à un auditoire absent (auquel une mise en scène va évidemment donner une existence bien réelle) qu'il veut tour à tour convaincre, intéresser et séduire[15]. On peut donc affirmer que les deux adaptations, en mettant le récit dans la bouche d'un narrateur qui le transmet à un interlocuteur présent sur la scène diégétique, rendent explicite la dimension dialogique implicite dans le texte adapté, nous invitant par là même à la relever.

L'option existait bien entendu, pour l'adaptation filmique, de *montrer* tout simplement l'histoire de Novecento, privant Max Tooney de son rôle de narrateur pour ne

lui accorder que celui de personnage. Or on constate que dans le film non seulement les deux rôles de narrateur et de personnage sont conservés pour Max Tooney (ce qui correspond à la situation à la fois dans le texte adapté – où le narrateur, qui est toujours sur scène, se raconte en tant que personnage – et dans la BD), mais que ces deux rôles se complexifient. D'une part, en effet, on assiste, comme nous l'avons vu, à un dédoublement de narrataire (le marchand et le fonctionnaire), ce qui confirme deux fois Max Tooney dans son rôle de narrateur. D'autre part, grâce à la présence des trois fils narratifs, Max Tooney est mis en scène en tant que personnage dans plusieurs situations narratives, non seulement à côté de Novecento, mais aussi en son absence. Cela répond sûrement en partie à la nécessité de mettre en place le cadre du récit, mais aussi sans doute à celle de donner plus de substance à ce personnage qui reste en effet assez fade et effacé tant qu'il se trouve à côté de Novecento, ayant surtout pour fonction d'en faire ressortir par contraste l'exceptionnalité. La séquence notamment où Max Tooney essaye de monter à bord du navire et de sauver Novecento prend une grande place dans le film, alors qu'elle a la brièveté du sommaire dans le monologue. Max Tooney se voit ennobli des bons sentiments qui l'animent dans cette circonstance : l'amitié qui le pousse d'abord à essayer de sauver son ami ; le respect dont il lui témoigne ensuite le laissant mourir sur le navire ; la fidélité à la mémoire qui le pousse enfin à raconter l'histoire dont il est seul gardien. Il s'avère en outre que si la musique de Novecento a pu survivre à la mort, c'est grâce au zèle qui l'a amené à cacher dans un piano la matrice du disque où on l'avait enregistrée à une unique occasion sur le navire (le piano ayant fini, par un heureux hasard, chez le marchand d'instruments). C'est aussi sur ce personnage que tombe le rideau.

En multipliant les visites de Max Tooney chez le marchand, le film fait avancer le moment de sa situation énonciative jusqu'à ce qu'elle se rapproche du final, c'est-à-dire du moment de l'explosion et de la mort de Novecento. L'épisode de l'explosion se trouve ainsi dans un passé qu'il faut supposer très récent par rapport à la situation d'énonciation du narrateur, du moins en ce qui concerne cette partie finale de son récit fait au marchand. Jusque là, en effet, la destinée de Novecento n'était pas encore accomplie pendant que Max Tooney faisait le récit de sa vie ; Max avait tout simplement perdu les traces de son ami, ignorant que celui-ci avait continué à jouer pour les malades du navire transformé en hôpital flottant pendant la guerre. Cependant, puisque cet épisode est, comme nous l'avons vu, longuement préparé – à partir de la 24ème minute, le spectateur suit à plusieurs reprises le fil narratif nous montrant le trompettiste aux prises avec sa mission de sauver Novecento, juste avant l'explosion – l'imminence de l'explosion se prolonge en quelque sorte tout au long du film, ce qui en amplifie la charge émotionnelle (même le spectateur qui ne connaît pas déjà l'épilogue de l'histoire à travers le monologue ressent très probablement l'atmosphère de menace qui accompagne chaque séquence constituant ce fil narratif). Cela ne correspond pas à la situation dans le texte adapté, comme nous le verrons. Dans la version filmique, l'explosion est montrée dans un plan panoramique qui ressemble à celui de la BD. Sur le

grand écran, l'image du navire en flammes concrétise visuellement ce que le monologue se limite à suggérer :

© Disney **Source**: YouTube

Par ce stratagème, le film donne à la mort de Novecento, dans tout ce qu'elle a de spectaculaire, une position de premier plan. Cela entraîne un effet de pathos, incarné par le personnage de Max Tooney, et emporte l'adhésion émotive des spectateurs, ce qui sans doute trouve sa correspondance au niveau de leur horizon d'attente. Aux effets de pathos mis en place par le film contribue naturellement la musique suggestive d'Ennio Morricone, dont le rôle ne saurait être sous-estimé. D'une manière générale, le film ne ménage pas ce genre d'effets, entre autres à travers l'épisode, ne faisant pas partie du monologue, d'une romance seulement ébauchée entre Novecento et une jeune femme passagère de troisième classe, vue d'abord à travers la vitre de la fenêtre au moment où s'effectue l'enregistrement sur la matrice du disque[16].

Dans le monologue, le narrateur fait seulement miroiter le final tragique devant l'imagination du lecteur, en l'annonçant d'abord de manière indirecte (« La dernière fois que je l'ai vu, il était assis sur une bombe. Sans blague. Il était assis sur une charge de dynamite grosse comme ça », p. 16[17]) pour y revenir vers la fin : beaucoup d'années après avoir quitté le Virginian, le narrateur reçoit une lettre l'informant que le navire est proche d'être dynamité (« Ils avaient débarqué à Plymouth le peu d'équipage qui restait, ils avaient bourré le bateau de dynamite et un jour ou l'autre ils l'emmèneraient au large pour s'en débarrasser : boum et on n'en parle plus », p. 60[18]). Suit un sommaire où, sous une forme qui ressemble à un script, le narrateur raconte s'être rendu sur le navire, peu de jours après avoir lu cette lettre, pour essayer de convaincre son ami à en descendre :

> J'ai retourné la lettre dans tous les sens pendent plusieurs jours. Puis j'ai pris le train qui allait à Plymouth, je suis allé jusqu'au port, j'ai cherché le Virginian, je l'ai trouvé, j'ai donné un peu de fric aux gardiens qui étaient là, je suis monté sur le bateau, je l'ai parcouru d'un bout à l'autre, je suis descendu jusqu'à la salle des machines, je me suis assis sur une caisse qui avait l'air d'être bourrée de dynamite, j'ai ôté mon chapeau, je l'ai posé par terre, et je suis resté là, en silence, sans

> savoir quoi dire / … Là immobile, à le regarder, lui là immobile qui me regardait / Dynamite aussi sous ses fesses, dynamite partout / (p. 61)[19]

L'explosion est ensuite évoquée dans son imminence incontournable (« Il n'était pas descendu, il allait sauter avec le reste, au milieu de la mer / », p. 61[20]) et puis dans sa réalisation, à travers une phrase, dépourvue de verbe, qui ressemble à une didascalie : « Le grand final, avec tous les gens qui regardent, au bout du quai, et sur le rivage, le grand feu d'artifice, adieu tout le monde, le rideau tombe, flammes, fumée, et grande vague, à la fin / » pp. 61-62[21]). Novecento saute donc en l'air mais sa mort, si elle compte au nombre des événements – le dernier – faisant partie de son histoire, est racontée sur un mode qui lui dérobe son poids de réalité. D'ailleurs sa disparition est immédiatement compensée par l'intermédiaire du souvenir du narrateur, qui le fait ressusciter : dans les toutes dernières pages, c'est Novecento qui parle, dans la salle des machines où il attend paisiblement la mort, nous livrant les sentiments qui l'ont décidé à ne jamais descendre à terre[22]. Ainsi, alors qu'avec l'explosion Novecento fait sa sortie de l'univers diégétique du film, il est le dernier à quitter la scène dans le texte théâtral. Ceci n'est pas sans importance, comme nous le verrons.

A la différence du film, le narrateur du monologue raconte une histoire qui appartient en entier à un passé lointain par rapport à sa situation d'énonciation. Il dit avoir quitté le Virginian en 1933, six ans après s'être embarqué, n'avoir plus rien entendu de Novecento pendant des années (p. 57) et l'avoir enfin revu après la guerre, au moment de l'explosion. Par la manière dont il s'y réfère, en utilisant le passé simple en italien (et non le présent, comme dans la traduction française), le narrateur suggère que ce moment est aussi éloigné de son présent énonciatif que l'histoire dans son entier, même s'il ne le situe pas précisément : « Et puis, un jour, je reçois une lettre, écrite par Neil O'Connor, cet irlandais qui n'arrêtait jamais de plaisanter. Mais cette fois-là, c'était une lettre sérieuse » (p. 60)[23].

L'éloignement temporel des faits auxquels Tim Tooney a participé personnellement et qu'il évoque à travers son récit explique probablement pourquoi son rôle de personnage reste secondaire, dans le monologue, par rapport au rôle de narrateur, qui est dominant. Comme nous l'avons vu, le rôle de narrateur est assuré aussi bien à Mickey qu'à Max Tooney, mais la consistance de la figure du narrateur est indéniablement plus solide dans le texte adapté. Cette consistance prend la forme d'une voix, qui s'installe claire dès l'incipit, maintient son ton et résonne tout au long sans fêlures. C'est justement, par contre – et paradoxalement – parce que les versions adaptées font le choix de donner une voix au narrateur (à travers le procédé de la voix off dans le film et des cartouches dans la BD, qui encadrent dans les deux cas le récit) que cette voix inévitablement se tait la plupart du temps.

D'un point de vue théorique, défendu par exemple par Seymour Chatman (1990), on peut affirmer que même lorsque la voix du narrateur ne se fait pas entendre, sa présence est implicite dans la manière dont les faits sont sélectionnés et présentés.

Chatman prône la vue selon laquelle tout est le produit d'une narration et peut donc être ramené à un narrateur. Ce narrateur, appelé « general cinematic narrator » et défini « the overall agent that does the showing » (1990:134), serait par moments remplacé par un « voice-over narrator », dont la contribution en termes de « telling » serait presque toujours un fait transitoire. Les deux narrateurs seraient issus du « implied author », défini de « separate principle of invention and intent » (1990:132). En suivant Chatman, nous devrions postuler ce « general cinematic narrator » à côté de Max Tooney, notamment pour les scènes dans la boutique du marchand, où Max Tooney fait partie du cadre, et non de l'histoire racontée. En effet, si l'histoire des années sur le navire, et à la rigueur celle des tentatives pour sauver Novecento, est racontée par Max Tooney au marchand, par qui et à qui est raconté ce qui se passe dans la boutique de ce dernier ? L'argumentation de Chatman, qui nous apparaît théoriquement fondée, ne nous semble toutefois pas utile pour rendre compte de la manière dont se fait la réception de nos deux textes adaptés : on peut supposer en effet que la voix du narrateur disparaît tout simplement par moments pour le spectateur du film et le lecteur de la BD, sans qu'ils aient conscience de cet *autre* narrateur qui viendrait par nécessité théorique occuper sa place[24].

La présence du narrateur du monologue est en revanche stable. Ce narrateur ne livre pas qu'une histoire, d'ailleurs, mais toute une vision du monde, qui se reflète dans le ton de son récit, où l'humour se tient à l'affût, prêt à corriger le sérieux des événements et où le haut et le bas, le sublime et le sordide sont sans cesse rapprochés par son discours. La légèreté de ton dans le traitement de thèmes aussi graves que la pauvreté et la mort, l'émigration et l'existence de Dieu caractérise le récit de plus d'un épisode. S'il faut que ce ton soit mis sur le compte du narrateur, sa voix off doit s'entendre dans le film. C'est ce qui se passe avec l'épisode de la mort du marin qui a trouvé Novecento et qui l'a adopté ; celui-ci meurt en riant, écoutant les noms drôles des chevaux de course que le petit Novecento lui lit du journal. La voix off reprend alors tel quel le commentaire du narrateur du monologue qui dit : « C'est ainsi que le vieux Danny mourut sur la septième course de Chicago, remportée de deux longueurs par *Eau potable* sur *Minestrone*, et de cinq sur *Fond de Teint Bleu* » (p. 21)[25]. Lorsqu'en revanche l'épisode dans le film n'est pas commenté par la voix off, ce n'est pas l'image du narrateur que l'épisode va nourrir, mais plutôt l'image du personnage impliqué dans l'épisode. C'est ce qu'on observe avec la scène, dont la solennité est celle d'un baptême, où le bébé Novecento, ayant reçu son nom, fait un grand caca. Si dans le monologue cet épisode permet de mettre en évidence la tendance du narrateur à rapprocher le poétique et le prosaïque, dans le film c'est plutôt la figure de Boodmann, le père adoptif, qui s'en trouve étoffée ; c'est en effet sa réaction de surprise incrédule qui est focalisée.

Le texte adapté se clôt, comme nous l'avons dit, avec les mots de Novecento. D'abord sérieux sur les raisons qui l'ont décidé à rebrousser chemin une fois arrivé à

la troisième marche de l'escalier, Novecento change de registre et met en scène un dialogue cocasse avec Dieu, à qui il demande un bras pour remplacer celui qu'il a perdu dans l'explosion. Il n'y a pas, en réalité, de solution de continuité entre sa parole et celle du narrateur : le même mélange de légèreté et de profondeur la caractérise. Si Novecento a donné une histoire au narrateur, il en a reçu une voix en retour.

Quant à la BD, la simplification des contenus se remarque aussi au niveau de la psychologie du narrateur : Mickey est en effet un narrateur seulement sérieux, alors que l'humour, dans une variante un peu loufoque, est transféré du côté de Dingo/Novecento (qui se méprend, par exemple, sur la nature du duel qui l'attend et veut un habit de cow-boy, planche 22, p. 36 ; qui dit vouloir aller en France manger une pizza devant le Vésuve, planche 33, p. 57 ; qui, enfin, dans l'épisode de sa descente à terre déjà commenté, se comporte de manière farfelue). Significative à cet égard est la manière vraisemblablement différente dont sera lu l'apologue du tableau dans le monologue et dans la BD. Le narrateur du monologue (pp. 48-49) se demande ce qui fait qu'un tableau soudain se décroche de son clou et tombe à terre (situation mise en parallèle avec la décision soudaine de Novecento de descendre à terre). La question, d'apparence banale, ouvre sur un questionnement plus vaste sur la destinée humaine et le lecteur la jugera à n'en pas douter parfaitement en ligne avec le caractère double de ce narrateur, tel que nous l'avons sommairement décrit ci-dessus. Voici comment cet apologue est présenté dans la BD (planches 33 et 34, pp. 57-58)[26] :

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Mis dans la bouche de Mickey, qui est un narrateur différent, l'apologue éveille une réaction de stupéfaction un peu perplexe de la part de Minnie. Le lecteur de la BD partage sans doute cette réaction (qui s'atténue peut-être en partie chez le lecteur qui a lu aussi le monologue et qui reconnaît donc l'apologue).

Depuis la perspective de la réception nous avons, dans cet article, envisagé le texte adapté et les adaptations comme trois textes autonomes et étudié quelques liens qui se tissent entre eux à travers divers parcours d'appropriation de la part de lecteurs et spectateurs hypothétiques. Nous avons vu que le narrateur connaît, en passant du texte adapté aux adaptations, des avatars qui tiennent à la fois aux spécificités tech-

niques intrinsèques à chaque média et à la diversité des horizons d'attente à satisfaire. En conjuguant l'histoire comme on conjuguerait un verbe, chaque texte, par le biais de son narrateur, adopte son mode et utilise son temps.

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1 Nous nous référons dans cet article à la version de ce film qui a été distribuée internationalement et qui est de 45 minutes plus courte par rapport à la version doublée en italien, sortie en Italie. La version anglaise, plus accessible au grand public et présentant à nos yeux l'avantage de la langue originale, pourrait évidemment être considérée en elle-même une adaptation par rapport à la version doublée et étudiée en tant que telle. Une telle étude ne trouve cependant pas sa place dans l'espace de cet article. Une autre restriction concerne le monologue de Baricco, que nous ne considérons qu'en tant que texte écrit, car la prise en compte des diverses mises en scène – chacune apportant vraisemblablement une nouvelle interprétation du texte écrit – déborderait du cadre de cette analyse.

2 À partir de maintenant, les indications de page pour les extraits du texte de Baricco – la traduction française aussi bien que l'original italien – et de *Topolino* se réfèrent aux éditions incluses dans la bibiliographie. *La vera storia di Novecento* publiée dans l'album nr. 2737 de *Topolino* y occupe les pages 15-68. Elle est divisée en deux parties séparées de 10 pages : la première partie va de la p. 15 à la p. 36 et la deuxième partie de la p. 47 à la p. 68. L'histoire est publiée sur le site de *Topolino* à l'adresse : http://www.disney.it/publishing/topolinomagazine/topostory/#/anni/2008/leggilastoria/2008_storia.jsp
En nous référant à ce texte, nous donnerons un double renvoi, à la fois à la page, selon l'édition sur papier, et au numéro de planche. La numérotation des planches est la nôtre et elle correspond au nombre effectif de pages sur lequel se déploie l'histoire. Par exemple, la page 15 dans l'édition sur papier correspondra à la planche nr. 1.

3 Comme l'observe Thomas Leitch « Fidelity makes sense as a criterion of value only when we can be certain that the model is more valuable than the copy » (2007:6).

4 La transtextualité, dans sa variante de l'hypertextualité, a été définie par Genette (1982) comme la relation qu'un texte B (l'hypertexte ; la BD et le film dans notre cas) entretient avec un texte antérieur A (appelé l'hypotexte ; le monologue ici), la relation étant telle qu'on dira que le texte B ne pourrait exister tel quel sans A (cf. 1982:12).

5 L'histoire doit être comprise dans cette optique comme le résultat d'une opération de reconstruction, comme une projection réalisée par le lecteur à partir du récit, à l'issue d'un processus rétroactif. C'est l'histoire au sens de Genette : une entité supposée objective, stable et définitive (pour Genette, le temps de l'histoire est le temps étalon, sur lequel s'ajuste le temps du récit). Or, comme le souligne Bertrand Gervais (1993) à partir de l'exemple du roman québécois *Le libraire*, cette manière de concevoir l'histoire présuppose un certain type de lecture, « en compréhension » (la lecture, disons terminée, qui regarde en arrière), car la lecture « en progression » – purement fonctionnelle, qui colle au texte et le découvre au fur et à mesure de son avancée – ne saurait générer qu'un histoire approximative, construction fonctionnelle et provisoire (voir en particulier pp. 170-178). Selon R. Baroni, la différence de base entre la narratologie classique, représentée par Genette, et les développements modernes de la narratologie post-classique, à laquelle lui-même appartient, consiste précisément dans la volonté qui s'est fait jour de « lire à l'endroit » : « […] lire à l'endroit signifie renoncer

à la description formelle des intrigues et rompre avec une longue tradition narratologique » (2009:92).

6 En se référant à Kamilla Elliott, Linda Hutchon affirme que « adaptation commits the heresy of showing that form (expression) can be separated from content (ideas) – something both mainstream aesthetic and semiotic theories have resisted or denied » (2006:9).

7 Le nom Blackspot choisi pour le pianiste américain qui défie Novecento est la traduction anglaise de Macchia Nera (tache noire), ce personnage de Disney s'appelant par contre Phantom Blot en anglais.

8 L'autorisation de reproduire les vignettes nous a été gracieusement accordée par *The Walt Disney Company, Italia*. Vignette de gauche: « Eh oui, j'aurais pu être un bon policier… mais en fait je suis le capitaine de ce navire ! Le capitaine Basettoni ! » ; « Enchanté de faire votre connaissance ! Moi je m'appelle Topolino ! ». Vignette de droite : « Je me suis trompé de métier ! Oui, j'aurais vraiment dû faire le policier ! Comme ça je les aurais mis tous en taule ! Tous ! » ; « Mais, mon capitaine… ». Traduit par nous.

9 Dans l'interview qui occupe deux des dix pages séparant la première de la deuxième partie de l'histoire de Novecento dans *Topolino*, une question est posée à Baricco au sujet du « jeu de Mickey, Dingo, et les autres acteurs » (« […] che mi dici della recitazione di Topolino, Pippo e gli altri attori? », p. 40), que Baricco qualifie d'excellent dans sa réponse. Il nous semble toutefois que la double lecture de ces personnages est non seulement possible, mais encore encouragée par la manière dont ils sont directement mis en scène sans qu'un méta-niveau, tel par exemple le plateau de tournage d'un film, encadre ce qui ne serait alors effectivement qu'un jeu. L'hésitation quant à la manière dont il faut comprendre le statut des personnages de la BD est visible par exemple dans les guillemets par lesquels un journaliste de *La Repubblica* entoure le verbe « interpréter » en se référant à Mickey dans le rôle de trompettiste. (« […] Topolino stavolta gioca da comprimario, "interpretando" un trombettista […] » (« Mickey a cette fois-ci un rôle secondaire, "interprétant" un trompettiste […] ». Traduit par nous.) (http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2008/05/07/il-mio-novecento-stile-disney.html)

10 « Blackspot jouait, très rapidement… et très légèrement » ; « Alors que le cigare restait là, en équilibre, comme s'il n'avait pas voulu tomber pour ne pas faire de bruit! ». Traduit par nous.

11 Baroni utilise le terme de « surprise au second degré » pour se référer à la situation où « le contenu d'un dénouement, censé être surprenant, étonne en fait par son caractère évident » (2007:304). Dans l'exemple qu'il commente il s'agit aussi, au fond, de rupture d'une convention générique.

12 Baroni discute le fait que la nature synoptique de la planche qui « permet d'appréhender plusieurs moments du récit en un seul coup d'œil » (2007:328) peut compromettre partiellement la tension narrative. On peut supposer que cela se produit ici, comme un effet plutôt bienvenu.

13 Dans la version du film qui se trouve à l'adresse Youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1P68o_opSw (novembre 2013) on peut suivre le fil narratif avec les visites de Max Tooney dans la boutique du marchand aux minutes 0:05:46, 0:23:17, 1:10:17 et 1:51:36. Ces séquences sont de longueur variable.

14 Dans la version du film Youtube indiquée ci-dessus, on peut suivre le fil narratif avec les tentatives de Max Tooney pour sauver Novecento aux minutes 0:24:08, 0:34:35, 0:42:03, 0:46:27, 1:09:39, 1:20 :09, 1:33:04 et 1:35 :23.

15 Voici quelques exemples seulement des nombreuses formules par lesquelles le narrateur veille à assurer la fonction phatique de son énoncé et à en garantir la vérité : « Je le jure » p. 9 ; « okay ? » p. 16 ; « aussi vrai que Dieu est vrai » p. 24 ; « la vérité vraie c'est que… » p. 30 ; « Vous comprenez ? » p. 31 ; « vous pensez » p. 44 (« giuro » p. 11 ; « okay ? » p. 17 ; « com'è vero Iddio » p. 24 ; « la verità dei fatti è… » p. 29 ; « Capito ? » p. 30 ; « pensa te » p. 40).

16 Cette scène représente peut-être le développement d'une suggestion contenue dans le passage du monologue où Novecento, dans le dernier entretien avec Tim Tooney avant l'explosion, lui expose la manière dont il a sublimé toutes ses passions, en les ensorcelant, selon son mot : « Toutes les femmes du monde, je les ai ensorcelées en jouant une nuit entière pour *une* femme […] », p. 66 (« Tutte le donne del mondo le ho incantate suonando una notte intera per *una* donna […] », p. 58).

17 « L'ultima volta che l'ho visto era seduto su una bomba. Sul serio. Stava seduto su una carica di dinamite grande così », p. 17.

18 « Avevano sbarcato a Plymouth il poco equipaggio rimasto, l'avevano riempita di dinamite e prima o poi l'avrebbero portata al largo per farla finita : bum, e via », pp. 53-54.

19 « Io mi rigirai la lettera in mano per dei giorni. Poi presi il treno che andava a Plymouth, andai al porto, cercai il Virginian, lo trovai, diedi un po' di soldi alle guardie che stavano lì, salii sulla nave, la girai da cima a fondo, scesi alla sala macchine, mi sedetti su una cassa che aveva l'aria di essere piena di dinamite, mi tolsi il cappello, lo posai per terra e rimasi lì, in silenzio, senza sapere cosa dire/ Fermo lì a guardarlo, fermo lì a guardarmi/ Dinamite anche sotto il suo culo, dinamite dappertutto/», p. 54.

20 « Mica era sceso, sarebbe saltato insieme a tutto il resto, in mezzo al mare », p. 54.

21 « Gran finale, con tutti a guardare, dal molo e da riva, il grande fuoco d'artificio, adieu, giù il sipario, fumo e fiamme, un'onda grande alla fine », p. 54.

22 La didascalie instruit : « Le comédien devient Novecento », p. 62 (« L'attore si trasforma in Novecento», p. 55).

23 « Poi un giorno mi arrivò una lettera, me l'aveva scritta Neil O'Connor, quell'irlandese che scherzava in continuazione. Quella volta, però, era una lettera seria », p. 53.

24 Notre réserve par rapport à Chatman ne nous situe pas automatiquement du côté de Bordwell, qu'il critique. La position défendue par Bordwell (1985), pour qui il y a narration mais pas narrateur, nous semble contre-intuitive. Par effet de contraste avec la voix off, cette présence est effacée dans le film qui nous occupe ici, mais cela n'autorise pas à exclure *a priori* que le spectateur d'un film ressente la présence de quelqu'un qui filtre l'information.

25 Dans le film la voix off dit : « He let go on the sixth race in Chicago, Drinkable water by two lengths on Vegetable Soup and five over Blue Foundation ». Voici l'original italien : « Così il vecchio Danny morì sulla sesta corsa di Chicago, vinta da *Acqua potabile* con due lunghezze su *Minestrone* e cinque su *Fondotinta blu* », p. 22.

26 « Puis, un jour, le tableau est tombé... » ; « Le tableau? » ; « Tu sais le tableau? Il reste accroché pendant des années, tranquille… et puis, sans que rien se soit passé, tout à coup…vlam! » ; « Pourquoi juste à ce moment-là ? On ne sait pas ! Il n'y a aucune raison, Minnie ! ». Traduit par nous.

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Elaine BARROS INDRUSIAK

Adaptation and Recycling in Convergent Cultural Polysystems: A Case Study

Abstract

This paper aims at presenting and discussing the findings of a research project that employs Polysystem Theory (Even-Zohar 1978; 2010) in mapping some of the contributions film industry has brought to the Brazilian literary and cultural systems. The focus of the project is on the editorial boom and recycling of J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* brought about by Peter Jackson's homonymous film versions and the several texts and cultural products synergically launched in the same period and afterwards. The research demonstrates that film adaptations of literary works in a convergent context (Jenkins 2006) may renew and enrich the original text, as well as rearrange its role and position within both source and target literary systems by introducing it to new audiences. By adapting the literary work into new texts and to new readers, this recycling process performs what Walter Benjamin conceived as translation's major role: to grant the original text "afterlife".

Keywords: Literary polysystems, adaptation, cinema, recycling, J.R.R. Tolkien.

The comparative strand of Literary Studies has always been particularly rich in Brazilian territory, partly because, as the critic Antonio Candido argued, "to study Brazilian literature is to study comparative literature" (Candido 1993: 23). As a result, the Brazilian Association of Comparative Literature and other such institutions have worked as reliable reference in pointing towards the newest trends and guidelines of academic research and critical thought aimed not only at the literary text itself, but also at the inter and transdisciplinary relationships that, if not introduced, were mul-

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tiplied and greatly deepened by postmodernity. In this sense, when we observe that some of the latest academic events in the field of comparativism have revolved around the dichotomy *center* vs. *periphery*, it seems reasonable to conclude that today there is a significant concern regarding the power relations that determine the formation of centers, which are obviously constituted in opposition to peripheral zones. Against this background, it is particularly interesting to investigate the role played by translation, adaptation and other forms of recycling which, at times, rearrange and challenge these positions.

Certainly, both in Brazil and internationally, the dichotomy *center* vs. *periphery* allows for a wide extent of probing possibilities that range from the already matured questioning as to national literatures within the scope of an alleged *Weltliteratur,* to more recent inquiries regarding the relations established between texts of different natures and that also determine hierarchies, cores and margins. Brazilian literary studies, however, arising from a so-called "country of transplanted culture", have always shown special interest in comparativist discussions that aimed at granting the national literature recognition and visibility in its relationship with foreign literatures, especially European ones, for a long time regarded as the center around which the national production was destined to orbit, which can be inferred from Candido's aforementioned statement. In this scenario, translating and translation studies, an area that has always been close to comparativist research, seemed to suffer from the curse of *la Malinche*[1] – the honor and the glory for fostering communication between peoples and cultures rest upon the translator, but s/he is also accused of defeatism and deemed responsible for the domination the center exerts over the periphery. Despite the anarchic humor of Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade in his anthropophagic propositions that back in 1928 stated "I only care for what is not mine" (Andrade 1991:36), only recently have Brazilians begun to break free from this view that is riddled with guilt, subservience, inferiority and debt. However, even this liberating perspective shift seems more closely related to extrinsic factors – especially the new conceptions of influence created under the overwhelming and revolutionary logic of intertextuality – than to some awareness that effectively celebrated being "mimics". In other words, the moratorium of the cultural debt hanging over Brazilian literature was not decreed by Brazilians themselves, but by the theoretical and critical thinking generated in Europe and North America, their creditors.

More recently, however, whether due to effects of the postcolonialist logic that questions and subverts debts and filiations, or due to a postmodernist thought that is largely imported, even if prematurely – considering that Brazil has yet to fully accomplish its modernity –, the analysis and questioning of hierarchies, centers and peripheries within our own national literature has been gaining strength. This tendency is further enhanced by interdisciplinary and intersemiotic contributions that, without denying linguistic and textual borders and specificities, follow the text wherever it goes, be it as translation, adaptation, intertextuality or even influence, thereby extrapolating

the limits that surround what is literary to encompass the bigger – and therefore more complex – picture, that of what is cultural. In this context, the theoretical propositions made by Israeli researcher Itamar Even-Zohar regarding literary polysystems are of great significance, as they support investigations on relations of power and value assignment among the different texts that make up literary and cultural systems, which are characterized by their plurality and diversity of sets of elements in a dynamic yet hierarchically organized relation, resulting in what the researcher classifies as "system of systems", hence "polysystem".

What later came to be called the Polysystem Theory was arranged from several texts published by Even-Zohar throughout the 1970s and which have been systematically reviewed, deepened and expanded. Resulting from studies of strong formalist influence carried out at the University of Tel Aviv, Even-Zohar's theories were born aligned with the Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) proposed by Gideon Toury. Those first papers focused on translation issues that defined the development conditions and scenario of the then incipient Hebrew literature, particularly the relations of power established between this literature and those produced in other languages that coexist and circulate in the still young Israeli literary polysystem. Despite the systemic and contextualized view of translational, literary, linguistic, cultural and even economic phenomena that have influenced the development of the literature in focus, losing sight, at times, of source and target texts, Even-Zohar's analysis maintains the descriptive neutrality and objectivity postulated by his colleague Toury and that evoke a scientific formalist bent. According to this orientation, then, there should be no judgment of value nor clear ideological stands raised and/or defended in the analysis, but the attempt to map the existing tensions between the elements that make up the literary polysystem. However, being still in full swing, Itamar Even-Zohar has considerably extended the scope of his theory, no longer limiting his investigation to literary polysystems in their diachronic and synchronic relations, but embracing the power relations that are established within culture as a whole, which gives rise to the characterization of actual cultural polysystems, as evidenced by his recent publication *Papers in Culture Research* (2010).

The dynamics of creation of centers and peripheries within literary polysystems mirrors power relations of colonialist and/or imperialist nature, since texts written in prestigious languages or from literary systems of renowned cultural value tend to settle comfortably next to the top of the hierarchy of works that make up a literary system still in the process of consolidation. The issue, however, is more complex, since, as pointed out by the researcher, there are other cases in which translated literature enjoys central position over the local production in the literary system.

> It seems to me that three major cases can be discerned: (a) when a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is "young," in the process of being established; (b) when a literature is either "peripheral" or "weak," or both; and (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature. (Even-Zohar 1978: 21).

Therefore, translation as a cultural practice gains in importance, for it is through this practice that the center of the system is fed with works that will either act as models and oppose the ones orbiting in peripheral areas or make up for possible weaknesses and gaps in the system. Hence, the systemic approach proposed by Polysystem Theory offers great contribution to studies of formation and organization of literary systems, forged in the shadows of European literatures, consequently dependent on translation and imports. Of course, the current situation of the Brazilian literary system no longer corresponds to the scenario of those early days; one should thoroughly inquire and investigate to what extent translated literature still holds a central role in the national polysystem, given the undeniable progress and maturity of Brazilian literature. In any case, even an uncommitted walk among the shelves of major bookstores around the country seems to indicate that this situation of unbalanced trade relations is still far from being reversed, and that translated literature will hold a privileged status in Brazilian culture for years to come.

Even-Zohar's theoretical studies, however, did more than subsidize research focused on this phenomenon of international exchange. They have also contributed to the realization that national productions are equally distributed in central and peripheral zones within their literary systems, indicating the same hierarchical dynamics that guide the positioning of foreign texts imported through translation, which is often noticed in the status given to children's literature or to written expressions of popular culture. It follows that the judgments of value, attribution of prestige and formation of canons that govern the internal dynamics of literary polysystems arise from power games that go well beyond the simplistic notions of cultural and economic domination between nations.

In times of exacerbated interdisciplinarity, however, no theories or concepts based on and applied to literature seem to be restricted to this form of art and field of studies. Likewise, when new conceptions of text put into question literary assumptions, translation, being one of the many forms of textual dialogues, is also broadened so as to accommodate, or at least approach, relationships between texts of different natures, extending its ancient tradition and relatively new theoretical framework to even newer fields of studies based on concepts of similar orientation, such as adaptation, appropriation, recycling, transculturation, remix, among so many others.

Added to this is the fact that cultural markets, driven by the logic of globalization and massification, seem to bet on convergence and transdisciplinary synergies and similarities so as to maximize their marketing campaigns and sales potential. Therefore, it seems absolutely natural and coherent that Even-Zohar's findings regarding literary polysystems migrate and become also relevant to larger and more complex scenarios that encompass all other semiotic systems of communication and cultural production.

> … the polysystemic approach is expected to serve as the theoretical environment for the study of culture allowing it to develop versatile tools which will enable dealing with heterogeneity and dynamics along the same principles that have led to the furtherance of the cultural framework. (Even Zohar 2010: 39)

Consequently, based on these theoretical assumptions, I have dedicated myself studying the contributions made by the international film industry to the Brazilian cultural polysystem through adaptations of English-speaking literary works. Studies related to the dialogue between literature and film are quite recurrent in the contemporary Brazilian academic environment, partly due to the acknowledgement owed to the investigative merits of interdisciplinary approaches, a consequence of the comparativist bent aforementioned, partly due to the unavoidable cultural influence and penetration cinema exerts as an artistic expression, despite the fact that the national film industry is still rather unstable. However, I seek to go beyond the still quite recurrent perception that this interdisciplinary dialogue indicates a parasitic relationship in which cinema – a recently formed art and industry – benefits from the literary legacy – older and more prestigious – when borrowing stories, plots, characters and narrative resources. To avoid the trap of treating recyclers as traitors, my research draws on the systemic approach to describe the intricate net of relationships existing between literature and cinema within the Brazilian cultural system. As a result, despite the prejudice still found in some instances of both academic and cultural environments, the research findings indicate that the massified "seventh art" has been aiding the publishing industry in minimizing the impact that the exacerbation of visual culture, as well as new technologies and entertainment media, has had over reading and hence over the local literary system.

The relationship between literature and film is as old as cinema itself, as thoroughly pointed out by Gerald Mast:

> Since moving pictures and, after 1927, moving pictures synchronized with recorded sounds could be used to tell stories, describe events, imitate human actions, expose problems, and urge reforms, it is not surprising that such uses of motion pictures would provoke speculative comparisons with that other major human system for telling, describing, imitating, exposing, and urging—verbal language. The history of these comparisons between film and literature has been a history of splitters and lumpers, of those who argue for the distinctness of the two media – the effects, purposes, pleasures, and possibilities of two separate arts that are, ought to be, or must be distinct – as opposed to those who argue that the aims, effects, and means of the two media are similar, parallel, or analogous. (Mast 278)

Even though this dialogue derives from the textual structures and communicative possibilities inherent to the two arts involved, giving rise to a wide range of relationships, parallels and influences that have contributed greatly to their respective productions, a huge percentage of the theoretical and critical approaches to these relationships limits the term "literature" to novels and drama, whereas "film" is reduced to the category of fictional narrative films, particularly feature films, a noticeable impoverishment which happens for reasons unknown even to Mast. Comparatively speaking, there is little discussion on the possible dialogues between documentaries and non-fiction literary texts, or poetry and, say, animation, to name two out of many other investigative

possibilities. What is more, even a cursory analysis on the numerous production devoted to such studies seems to be enough to prove the tendency to give priority to cases of literary adaptation (of novels and plays) to film language, practically disregarding the wide range of possible dialogues – from obvious intertexts to subtle influences –, which ultimately contributes to this insidious notion that the myriad of relationships between two huge fields of artistic creation can be narrowed down to the practice of intersemiotic translation aimed at merely retelling on the big screen what literature has previously consecrated in its pages. In a world still strongly attached to the notion of an overvalued and idealized originality that is mistaken for primacy, there is no need for a great deal of reflection to realize that this is a comfortable spot to a notion of cultural debt along the lines of that which still undercuts many non-European literary systems. In other words, this biased and narrow-minded view of the richness of the interdisciplinary dialogue reinforces the perception that cinema owes to literature a great part of its wealth and complexity simply because, mind you, it did not come first.

Of course, the market for film adaptations of literary works, as well as the obviousness of such dialogues, often expressed in the choice of title itself, partly justifies this notion, but there are also historical reasons that seem to contribute to such a marked tendency. The first, as noted by Mast, is the fact that cinema, being a recent art, is not only valued and judged according to criteria that are applicable to the oldest and more prestigious arts, but is also studied by professionals who had their education and taste developed to conform to the particularities of the already established art forms and disciplines dedicated to them, especially literature. Differences in the composition of audiences are also noteworthy, since the aesthetic, philosophical and epistemological concerns are displayed by the most select and affluent publics of the prestigious arts, while the often illiterate cinema audiences of the early days were not concerned with this sort of questioning, little caring about the socio-cultural status of their newly acquired hobby. In addition to that, in the specific case of adaptation, appropriation and other explicit intertextual dialogues and recycling practices, there is the discredited view of translation – in this case, intersemiotic translation – which has not yet been overcome due to the resistant notion that places the original literary text as something sacred whose integrity must not be tainted; it is the old maxim of fidelity, which, however fallacious translation studies have proven it to be, is still desired and defended by many, at times in an overt way.

Mast adds as a derogatory factor for cinema in face of literature the modernist assumption, still much in vogue, that a work of art has to be a radical creation, both in form and content, one that does not result from generic conventions and, therefore, cannot be identified with the masses, which tend to feel comfortable in the presence of what is generic and conventional (281). Even though the American scholar does not go too deep into this issue, emphasizing only that formal experimentalism is not exactly the hallmark of most of the film industry production, one can notice here that he touches an aspect of great importance to this research: the characterization of cinema as

mass cultural expression. In previous texts I have analyzed some of the consequences, particularly for cinema, of overtly biased views on mass culture products, such as Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno's articulate reasoning which concluded that art and entertainment are not only two distinct cultural phenomena, but incompatible ones.

Despite so many entrenched principles and prejudices that for many years denied cinema the status of art, one can say, with relief and genuine satisfaction, that this discussion is today surpassed in most cultural systems. Though the term "film industry" stills haunts and distresses a few purists on duty, the seventh art now seems to live up to its own muse. However, prejudice does not die easily, and often its propagators make small concessions in order to maintain their innermost values untouched; the old strategy of "losing the saddle to keep the horse". This seems to have been the case of the perception of cultural value attributed to cinema; instead of abolishing aprioristic evaluations that prejudge and label film productions based on their popularity among the least affluent and sophisticated publics, art criticism gradually split film productions into two segments of easy identification, the so-called "art films" and "commercial films" – an offshoot of the overwhelming growth and diversification of worldwide film production that unfortunately reinforces the notion that art and entertainment are self-excluding. Although specialized literature does not fully define what kinds of films are to be aligned in each of these segments, even because generic classifications in film studies are a work in progress, any reader of cultural supplements knows that the second category must be filled up with Hollywood movies and blockbusters; whereas the definition of the first group would be a little more complicated, since it involves the very notion of film art. However, this task can be significantly simplified without much risk of error if one aligns European (particularly French), Asian (except for the world-famous Bollywood films), independent, experimental and auteurial productions, that is, almost all movies that have not been created by North American studios and/or have not achieved much success or financial return. Excesses and inaccuracies aside, one can say that the contemporary film industry, as well as its specialized criticism, is guided by this classificatory logic.

It is worth stressing, though, that cinema is both art *and* industry. Therefore, both the experimentalism and aesthetic refinement peculiar to art films, and heavy investments in new audiovisual production and reproduction technologies – only possible in films bankrolled by major producers – contribute equally to the development of film language. Nonetheless, the same conception of tainted entertainment devoid of artistic qualities that once fell on cinema as a whole is now often employed in a priori characterization of commercial movies, especially blockbusters. Of course, it is not my aim to advocate the complete reversal of this assumption, defending that all movies are works of art and objects deserving of the most insightful analyses and theoretical considerations. Just like all other arts, cinema produces a great deal of works of poor or highly questionable quality and merit, regardless of having or not any commercial appeal. What is in question here is the (not always) veiled practice of assessing artistic value

and quality based on financial data in a relation of inverse proportionality: the higher the figures involved in the production of a film, the lower its merit as a work of art.

Although this is an internal matter of film industry and market, literature has always been affected by this relation, and the growing complexity of today's transdisciplinary and transmedial cultural polysystems has only enhanced these "sympathy pains". The numerous adaptations and appropriations of literary works, for instance, are also subject to the same rules applicable to original screenplays, but with an aggravating factor: few readers seem to be pleased by the sudden transformation of one of their favorite readings into a blockbuster. Imagine, just for the sake of recreational pondering, the passionate reactions one would get from an announcement of yet another film production of *Hamlet*, only this time with experienced actor Sylvester Stallone in the leading role. Not even Alfred Hitchcock's many lessons demonstrating that, in film, acting skills are not a *sine qua non* condition for the production of a great movie would save this work. Even before any take was shot, the film and its director would already be hopelessly and irrevocably doomed by the critics' and the public's massacre. Certainly such a far-fetched example may be laughable, but it is enough for us to realize the existence of this premise according to which film adaptations – and other forms of recycling – of great literary works must be guided by an artistic approach, not a commercial one, whatever that entails in terms of screenwriting, instersemiotic translation and film production.

The hypothetical example above also reinforces that which Christian Metz (1972) indicates as one of the features that help us distinguish between film and cinema language. The cinematographic text goes far beyond the film text, for it also involves elements that produce meaning before, during and after the screening of the film itself, such as projection conditions or even assumptions and intertexts created by the mere casting for the different roles, as described in our comical example or in the recent (and slightly surreal) negative reactions of Batman fans to the choice of Ben Affleck to take up the role as Bruce Wayne in Zack Snyder's coming production. Therefore, one can see that criticizing commercial cinema for using elements extrinsic to the film itself in order to maximize the cultural experience tied to it makes no sense at all, for these extrinsic elements are a mechanism intrinsic to the production of meaning in the art of cinema.

Given this scenario, the position of the director who intends to adapt into film canonical or extremely popular literary works is unrewarding. If s/he has aspirations of someday being praised as an *auteur*, s/he will almost wish that the work be a flop, so that only critics and a few enthusiasts will find in it the "noncommercial" bent that will consecrate the artist. However, if that is a rule in today's film industry, there has to be at least one exception to confirm it. Well, it seems one of such exceptions may be found in New Zealand, and it goes by the name of Peter Jackson.

A virtually unknown B movie director (hence, an "artist") without any title of greater impact in his curriculum, Peter Jackson found himself, in the mid-90s, trusted with

a multimillionaire budget and one of the greatest film projects ever carried out – the simultaneous production of three feature-length films that would bring to the screen the saga *The Lord of the Rings*, by J. R. R. Tolkien. Since the first rumors about this long-awaited adaptation, yet until then unseen due to the challenges of intersemiotic translation the novel presented, strong suspicions as to the reasons behind the choice of Jackson and to his attributes to undertake such a huge responsibility hovered. Although Tolkien's work has always been subject to fierce disputes regarding its literary worth and has never rejoiced in a position that was unquestionably central – even in its original literary system –, its passionate legion of British fans raised it to the singular position of "book of the century" [2]. With such a literary heritage in hands, the risks of significant financial loss and of the adaptation becoming "a chronicle of a flop foretold" were astronomical. Therefore, choosing a director was not something that could be done carelessly, it followed a thorough process of selection that took into account both characteristics needed to ensure acceptance by the literary public and what would guarantee the financial return necessary and desired by producers and investors, as pointed out by I. Q. Hunter:

> Jackson and his co-adaptors were constrained not only to satisfy Tolkien readers by capturing "the essence" of the novel, but also to produce a blockbuster action movie accessible to viewers with no emotional investment in the novel. But the novel's wide fan base, while not sufficient, as Kristin Thompson remarks, to make the film a hit, was certainly large enough to cause damage if the film was felt to be inauthentic, "Hollywoodized" and out of alignment with readers' expectations … To keep the fans onside, it was crucial not only that the films (or at least the first one) stuck closely to the novel, but that Jackson and his team display credentials as fans themselves. The Tolkien estate, luckily, had no control over the films, but convenient links were emphasized between Tolkien and the filmmakers - for example, the fact that Christopher Lee, who plays Saruman, had actually met Tolkien. Jackson himself was opportunistically spun in publicity material as a genial, tubby, bare-footed hobbit. Even so, while mollifying the fans ensured some sort of audience for the film, pandering exclusively to them was aesthetically constricting and commercially perilous … Furthermore, for a minority of film fans (like me), *The Lord of the Rings* was not simply an adaptation of Tolkien: it was the latest film by the *auteur* Peter Jackson, an accomplished director of fantasy movies from the splatter-comedy *Bad Taste* (1987) to the psychological drama *Heavenly Creatures* (1994). How would *Lord of the Rings* adapt to and extend *his* distinctive vision? Was the quirkily subversive New Zealander at last selling out to Hollywood? (156-157)

However, contrary to the most pessimistic predictions, choosing Jackson proved to be more than just accurate and, by the end of 2003 – when the final film of the trilogy was released – the film version of *The Lord of the Rings* was celebrated as one of the most successful adaptations of literary works, a great work of fiction, a prodigy of au-

diovisual creation of fantastic worlds and beings and, paradoxically, a blockbuster of great artistic qualities. But, of course, Jackson was not alone during the several years demanded to accomplish the production of the trilogy, and part of its success is owed to the efficient marketing campaign that orchestrated all the moves of the several cultural products created in association with the film. Aware of the sales potential that this massive cultural movement presented, the publishing industry rushed to launch its products as well: several different editions of the original trilogy, new editions of other works by Tolkien, as well as a number of other publications somehow related to *The Lord of the Rings*.

So far, nothing new; publishing booms fueled by film adaptations are a fairly common phenomenon and, though they reinforce my underlying statement here concerning cinema's great and perhaps increasing influence on literary polysystems, they sometimes do not go beyond a fleeting fever of the publishing market. But the specific case of Jackson's adaptations of Tolkien's works and their penetration into the Brazilian cultural market had unique consequences that allowed further investigation of the complex relationships texts of different natures and languages establish between themselves within the scope of what may be called "cultural polysystems". The peculiar aspect behind the position taken up by Tolkien's work within the Brazilian literary polysystem arises from the fact that *The Lord of the Rings*, despite its aforementioned popularity in its original system and in those of other English-speaking nations, had remained virtually unknown to Brazilian readers until the late 90s, the eve of the release of Jackson's trilogy.

Looking back, it is really interesting and rather surprising that Tolkien's work had such an unimpressive performance in Brazil during the 20th century while establishing itself as one of the most popular and admired works of fiction in the English language, especially if we take into account that the first translation of the trilogy to Portuguese was carried out by Antônio Ferreira da Rocha and Luiz Alberto Monjardim for the Brazilian publishing house Artenova. About twenty years after the publication of the original work in the UK, Artenova published its translation; oddly enough, the Brazilian edition had six volumes, three of which created and titled by the editors, since the original text, conceived as a single novel, had been divided into three books, despite the author's resistance, in order to make it more marketable. Translational and editorial licenses aside, Artenova was responsible for introducing *The Lord of the Rings* into the Portuguese-speaking world. However, despite this major accomplishment, the company closed down soon after the publication of the last of the six books. After this period (70s and early 80s), the only translations of *The Lord of the Rings* to Portuguese would be published by Europa-América, a Lisbon-based publishing house.

For those unfamiliar with Brazilian culture, Artenova's failure in publishing those translations might seem to have been due to prejudice or national grudges against English literary works. However, as previously discussed, most of the works that hold central position in the Brazilian literary polysystem are European, many of which

English-speaking, and have been brought here through translation. One could also hypothesize that this poor publishing performance might have resulted from a difficulty the translated work faced in positioning itself, since young adult fiction in Brazil until quite recently was not dissociated from children's literature, hence the recurrent classification of works as different as, for example, Roal Dahl's and Tolkien's under one generic and imprecise label called *infanto-juvenil*[3] literature. Still, other English-speaking writers have been successful in ensuring their niches in this apparent "mixed bag", such as Lewis Carroll or even Jonathan Swift, whose works have been somewhat oversimplified and adapted to young readers. Therefore, the reasons for Artenova's poor performance in introducing Tolkien to the Brazilian literary system remain unknown, and the fact is that the masterpiece of the famous British philologist had to wait more than a decade until the cultural agitation sparked by the making of Jackson's film adaptations ensured the investment of the publishing market in producing new translations. Still in the 90s, probably tuned to the first steps of Jackson's long and painstaking pre-production, the publishing house Martins Fontes resumes the project of introducing *The Lord of the Rings* to the Brazilian literary market, publishing the saga in its original format, in three volumes. Already in 2000, aided by the international marketing campaign run in preparation for the release of the first feature film (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 2001), the Brazilian publishing house could already tell that the process of reintroducing and recycling Tolkien in the Brazilian polysystem was not only complete, but had been a success. Following this first "recycled" edition of the first novel of the trilogy, the other two novels came right behind, but soon the marketplace would be flooded with revised editions and publications in new formats, including, of course, the one that would confirm the "synergy" of the different cultural products of the Tolkien franchise: a three-volume edition with covers alluding to Jackson's films.

With the release of the last film of the trilogy (*The Return of the King)*, in 2003, Brazilian readers could count not only with a British writer and a highly popular work of young adult literature thoroughly renewed within their literary polysystem, but also with a number of new cultural products and a genuine "tolkienmania" spreading through several segments and media, such as comics, digital games and fanfiction. But more than that, to the likely chagrin of the precursors from Artenova, one can observe that the recycling of *The Lord of the Rings* within the Brazilian literary system was not limited to fueling the commerce of the trilogy and other products directly associated with it, but pushed all of Tolkien's work, if not to the center of the literary system, certainly to the center of the publishing market. With that, fictional and nonfictional works of the British writer thus far unknown to the Brazilian public (aside from occasional buyers of imported books), such as *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion*, *The Children of Hurin* and *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, were finally translated and published by national publishing houses. Similarly, the cultural effervescence brought about by the *The Lord of the Rings* franchise would be later reenacted and further explored by the launch of Jackson's adaptation of *The Hobbit* (2012-2014); this time, however, it came

as no surprise, since Brazilian readers and film viewers were already enlisted among Tolkien lovers worldwide.

But the revival of *The Lord of the Rings* within the Brazilian cultural system had consequences that went way beyond establishing or enlarging Tolkien's and Jackson's fanbases. The intensity of this boom helped consolidate young adult fantasy literature as a high-profit niche dissociated from children's books, a niche which, of course, would need more than one author to sustain itself. As a result, the editorial market made heavy investments in recycling previous works by different authors or in publishing new ones that could be associated with Tolkien's fantastic universe, such as narratives exploring Norse or Celtic mythology, medieval scenery and fantastic sagas of Messianic heroes, themes and images that do not easily match South-American tropical environments. Moreover, having taken place in these times of unprecedented "cultural convergence", as Henry Jenkins puts it, the adherence of Brazilian youth to tolkienmania fed the recent but growing practice of fanfiction writing and sharing, a cultural phenomenon which in Brazil is still restricted to the upper classes due to the costs involved in the acquisition of technology, but which has already proven to be highly influential in the dynamics of the literary system both by boosting readership and by forming more, better and younger literary writers by the year.

Therefore, from the facts presented in this "literary case study" it is clear that the effects of film adaptations and of the ensuing revival of literary works adapted are diverse, complex and too broad to be encompassed by approaches exclusively aimed at analyzing source and target texts. The systemic approach proposed by Even-Zohar allows us to map, both synchronically and diachronically, without any intention of exhausting the issue, the complex and dynamic web of relationships between texts of different media that feed the cultural polysystem, particularly re-culture practices that interfere in the circulation of such texts.

Although much more could be researched regarding the corpus and connections presented here, it seems reasonable to conclude that the data exposed put to rest any notion that one could still have as to film industry's debt to literature. Even if the film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* might not have had major implications in cultural systems in which the literary work had already enjoyed solid popularity – which I doubt –, I believe that the cultural phenomenon brought about by the release of Peter Jackson's trilogy in Brazil is not only worthy of note and study, but must be greeted warmly, for a nation where about 40% of students report having less than ten books at home[4] is in no position to feed prejudice against any cultural product or practice that may boost the publishing market and stimulate an interest in reading. The launch of Jackson's adaptations in Brazil, backed up by commercial practices usually frowned upon for their overt financial motivations, had the merit of single-handedly supporting the reintroduction and recycling of a great work of young adult fantasy in a literary system where this genre was marginal and fuzzy, of introducing a rich fantastic universe that has influenced many other works and of stimulating the formation and

qualification of both new readers and writers, greatly surpassing any timid governmental campaigns to promote reading.

If it is true that Brazil has been going through a serious "book crisis", as has been argued, then perhaps it is time scholars and critics free themselves of unfounded prejudices and regard cinema not as wealthy literature's poor and indebted cousin, but as a possible and effective aid in reviving and recycling the literary legacy which is increasingly in disuse. In this sense, the long-detracted practice of adaptation may claim its share of acknowledgment for cultural services rendered, since, just like the hailed poetry translation, it can carry out the primary task of translation appointed by German philosopher Walter Benjamin: to ensure the survival of the literary text. Although Benjamin's romantic spirit did not have in mind mundane topics such as the publishing market or re-culture practices, it will seem logical to any more pragmatic mind that, without readers, no text survives.

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1 *La Malinche*, also known as Malintzin, was the Mexican woman who, due to her talent for language learning, became Hernan Cortez's interpreter, contributing to the devastating Spanish domination over Mexico. The term La Malinche has since meant both the translator and the traitor.

2 In a survey carried out in 1997 by Britain's Channel 4 in partnership with Waterstone bookstore chain that aimed at pointing out "the greatest book of the 20th century" according to the readers.

3 A category that encompasses both children's and young adult literature.

4 According to PISA 2010, 39.5% of Brazilian students have less than ten books at home, and other 30.4% reported that their books do not exceed 25, textbooks included.

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Adaptation as a Means of Reflecting upon Immersivity and Self-Referentiality

Abstract

In this article, I apply parts of the method introduced by Linda Hutcheon in her recently reedited book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2010) and try to answer the question "why" an adaptation is made. I particularly study three complex cases of adaptation, which might even put into question the canonical definition of adaptation itself, but I concentrate on aspects related to immersion and self-referentiality. All these examples, which are Jasper Fforde's novel *The Eyre Affair* (2001), Abdellatif Kechiche's film *Black Venus* (*Vénus noire*, 2010) and Peter Greenaway's film *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (2012), address the above mentioned aspects in interesting and ingenious manners. In Fforde's novel, the shift of genres permits a narratively advanced game with the reader's possible immersion in the world of fiction, challenging and broadening thus theories of reader's involvement or immersivity. In *Black Venus* and *Goltzius and the Pelican Company,* the shift of media and the residual presence of the source medium in the adapting medium offers the possibility of accomplishing subtler, but quite as daring games with the immersivity and self-referentiality of the source text as in *The Eyre Affair*. In Kechiche's film, the reaction of the audience is presented. In *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* there is one more level, which permits self-referential reflections on the adapted product itself and on the act of its reception. However, despite the differences between them, all these three examples illustrate the possibility to include theoretical reflections in artistic works, dissolving thus the difference between theory and practice (cf. Kamilla Elliot).

Keywords: Adaptation studies, Greenaway, Fforde, Black Venus, immersion, self-reflexivity, intermediality.

Adaptation – a dynamic study field

Adaptation studies appears to be a very dynamic theoretic field these days. Let me for example mention the newly published anthology *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions,* edited by Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen. Let me also mention the Association of Adaptation Studies, which publishes the Oxford based jour-

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nal *Adaptation* and organizes international conferences on a yearly basis. Their latest conference, the eighth one, took place at Linnaeus University in Sweden in September 2013, and its subject emphasizes the changes that the field is undergoing. Indeed, the title of the conference itself, *Disturbing Adaptations,* highlights the conviction that adaptation studies no longer deal with the fidelity aspect alone, but with a large number of problematic issues which could "disturb" the canonical definition of adaptation itself. As adaptation theorist Christine Geraghty stresses in her abstract of her paper presented at the conference in Växjö, "[b]y building on poststructuralist insights, scholars began to explore adaptations in a much freer and more transgressive way" (Geraghty 2013: 14).

As already alluded to above, one of the most important aspects making the object of transgressions in today's adaptation theory is the fidelity criterion. However, the fidelity criterion, or the fidelity obsession as I am inclined to call it, seems to impose its presence in a very persistent way. In the introduction to the anthology *Adaptation Studies, New Approaches* from 2010, the editors – Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins – claim that "[a] stubborn insistence on fidelity certainly has kept adaptation theory from maturing" (2010: 12). I could certainly agree with this objection, but I would like to clarify that I do not think that the fidelity criterion is to be eliminated altogether. Comparing an adaptation to the original text should not become a forbidden method, since it is by such thorough comparisons that similarities and differences are highlighted in ways that could contribute to the creation of meaning for the recipient. The fidelity criterion is inappropriate especially when it is used with the goal of judging quality according to hierarchy. I therefore agree with Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins when they criticize the use of "the issue of 'fidelity' to a precursor text as a means to understand an adaptation's scope and worth" (2010: 12). The result of such an understanding of the fidelity criterion is – as Linda Hutcheon points out – that "in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing, contemporary popular adaptations are most often put down as secondary, derivative, 'belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior'" (Hutcheon, 2012: 2).

The insistence on the fidelity criterion often entails an overemphasis on the question of "what" is being adapted. This is an essential question of course, but as Hutcheon shows in her book, there are other questions to be asked in relation to adaptation. In this article, I will rather concentrate on the question "why" an adaptation is made. In the three examples that I will study below – which are Jasper Fforde's novel *The Eyre Affair* (2001), Abdellatif Kechiche's film *Black Venus* (*Vénus noire*, 2010) and Peter Greenaway's film *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (2012) – I will investigate if adaptation can have the effect of highlighting immersivity and self-reflection.

The Eyre Affair – Metaleptic immersion in the adapted work

The Eyre Affair, a novel written in 2001 by English author Jasper Fforde, can be used to investigate the importance of genre aspects in relationship with adaptation, since it is a good example of genre hybridity. As a matter of fact, parts of *The Eyre Affair* can be

studied as interesting forms of adaptation, since the world of the novel *Jane Eyre* comes to life and the story is retold with small variations when the characters from the main story enter the world of *Jane Eyre* and take an active part in it. As I showed elsewhere (Lutas, 2011), the novel can be considered as an example of a popular detective work, since the basic structure of the main plot follows the conventions of the genre very closely: a detective searching for the solution of a crime and succeeding in getting the culprit at the end of the novel. However, a great number of supernatural events complicate the genre question, making it possible to consider *The Eyre Affair* as pertaining to the fantasy genre, or a sub-genre thereof, or even to science fiction. In terms of generic loyalties, *The Eyre Affair* appears to be also a metafictional novel in the proper meaning of the word: a novel about fiction. But this does not stand in contrast to the detection element of the novel. On the contrary, the metafictional aspects are rather to be considered as a part of the main subject of the plot, since a metaleptic transgression, namely the disappearance of a character in Brontë's book *Jane Eyre,* is the mystery that the detective must solve.

The main character in *The Eyre Affair*, a 36-year-old woman by the name of Thursday Next, is a detective working at SpecOps-27, which is "an organisation working with crimes committed in the field of literature: counterfeiting, theft of original manuscripts, illegal trading, copyright infringements, etc." (Fforde, 2001: 1–2). The subject of literature is consequently important in the novel, which is filled with references to literary works, in particular to classics like Shakespeare's plays, Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" and of course Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In addition to this, literature is an extremely important phenomenon in the fictional world of Fforde's novel, which is an alternative version of contemporary Britain where gangs fight and people murder just to settle literary questions, such as Shakespeare's authorship.

As already mentioned, one of the most striking things in *The Eyre Affair* is that certain characters of the main story can enter the world of books, and that characters from the world of books can leave their world and come to life in the world of the readers. As a matter of fact, the main crime that Thursday Next has to solve is the literal kidnapping of the character of Jane Eyre from the original manuscript of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. All these would be examples of narrative metalepses, defined by French narratologist Gérard Genette for the first time in *Figures III* in 1972, and redefined in his *Narrative Discourse Revisited* as follows: "when an author (or his reader) introduces himself into the fictive action of the narrative or when a character in that fiction intrudes into the extradiegetic existence of the author or reader" (Genette, 1988:88).

However, the narrative metalepsis, as exemplified by the kidnapping of a character from a novel and by the intrusion of readers into the world of the novel and their interaction with the characters, is not only the main event of the plot. It is also a subject of discussion and analysis within the novel. Different aspects and consequences of the intrusion of real people into the fictional worlds of the novels are analysed

in interesting and original ways. For instance, when Thursday as a little child glides into the narrative of *Jane Eyre*, the distinction between the plot, that is the events that are mentioned in the text, and the story, that is the logical chronology of the events as they happened in the world of the novel, is highlighted. Thursday's intrusion does not affect the plot, since the text does not mention all the events of the story. Thus, Rochester's dog, Pilot, who discovers the little girl, "knew that he could stretch the boundaries of the story a small amount, sniffing along one side of the lane or the other since it wasn't specified; but if the text stated that he had to bark or run around or jump up, then he was obliged to comply" (Fforde, 2001: 67). Likewise, Rochester knows that he is free to do whatever he pleases in the world of the novel as long as he is not confined by the text itself. "I am not featured again in the book so we may do as we please," he tells Thursday when she enters the novel as grown-up through the "prose portal" (Fforde, 2001: 317) at the point in the book when Jane is about to save Rochester from the fire.

Nevertheless, in some cases, the metaleptic intrusions do affect the actual plot. The most obvious case is when Thursday chooses to influence the relationship between Rochester and Jane Eyre. Her intervention changes the end of the novel, so that instead of leaving for India alone, Rochester marries his beloved Jane. The novel consequently ends as it actually does in Brontë's original version. This ontological consequence for the actual world of the reader could lead to an effect which could be compared to the fantastic effect or to the fear and vertigo that can be the result of narrative metalepsis (Cohn, 2005: 129), since the reader gets the feeling that his or her world and existence can be influenced by a work of fiction.

Meanwhile, it does not seem to be Fforde's intention to create such an effect. The effect of the metalepsis is attenuated for instance by the mentioning of the fact that the readers are less shocked by the intrusion than by the ending of the novel itself, reacting not with fear or vertigo, but with delight. "In a recent survey," one character claims, "ninety-nine out of a hundred readers who expressed a preference said that they were delighted with the new ending. Jane and Rochester married! Isn't that wonderful?" (Fforde, 2001: 361).

Moreover, the metaleptic intrusions are often narrated in a rather humorous tone which diminishes their fantastic effect.[1] For instance, when Thursday meets a Japanese woman guiding a man inside the diegetic world of *Jane Eyre,* her comment as a narrator is: "I shook my head sadly. It seemed there were very few places that the tourist business hadn't touched" (Fforde, 2001: 325). Rochester's comment about the metaleptic intrusions of this woman is perhaps even more comical. He tells Jane that he does tours for her and her clients, since "it is extremely lucrative. Country houses are not cheap to run, Miss Next, even in this century" (Fforde, 2001: 331).

In other words, *The Eyre Affair* is a revealing example of how generic conventions influence the effects of metalepsis. A comical style and a greater focus on the plot draw the reader's attention from the disturbing aspects of the narrative metalepsis.

Moreover, the use of metalepsis as an allegory of the writing and reading processes is of great importance in Fforde's novel. The reading process is for instance allegorized by the way the readers can enter the world of fiction. One way of doing that is by using a special technical device, invented by Thursday's uncle Mycroft, a machine called the "prose portal." The other possibility is to get literally absorbed by the novel by reading very attentively, as does the Japanese woman I mentioned above. "How do you manage it?", asks Thursday. "I just can—she answered simply—I think hard, speak the lines and, well, here I am" (Fforde, 2001: 325). Here we have what can be seen as the realisation of the proper sense of the expression "absorbing the reader." The Japanese woman has developed a capacity to get literally absorbed by the text. Something similar happened to Thursday too, when she was a child, but in a way that she couldn't control. Besides, it was an event that she even starts doubting if it really happened, writing it off "as the product of an overactive imagination" (Fforde, 2001: 69).[2]

But *The Eyre Affair* also contains examples of characters from the world of fiction entering the so-called real world, or the extradiegetic world.[3] The direction of the transgression is thus reversed. When these transgressions do not occur through the prose portal, they cannot be explained, and they could obviously not be interpreted as allegories of the immersion in a text that absorbs the reader. For example, when Rochester once appears in front of Thursday, he says: "I don't know how I managed to get here or even how you managed to get to me" (Fforde, 2001: 189). These multi-directional metaleptic transgressions make the boundaries between reality and fiction seem permeable. This is even expressed in the novel, by Victor Analogy, one of Thursday's colleagues: "The barriers between reality and fiction are softer than we think; a bit like a frozen lake. Hundreds of people can walk across it, but then one evening a thin spot develops and someone falls through" (Fforde, 2001: 206).

These interactions between the fictional world of *Jane Eyre* and what can be considered as "the real world" of *The Eyre Affair*, in which the world of *Jane Eyre* is embedded, lead to a number of far-reaching consequences: when Jane Eyre is abducted from the novel's manuscript into the world of Thursday Next, the whole printed text vanishes from the *Jane Eyre* printed novels in the world of *The Eyre Affair*. Thursday finds a logical explanation to this apparently supernatural event: she makes an analogy to the genetic code of the mammals: "When the original changes, all the others have to change too. If you could go back a hundred million years and change the genetic code of the first mammal, every one of us would be completely different" (Fforde, 2001: 208). Even though the explanation seems far-fetched when applied to the printed text, whose physical disappearance of course cannot be explained in such a manner, it appears as more relevant if one considers the literary text, as do certain literary theorists, as a dynamic, non-closed entity, as in constant production rather than as a finished product, subject to continuous changes and different interpretations.[4]

The text of *The Eyre Affair* is in itself a very good example of an open text, thanks to the inclusion of parts of some other texts that actually exist outside the actual nov-

el, namely on the Internet[5]. The dynamic dimension of the literary text as an interplay between author and audience, teller and tale, as well as throughout textual traditions is reflected in many ways in *The Eyre Affair*. For example Thursday and her boyfriend, Landen assist at a highly original performance of Shakespeare's play *Richard III*, where the actors are chosen from the audience since they knew the play "back to front" (Fforde, 2001: 180). The audience is thus not only assisting, but is allowed to interact and to suggest changes to Shakespeare's text, something that is so appreciated that the play has been performed continuously every night for fifteen years. This could easily be seen as a reflection of the act of reading according to modern reception theory, as initiated by theorists Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, according to which the reader is seen as something more than a passive receiver of a ready-made product. It presents the literary text as an organic entity open to changes.

The chapter headings of *The Eyre Affair* refer to the two different fictional worlds and thus reflect on the process of telling a tale: "our book" refers to the fictional world of Thursday Next and "their book" refers to the embedded fictional world of Jane Eyre. The collective pronoun "our" in the chapter heading includes of course Thursday herself, who is the narrator of the novel in the first person. The fact that Thursday talks about herself as being a part of a book could mean that she has a metaleptic consciousness about her fictionality. But "our" could also include the reader on the same diegetic level as Thursday. According to this interpretation, Thursday would break her confinement to the fictional world in order to address the reader on an extradiegetic level and to talk about the book the reader has in his or her hands.

In spite of its metafictional dimension, created by the frequent use of different types of metalepses and by the many interesting theoretical comments about them, *The Eyre Affair* is, as already mentioned, primarily a popular detective novel. The detection aspect remains central in the novel, despite the various excursions into the fantastic. Fforde's novel enacts escapism and immersion when characters cross the boundaries between the fictional world of Jane Eyre and the world of Thursday Next, but it chooses to alleviate the disruptive effects of such metalepses by inscribing them into an allegory of the reading process and by presenting the workings of open texts and textual traditions as events in the story.

From the perspective of this article, some of these metaleptic intrusions are possible thanks to the process of adapting *Jane Eyre* in such a way as to highlight the boundaries between the adaptation and the original text. The enacted transgressions of these boundaries can be seen as an allegory of a reading process of the immersive kind, which has been defined by Marie-Laure Ryan as follows: "In the phenomenology of reading, immersion is the experience through which a fictional world acquires the presence of an autonomous, language independent reality populated with human beings" (Ryan, 2001: 14). The goal of an adaptation process where the world of the adapted text exists at the same ontological level as the world of the adapting text can thus be to display the reader's possible immersion in the world of fiction. The shift of

genres, from romantic novel that can be applied to *Jane Eyre* to detective fiction in the case of *The Eyre Affair,* reinforces the hypothesis that the latter of the novels allegorizes the reading process, since detective fiction can be seen as "the hermeneutic genre *par excellence*", as claims Joel Black (1999: 78): "The detective becomes a romantic projection of the critic qua analyst or of the analyst qua critic" (1999: 78). According to an even stronger formulation by Black, "the writer is certainly the author of the crime and the reader the detective of the text" (1999: 162). Such an analogy is based on the assumption that, after all, the enigma that the detective has to solve is a text, since the events have to be put in words.

BLACK VENUS – Self-reflexivity in the adapted medium

In the example above, the adaptation and the original text pertain to different genres, but to the same medium. In the following two examples, there is a shift of media too, which would place them in Marie-Laure Ryan's category of transmedial adaptations (Ryan, 2008: 399). In spite of this difference, the analysis of *The Eyre Affair* can help us investigate the question "why" the adaptation is made.

French director Abdellatif Kechiche's film *Black Venus* (*Vénus noire*), released in 2010, tells the reality based story of Saartje Baartman, a colored woman who left South Africa for Europe in 1808. She followed her employer, Hendrick Caesar, who promised her she would achieve fame and fortune there by singing. Once in London, the employer turned master and manager, and put up shows in which Saartje was exhibited as an African savage in a cage. As a consequence of Saartje's growing disappointment and beginning alcoholism, Caesar sold her to a Belgian bear-tamer, called Réaux, who took her to Paris. There, she had to play the same role in similar shows which turned more and more decadent and degrading: the carnivals were followed by the salons of the Parisian High Society, where Réaux introduced surreptitiously an element of prostitution. Gradually, this element became the bearing part of Saartje's shows, leading her first to the parties of libertines and finally to brothels, where she became a prostitute. In the meantime, French anatomists took an interest in the unusual anatomy of her anatomy, especially regarding her genitalia, trying to see her as the missing link between ape and man. Saartje died in 1815, at the age of 27, probably of a combination of tuberculosis and venereal disease.

The film itself can be interpreted through Gérard Genette's conceptual frame of "scene" as one of four basic forms of narrative duration: when the pseudo time of the narrative – measured in terms of textual space in the case of written narratives – coincides exactly to the story time (Genette, 1972: 95). Certainly, scenes are easier to achieve in film, since the time of the narrative does not depend on the recipient's actualization of a written text. In the case of *Black Venus*, most of the scenes are adaptations of theatrical shows to film, and Kechiche does not choose to use the filmic possibility of cutting in order to shorten the narrative time of the film. He prefers to reenact, or "remediate" (Bolter and Grusin, 2000), the shows, forcing them on the viewer in their full

length. The result is an unusually long feature film (two hours and 39 minutes), something that certain critics have unjustly criticized.[6] Indeed, these long scenes of remediated freak shows from which the viewer cannot protect him- or herself are one of the film's strengths.

Besides, the technique of remediation is used in an ingenious way in the film. The film viewer does not only see Saartje's shows, but very often the camera pans over to the audience in the theatre, concentrating on their reactions. Showing the reactions of the theatre audience adds a self-reflexive dimension to the film, since the reactions could be the same as those of the film audience, that is ourselves. This works as a mirror put in front of the film viewer, who is supposed to feel the shame of recognizing the same feelings of curiosity, fear and hierarchical superiority in him- or herself as do the people in the early 19th century audience. Indeed, the faces of the people in the audience, as in the still below (Fig. 1), seem cruel and unsympathetic towards the young woman in the cage.

These people remind us less of the modern, unprejudiced and democratic man than of the people in the paintings by Flemish Renaissance painters, as Jan Brueghel, or the painting below (Fig. 2), painted by the workshop of Quentin Metsys, where people's greed and cruelty shine through in their grotesque faces in a transparent way.

However, there is another essential detail that appears in the filmed interaction between the audience and Saartje's performance. The camera sometimes adopts Saartje's perspective, as in the film still in Fig. 1, when we actually see the audience with her eyes through the grid of her cage. This is a subtle way to integrate an immersive dimension in the film, the viewer being forced to experience the same humiliation as Saartje. The fictional context is appropriated by the spectator through the protagonist's immersion. A kind of powerful, immersive 'contamination'. Such a technique is only possible, as in

Fig. 1. *Black Venus*. Dir. Abdellatif Kechiche. Perf. Yahima Torres, Olivier Gourmet, Jean-Christophe Bouvet, Jonathan Pienaar. 2010. www.wat.tv, 10.01.2014.

the case of *The Eyre Affair*, thanks to the process of adaptation, a process in which the adapted work is represented while performed in front of an audience. This self-reflexive technique is used in the other scenes as well, as when Saartje performs in front of the French High Society audience (see the film still below, Fig. 3). In these cases, the audience even starts interacting physically with the young woman, something that will go to unpleasant extremes with the libertines.

Once again, this manner of focalizing the event works less as a way to identify with Saartje than as a mirror put in front of the film audience. Through this self-reflexive device, the adapting film and the adapted play melt together into a whole where there is even space for representing the audience and their reactions. The contact between the adapted medium (the theatrical performance) and the adaptation (the film) gives raise to that space "in-between" which Ágnes Pethö finds so propitious to the creation of good cinema: "it is the theory of intermediality", writes Pethö, "that has brought into the spotlight the intricate interactions of different media manifest in the cinema, emphasizing the way in which the moving pictures can incorporate forms of all other media, and can initiate fusions and 'dialogues' between the distinct arts" (Pethö, 2011:1). From this point of view, the filmed scenes from Saartje's shows in *Black Venus* offer the possibility to construct a dialogue between film and theatre performance. The incorporation of the theatre audience in the filmed scenes adds a self-reflexive dimension which would not have been possible without the representation of the theatrical medium within the filmic medium.

Fig. 2. Workshop of Quentin Metsys (Massys), *Suppliant Peasants in the Office of Two Tax Collectors*. 1515. Oil on panel. 78.5 x 94 cm. The National Gallery, London.

Fig. 3. *Black Venus*. Dir. Abdellatif Kechiche. Perf. Yahima Torres, Olivier Gourmet, Jean-Christophe Bouvet, Jonathan Pienaar. 2010. www.odysseeducinema.fr, 10.01.2014.

GOLTZIUS AND THE PELICAN COMPANY – Self-reflexivity in the adapting medium

Peter Greenaway's film *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* from 2012 is another example of a transmedial adaptation according to Marie-Laure Ryan's definition quoted above. However, the question of what is being adapted is of great importance in the film, since the process of adaptation here is not a simple one. At a first view, it would seem easy to claim that what is adapted is the text of the Bible. But a closer look at the film would reveal that this adaptation is made in two steps: first from the text of the Bible to a theatrical performance, then from the theatrical performance to the film. An even closer look would show that the question is much more intricate than that. Among other things, there is even a script, which has actually been published two years before the release of the film (Greenaway, 2009).

The film tells the story of Hendrik Goltzius, a 16th century Dutch printer and engraver of erotic prints, who needs money to buy a printing press. He visits the Margrave of Alsace at his court in Colmar with his printing and theatre company, in order to make this enlightened and open-minded leader pay for the press. Goltzius promises him in exchange an extraordinary book of pictures of the Old Testament Biblical stories. The book would contain erotic tales of the temptation of Adam and Eve, Lot and his daughters, David and Bathsheba, Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Samson and Delilah, and John the Baptist and Salome. To tempt the Margrave further, Goltzius and his printing company offer to perform dramatizations of these erotic tales for his court. As in the case of *Black Venus,* these filmed performances form the film itself, only with some entr'actes between them. Some of these entr'actes are presentations of the plays made by the main character, Goltzius, to the audience of the theatre, in ways that sometimes are of a metaleptic kind, as we shall see below. In most of the entr'actes though, we see the actors of the Pelican Company being themselves in what appears to be an intercalated story which sometimes has strange coincidences with the biblical stories.

As in *Black Venus,* the performances are not only filmed theatre plays, since the audience is filmed as well. As in Kechiche film, and also as in Fforde's book, some of the members of the audience get carried away, or "absorbed", by the performance and react by identifying with the characters and their sensations. This is both shown by the camera and mentioned explicitly in the script, for instance in the reaction of the audience to the performance of the story of Adam and Eve: "Adam and Eve have absolutely no awareness of their nakedness, though the audience certainly has, and react to it variously. Some studiously refuse to look, busying themselves with their costume. Others are curious and take fleeting glances whilst pretending not to. Two young women are dis-countenanced and over-react, giggling and then exhibitionistically but naively identifying, thrusting out their bosoms and putting their hands on their hips, thrusting out their bellies. Some just stare with moist lips and open mouths, oblivious of decorum" (Greenaway, 2009: 12). The oblivion of the "decorum", or of the referential world, and the identification with the characters in the fictional world are signs of

an immersive kind of participation as in the case of immersive reading, according to Marie-Laure Ryan's definition.

Another interesting detail in Greenaway's film is that the camera does not pan between the play and the audience; the audience appears in the same film frame as the performance, hardly separated from the theatre scene. This appears quite clearly in the performance of the story of David's seduction of Bathsheba. The two actors, Quadfrey, the master-printer of the Pelican Company, and his childless wife Portia, are doing in public what they hardly ever do in the film's reality: they have sex. But the lack of the so called fourth wall between the actors and the audience makes it possible for the film viewer to follow the lascivious gazes of the some of the spectators. In the script, these gazes are mentioned explicitly in the didascalia: "Both Quadfrey and Portia are watched closely by potential sexual partners in the audience. Eduard, Goltzius's nephew, watches Portia who thinks that he might be able to make her pregnant, a situation he is happy to exploit for his own lechery, and the Margrave's wife, watches Quadfrey as a father figure protective sexual partner in opposition to her resentment of the Margrave's imperious and abusive treatment of her" (Greenaway, 2009: 76).

This performance becomes clearly interactive when members of the audience are invited to play some of the roles in the tales. Thus, for instance, the Margrave plays Potiphar and Joachim, the Margrave's younger brother, plays Joseph in the performance of the story of the boy Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Greenaway, 2009: 113-121). Besides, the plays seem to mirror some of the relations between the people at the Margrave's court, giving the impression that the boundaries between reality and fiction are permeable, as in the case of *The Eyre Affair* studied above. As when characters from Fforde's novel enter the worlds of Charlotte Brontë's book and actually even change the plot, so do the people from the Margrave's court enter the world of the performances and change the course of the events according to their own personal wishes and goals.

Except for the above described immersivity, there is also a clear self-reflexive dimension in *Goltzius and the Pelican Company,* comparable to the one in *Black Venus.* Indeed, not only do the members of the audience take part in the fictional world, but some of them also comment on what they are watching. Especially the religious leaders criticize the performances for their "blasphemies and turpitudes" (Greenaway, 2009: 10), and are met by arguments from more liberal thinkers. But the device of displaying both the adapted performance and the audience gives Greenaway the opportunity of nuancing these ideological standpoints. Indeed, some of the clergymen's concealed desires, which contradict their overtly expressed positions, can be detected in their gestures, postures and gazes. The script provides us with a clue in this direction, in the description of two churchmen's reaction to the performance of the story of Adam and Eve: "Two elderly churchmen leave the tribune, one muttering, the other looking back over his shoulder, and hesitating at the exit door, deeply curious" (Greenaway, 2009: 12).

However, there is another layer of self-reflexivity in the film *Goltzius and the Pelican Company*: the extra-diegetic level is sometimes inserted in the diegesis. What was only suggested in *Black Venus*, through the mirror effect discussed above, becomes overtly metaleptic in the scene when Goltzius, in the role of an extradiegetic narrator, presents the fifth performance, the story of Samson and Delilah, which is meant as a parable of the sin of prostitution. Indeed, as in the case of the introductions of the other performances, Goltzius as a narrator addresses an audience placed at the same extradiegetic level as himself, giving thus the impression that he is talking to us, the film viewers. Already in the introduction of the first performance, the story of Adam and Eve, which represents the sin of voyeurism, Goltzius addresses the film audience with the pronoun "you", distinguishing it from the "Colmar audience" which is mentioned in the quotation: "You must of course ask yourselves what in fact will this Colmar audience be doing now, what in fact are YOU doing now. Is this theatre the legitimate place where we permit ourselves to be licenced voyeurs?" (Greenaway, 2012). This technique, which is actually completely absent in the script, adds another narrative level to the film, opening an additional possibility to self-reflexive and metaleptic devices. In the film still below, Fig. 4, extracted from the performance of the story of Samson and Delilah, the different narrative levels are represented visually, through the use of a frame behind Goltzius as an extradiegetic narrator. Placing Goltzius in front of the frame brings him even visually closer to the film audience. Within the frame, there is another version of Goltzius, wearing darker clothes, who is talking at the same time as the extradiegetic Goltzius, presenting the performance to the Colmar audience. The reduplication of Goltzius, according to the narrative mode (that is as a character inside the diegesis) and to the narrative voice (that is as an extradiegetic narrator), is actually only possible thanks to the three-layered adaptation: from theatrical performance to filmed theatrical performance and finally to filmed narratorial discourse on the film.

Fig. 4. *Goltzius and the Pelican Company*. Dir. Peter Greenaway. Perf. F. Murray Abraham, Vincent Riotta, Halina Reijn. 2012. http://www.youtube.com 10.01.2014.

Goltzius and the Pelican Company can thus be seen as a highly self-reflexive film, in which the adaptation process is put to the fore both through language and images, in a way that contributes to meaning-making.

Conclusions

In the three case studies above, I concentrated on two aspects which are arguably more frequently used in today's adaptations than in earlier ones: the representation of the processes of immersion and of self-reflexivity. The works chosen, ranging from a popular detective novel, through a feature film and ending with an art-house film, show us that such devices are not only the prerogative of so called High culture. As scholars have shown lately, self-reflexive devices of the kind which have been studied in this article have gained their access into popular forms of culture.[7]

What has appeared clearly in all three cases is that the devices are not only used as formal games used automatically. On the contrary, both immersion and self-reflexivity can contribute to creating meaning when they are displayed in an explicit manner. In *The Eyre Affair,* the metaleptic leaps in into and out from the world of *Jane Eyre* permit not only the creation of an extremely original form of adaptation, but also a reflection on the reading process in general. In *Black Venus,* the displaying of the adapted work (Saartje's shows) and of the reaction of the audience offers the possibility to suggest the presence of a mirror between the film and the film audience, something that can have a greater impact on the audience than the mere representation – or remediation – of the show. Finally, in *Goltzius and the Pelican Company* there is a third narrative level, in which the extradiegetic narrator addresses the filmic audience directly, something that can have the same effect as the mirror in *Black Venus*, but something that also highlights the creation process even in the case of the Bible and of its adaptations. What has emerged as common to all three cases is that the displaying of immersion and self-reflexivity opens up for the possibility to include theoretical reflections in artistic works, which eventually leads to the dissolving of the difference between theory and practice (cf. Elliot, 2013: 19).

Finally, these case studied have hopefully shown that there are other ways to analyze adaptations than only according to the fidelity criterion. In all three cases it is arguable if we really have to deal with adaptations, but using adaptation theory in a heuristic manner has proved to be rewarding. One aspect that I only touched upon briefly, but which would deserve a further examination in relation to the question we discussed before is if immersion and self-reflexivity are influenced by the type of adaptation: that is if the adaptation is transmedial, or if it occurs in the field of High, respectively popular culture.

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1 Admittedly, in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1983/1988: 87), Genette corrects his earlier statement from 1972, considering that the metalepsis does not have to create either a fantastic or a funny effect, but a mixture of the two, as in Borges's stories or in Woody Allen's short

story "The Kugelmass Episode." Still, I argue that the shocking effect is at least diminished if a metalepsis is narrated in a funny fashion.

2 The theme of real persons entering the world of the novels is important in Fforde's other novels about Thursday Next too, that is: *Lost in a Good Book* (2002), *The Well of Lost Plots* (2003), *Something Rotten* (2004) and *First Among Sequels* (2007).

3 Genette calls this phenomenon "antimetalepsis." The term in French is antimétalepse. This is how Genette defines it in his latest work on the subject: "Puisque la théorie classique n'envisageait sous le terme de métalepse que la transgression ascendante, de l'auteur s'ingérant dans sa fiction […], et non, à l'inverse, de sa fiction s'immisçant dans sa vie réelle […], on pourrait qualifier d'antimétalepse ce mode de transgression" (Genette, 2004: 27).

4 I am thinking of theorists like Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva or Jean Bellemin-Noël, who question the notion of text as a finished product. The terms are Julia Kristeva's (Kristeva, 1969).

5 See <http://www.jasperfforde.com/>. *The Eyre Affair* is arranged in such a way as to give the impression that the novel is a compilation of other texts and documents of its own fictional world. The chapters have epigraphs of quotations from other documents that have supposedly been written about the events taking place in the story. Certainly, those documents are made up by Fforde, but their existence outside the actual text of the novel, on the web site mentioned here, is beyond any doubt.

6 See for instance the Swedish review, "Segt men sevärt", in *Svenska Dagbladet* from August 26, 2011. < http://www.svd.se/kultur/film/bio/film-svart-venus_6167391.svd>)

7 See for instance the volume *Metalepsis in Popular Culture* (Kukkonen & Klimek, 2011).

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Heidi HART

Silent Opera: Visual Recycling in Olga Neuwirth's *American Lulu*

Abstract

Billed as a "Jazzy BlackPower BergWerk" at its 2012 premiere, Olga Neuwirth's adaptation of Alban Berg's opera *Lulu* combines jazz, soul, and sound clips of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches in close relationship with the original score. The opera also includes digital projections of Lulu's face and body, jerkily animated, violently mutilated, or invaded by the singer as she walks through her own larger-than-life image. In the Berlin version, a body double dressed as a Las Vegas-style showgirl recycles these projections back into human form. *American Lulu* has been criticized for its sound-materials' uneasy fit, without much comment on its visual aspects – a strange lacuna, considering Berg's interpolation of silent film in his instructions for the opera, which itself has a mirror-like structure. Drawing on Artaud's "theater of cruelty," in tandem with Derrida's idea of the "supplement" as both excess and remedy, this article argues that the opera's sonic fault-lines open a space for a parallel, visual opera to emerge, with multiple Lulus engaging each other onstage and informing each subsequent production. This ongoing re-adaptation of Berg's opera allows the original to be heard less as a canonical work than as an open process in which music is an entry, not an end in itself. By recycling the objectified female image to excess, this parallel, trans-production silent opera destabilizes its own fetish. Lulu begins to look like a subject facing down the viciously commodifying world to which she has adapted all too well.

Keywords: opera, adaptation, visuality.

My fragments I shore to reveal my ruin.

Lia Purpura

Introduction

All opera works as adaptation on at least one level, the musical recycling of literary texts or – in the case of contemporary works like John Adams' *Nixon in China* or Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* – well-documented biographical and/or historical events. Olga Neuwirth's 2012

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American Lulu takes this process a step further, interpolating new music and characters into Alban Berg's 1934-37 opera, itself based on two Frank Wedekind plays, and re-imagining *Lulu* as a matrix of gender and race conflicts during the American Civil Rights movement. A completely new third act, an English libretto by Richard Stokes and Catherine Kerkhoff-Saxon, "Wonder Morton Organ" jazz samples, a soul-singer character named Eleanor (in place of the Countess Gerschwitz in Berg's opera), sound clips from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches and June Jordan's poetry, and larger-than-life screen projections open up Berg's score from the inside. On the surface, this adaptation appears to take the opera much further from its sources than the Robert Wilson/Lou Reed *Lulu*, a musical update of Wedekind that has enjoyed much recent success at the Berliner Ensemble. Berg's opera actually sets up a template for Neuwirth's project, with a wind-and-saxophone jazz ensemble scored parallel to the traditional orchestral configuration and a projected film sequence intended to move the narrative forward at the opera's mid-point.

Since its 2012 premiere at Berlin's Komische Oper, *American Lulu* has been staged at the Bregenz Festival in Austria, the Edinburgh International Festival, and the Young Vic in London, all of these productions in collaboration with London-based Opera Group. Reviews have been mixed. An April 2012 article in the *Frankfurter Allegemeine Zeitung* describes the Komische Oper's *American Lulu* as a bold, noisy collision of musical idioms; the reviewer, Berlin-based Christiane Tewinkel, shudders at the title character's Barbie-like costuming, in which the soprano Marisol Montalvo seems "fabulously" identified with her role (Tewinkel, par. 5, translations mine unless otherwise noted). *The Guardian*'s string of negative reviews from 2012 into 2013 emphasize the "muddled" result of Neuwirth's project (Clements, par. 4), its "unexciting vocal lines" (Maddocks, par. 4), and its "musically forced" adaptation of Berg (Molleson, par. 1). The number and tone of such reviews signals the magnetic force, however troubling, *American Lulu* seems to exert. A more complex response to the opera, from September 2013 in *Opera Today*, notes that despite the "oddly uncritical" aspect of Eleanor's music in particular, Neuwirth's re-orchestration for a wind-dominant ensemble allows Berg's opera to be heard "through Brecht-Weill," a "reimagination of post-expressionist music" that actually works (Berry, par. 2), though this review neglects to mention the existing jazz ensemble in Berg's score. Several German reviews focus on the controversy, shortly before the opera's premiere, surrounding Neuwirth's former collaborator, video artist Stan Douglas, and his later-dismissed legal claim that the Austrian composer had lifted and taken credit for his idea (Brug, pars. 2-4).

Few reviews consider the visual aspects of *American Lulu*'s stagings, except for this pejorative and even prudish comment in *The Guardian*:

> Images were projected on a sleazy, fringed, golden-rain curtain in front. haracters came and went through the curtain, ever visible. You could see them wait, arrive, exit. It was difficult to find a focus for the action (Maddocks, par. 5).

None of these reviews notes Berg's original intention for a silent film to appear at the opera's midpoint, visually recounting Lulu's arrest and release. The film, directed by Heinz Ruckert, only survives in fragments; most productions of Berg's *Lulu* either include still or moving images of the singers at hand, or dispense with the film sequence altogether. The foregrounding of projected images has been a crucial aspect of *American Lulu* productions so far, bringing Neuwirth's project closer to its source than many critics may realize, and mediating between the opera's stylistic collisions to reveal the project as an open process. Screen or curtain projections recycle the image of Lulu's larger-than-life body, which, in the Berlin production, also loops into the form of a live body-double and back onto the screen. The Bregenz Lulu walks back and forth through her own gigantic image, projected onto the fringed curtain over the stage. This cumulative visual excess, in Derrida's sense of the "supplement," is not as secondary as it appears but works as a critical *Verfremdungseffekt* in which "reification is used to dereify" (Jameson, 169). The image of Lulu, whose coloratura scoring makes her words barely comprehensible, begins to speak for itself, in ways the character's own voice cannot.

Swiss-German-Austrian Lulu

Some background on Alban Berg's *Lulu* and its sources will clarify the stakes in Neuwirth's project. The Swiss-born author of the Lulu plays, Frank Wekekind (1864-1918), is best known in contemporary culture as the writer of *Frühlings Erwachen* (*Spring Awakening*). He was himself a cabaret artist and contributor to the Munich satirical journal *Simplicissimus*; he was incarcerated for anti-government writings in 1899 and taken to court for "obscenity" in 1905. His plays draw on Nietzsche's convention-disrupting philosophy and anticipate German Expressionism, the theater of the absurd, and – in their anti-cathartic, self-conscious presentation – Brecht's epic theater. Two of these plays, *Ergeist* (1895) and its sequel *Pandora's Box* (1904), portray the *femme fatale* Lulu in a series of relationships with men who change her name to shape her to their projections, enact jealous violence over her, and (in the case of Jack the Ripper) eventually kill her. The second play introduces Lulu's lesbian love interest, the Countess Gerschwitz, who suffers her same fate in London. Lulu's ambivalent role as victim and offender certainly disturbed bourgeois sensibilities in Wedekind's time; in the first play, she appears as a snake, a conventional temptress, while in the second play "[t]his essentialist view of woman … is countered," with Lulu "as an aggregate of cultural citations, a figure affiliated with the biblical Eve and the mythical Pandora." (Tatar, in Wellbery, 659). This female figure, as powerful in her allure as she is powerless to step out of it, appears in the current Berliner Ensemble adaptation (directed by Robert Wilson with hard-edged music by Lou Reed), as a fragile character who survives by playing the automaton-chameleon and who, at the last moment, when she reaches out to an innocent-looking young man in hopes of just a crumb of affection, meets her death at his hands. As in many stagings of the Lulu plays, these hands also belong to

all her lovers and abusers who have come before. Wedekind's own investment in the problematization of sexual politics is not hard to see; in the Viennese production of *Pandora's Box*, he played Jack the Ripper himself (Tatar, 660).

Austrian composer Alban Berg (1885-1935) combined an intense literary interest with rigorous musical training under Arnold Schoenberg. After composing his twelve-tone-influenced opera *Wozzeck*, he began work in 1929 on an adaptation of Wedekind's Lulu plays, the second of which he had seen in Karl Kraus' Vienna production in 1905. Berg interrupted the project to write his Violin Concerto, composed in response to the death of Alma Mahler and Martin Gropius' daughter in 1935; later that year he worked on the third and final act of *Lulu* but, according to the customary account, was unable to complete it before his death from blood poisoning at the age of 50. In fact, Berg finished much of the opera's "missing" third act, which included frequent personal references; due to the work's control by Berg's widow until her death in 1976, the opera was for many years performed incomplete or with the insertion of the orchestral *Lulu Suite* in the third act (Gilliam, 12.13). A completed version of the opera by Friedrich Cerha premiered in 1979 and has long been accepted into the operatic repertoire. Berg's portion of this version is notable for its tone-rows associated with individual characters in the opera, a pitch-set- rather than melody-based form of leitmotif; for its inclusion of a jazz ensemble and vibraphone, a first in opera; and for its palindromic musical structure. On a narrative level, Berg's decision to change Wedekind's character Alwa from a playwright to a composer, and his instructions that the male characters in the first act be played by the same singers as their later counterparts, create further mirror-like effects. Berg adapted Wedekind's texts himself to create a libretto whose harshly everyday language is scored not only in sung lines but also in Schoenbergian *Sprechstimme*, sometimes punctuated by rhythmic breathing in and out.

The film sequence intended as the opera's centerpiece is scored to music that replicates, in miniature, the opera's larger musical form. Berg's notes on the sequence do not work as a screenplay but point to establishing shots, to stills of Lulu's shadow on the wall and her body in a "muck shovel," and to the progressive-retrograde movement of the image sequence, a visual counterpart to the music's palindromic structure. Though most of the original film has been lost, Berg's notes indicate the influence both of montage and cutting-to-continuity approaches to filmmaking in the 1930s. These notes reveal detailed attention to visual and musical correspondences in the film sequence, which narrates events not shown onstage – Lulu's arrest, imprisonment, hospitalization, and escape – while Alwa the composer-figure waits for her return. Within the film sequence, palindromic patterns in fast-slow-fast tempo markings and "nesting frames" amplify the tone-row-based mirroring of the opera's overall musical structure. (Goldsmith, 32-35) A symmetrically placed *Hauptrhythmus* or dominant rhythm ("long, long, short, long") associated with "fate" (Goldsmith, 27) amplifies this mirroring effect. The central axis of the film sequence, a two-octave chromatic piano arpeggio signaling Lulu's imprisonment, is itself "arrested" under a fermata and framed

six bars on either side by inverted arpeggios in the orchestra. Jazz sequences for oboe, saxophone, and piano, scored between the orchestral staves and also interpolated at palindromic intervals, add another temporal and textural layer to the film sequence. As Miriam Hansen has noted, film works in "striated dynamics" of "multisensorial" materials moving at different tempi (Hansen, 247); this early instance of adding film to the already multi-dimensional form of opera introduced a theatrical element so potentially overwhelming, its structural rigor may have worked as an attempt to contain that element. Utilizing not only the stage, the singers, and the orchestra, Berg also draws on what Artaud calls the theater's "*undersides (dans ses dessous)*" to create a cumulative "overlapping … of physical language with signs, not words, as its root" (Artaud, 124). Berg's well-documented interest in film and attention to its role in his opera, combined with his inclusion of a small jazz ensemble within the larger orchestra, reveal his *Lulu* to be less removed from Olga Neuwirth's contemporary adaptation than it may at first appear.

Lulu "Goes South"?

In an interview recorded during rehearsals for *American Lulu* at the Bregenz Festival in summer 2013, Olga Neuwirth describes her adaptation process as one of forgetting, over-layering ("in the tradition of Austrian painting" [Neuwirth, interview]), and at the same time honoring Berg's score. The opera opens with a fortissimo cluster echoing Berg's chord meant for the opera's finale (Lulu's death), which includes all twelve tones of the chromatic scale. This chord lurches repeatedly into pianissimo and back to mezzo-forte before exploding into electric-guitar triplets doubled in the strings, a pattern that recalls American minimalist opera, in John Adams' vein, more than it does Berg's *Lulu.* This pattern, and the chromatic chord cluster, returns in Neuwirth's all-new third act, approximating Berg's palindromic plan for his unfinished opera. Unlike Berg's opening carnival scene, in which Lulu is referred to in the libretto as a snake, Neuwirth's version opens with a note in the stage directions about her blackness (Neuwirth, score, 1), a description to be treated in more detail below. Lulu's first appearance onstage, set in the 1970s, follows her lover/keeper Clarence's harsh words with a spoken monologue about her too-early coming of age and the compromises she is all too aware of having made in adulthood. This spoken-word opening continues with a recording of a Martin Luther King, Jr. speech on institutional and internalized racism, accompanied by the first visual "supplement" noted in the score, an animated Mississippi steamboat with a smoky "'aurora effect'" as "we hear a melody from a calliope" (Neuwirth, score, 14). This prologue leads into the opera's central narrative, Lulu's extended flashback to the 1950s.

Acts One and Two of the opera closely follow Berg's score, with a libretto in American English. Neuwirth has made several brief cuts and included rests or sustained orchestral chords during video sequences and spoken-word breaks. She links these breaks to Brecht's use of the Chorus, which does not simply comment on the ac-

tion but inserts a new or alien perspective (Neuwirth, interview). When read closely, however, King's words about socially conditioned loss of initiative in black communities seem right in line with these words of Lulu's: "I can tell from a hundred feet off, if someone is made for me. If not I go ahead anyway. I wake up feeling I've trashed my body and soul" (Neuwirth, score, 13, 14). Similar sequences that quote poet June Jordan's words about rape fit more neatly than disturbingly into Neuwirth's adaptation. Her re-historicizing of the drama requires very little textual change besides idiomatic translation; "I've got news: a hydrogen bomb has been tested" (Neuwirth, score, 92) easily updates a line in Berg about revolution breaking out in Paris (Berg, 104). Musically, Neuwirth's changes are quite seamless as well, despite her re-orchestration, doubling the number of strings and adding more jazz and electronic instruments. She keeps Berg's film-music sequence unchanged, adding notes for insertion of a new film that includes Eleanor's humiliation in her attempt to help Lulu. She replaces Berg's intermittent jazz ensemble, scored parallel to the orchestra with a sampled recording on a Morton Wonder Organ, giving the original ragtime sequences a slightly more eerie, vibrating quality, cutting the orchestral voices while keeping the jazz notation intact. Only in Act Three does the music change dramatically, returning to the American-style minimalism of the introduction. Neuwirth approximates Berg's pitch-set vocal lines, exaggerating Lulu's coloratura over electric-guitar buzz, and adds Eleanor's melismatic music, more 1970s soul than "blues," as indicated in the opera's character description (Neuwirth, score, Cast page). Perhaps this abrupt change is what has led several reviewers to comment on the adaptation's mismatched elements. Compared with Berg's thorny textual-musical landscape, composed in the shadow of Hitler's rise to power, this last act's thinned-out scoring and "self-empowerment" soul lyrics do ring hollow, despite the adaptation's Civil Rights-era stakes and perhaps reinforcing the very stereotypes the project works against. If Neuwirth's *Lulu* falls short of responsively enriching the work that inspired it, as Jørgen Bruhn finds possible in a dialectical approach to adaptation (Bruhn, 69-88), it leaves open a gap that its visual "supplement" can both illuminate and remedy.

Opera for the Eyes

Despite the view, not prevailing but perhaps not uncommon, that "audiovisual technology has been a threat to the mystique surrounding live opera as an aesthetic experience" (Pérez, 7) since the inception of Live from the Met broadcasts, their more recent movie-theater-HD incarnation, and the availability of opera videos and DVDs, opera's cinematic elements – its slowing and quickening of time, its breaks and multisensorial layers (Hansen, 247) – are essential to its form. The use of film *in* opera can be seen as a variation on its long-term relationship with the "phenomenal image," from the portrait of Pamina in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* to the Flying Dutchman's ship, and including the portrait of Lulu that appears at Berg's opera's outset and haunts its every scene (Hutcheon and Hutcheon, 67-68). In the case of *American Lulu*, the image does

its own work in relation to the music. To apply Antonin Artaud's idea of the theater as a realm of visual assault or "plague," from his theoretical writings contemporaneous with Berg's 1930s *Lulu*, recycled projections of this new Lulu's image take on a larger-than-life, even monstrous aspect, looming behind or in front of the singers. Perhaps these projections are meant to "act like silent blows, rests, leaps of the heart, summons of the lymph, inflammatory images thrust into our abruptly wakened heads" (Artaud, 27). Artaud's own inflammatory language, countered by several letters referring to theatrical "cruelty" not as "sadism" or "sensationalism" but rather "a pure and detached feeling, a veritable movement of the mind based on the gestures of life itself," approximates this paradox of simultaneous "delirium" (Artaud, 114, 27) and awakening. Drawing on the gestural concreteness of Balinese theater, Artaud envisions images working in toward multisensory effect, not to entertain or mirror the audience but to leave a "scar" (Artaud, 77). Though Artaud's "alchemical theater" or "*theater of cruelty*" does seem to call for a heated audience reaction of "nerves and heart" (Artaud, 79, 84) rather than the cool, critical stance Brecht had in mind with his epic theater, the work of images in this heating process is also intended to activate a change in attitude. Artaud means for theater to teach its audience that "[W]e are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads." (Artaud, 79) In *American Lulu*, repeated images of impending rape and racist violence, in the figure of the ever-objectified Lulu, work as a kind of *pharmakon,* poison and remedy at once, "even in the transmutation of the lies from which truth can be remade" (Artaud, 15). The *Verfremdungseffekt* of this cumulative reification does not work through distancing but rather through insistent and troubling intimacy.

Applying the oscillatory logic of Derrida's "supplement" to musical narratology, Lawrence Kramer describes the Platonic *pharmakon* as "a deceptive and artificial mechanism that blights the natural immediacy of speech … [b]ut … also a medicine … that cures the ills of speech." When this idea is applied to music, "[t]he narrative circle breaks; the music becomes the primary term and the story is mere accompaniment." (Kramer, 112). Though treatments of the "musical supplement" have attempted to rescue it from secondary status, especially in relation to film (Paley, 87), the problems of the Berg-Neuwirth project call for a reverse process, in which "deceptive and artificial" images may seem merely to accompany the score but in fact shape the way the music is heard. This process occurs not via two autonomous forces in "counterpoint" relationship, but rather through what Claudia Gorbman has called "*mutual implication*" (Paley, 87). These images break both the narrative and the musical circles of Berg's and Neuwirth's (re-interpreted) palindrome to tell their own story, that of the female body, and in particular a black female body violated by white men. This story, because of its predominant setting in the American South, associatively foregrounds the jazz elements in Berg's original score, so much so that they may seem to be "new" additions in Neuwirth's adaptation. By the end of the opera, whose last act may sound musically simplistic and textually overwrought, in its very attempt at American di-

rectness (Eleanor: "You erratic, unreliable and such a manipulator" [Neuwirth, score, 343] or Lulu: "You are a paranoid and demented seeker" [Neuwirth, score, 349]), the visual images may recall their predecessors in Acts One and Two, echoing by association Berg's bristling tone-row textures and sharp-edged, Wedekindian libretto. While Neuwirth has changed very little in the first two-thirds of the opera, re-voicing and recontextualizing Berg's score at the surface level, her new music is neutral enough to allow what has come before to echo back through it, especially if non-auditory sensory memory is at work. It may be possible to hear less difference between Acts Two and Three in person than by listening to the opera recorded without its visual elements. In addition to changing the way in which the score sounds in the opera house, *American Lulu*'s screen or curtain projections recycle Lulu's objectification until that very process is painfully exposed. This recycling process occurs differently in several recent productions, as will be shown below.

Recycling the Body/Double

The very first instructions in Neuwirth's orchestral score describe the following:

> *New York. A spacious, very elegant designer apartment in the mid 1970s. A tall mirror leans against the wall in the left corner. Lulu is black, in her early 50s, slim and delicate. She wears very little make-up. Her pretty face is spoiled by a smug, condescending expression. Clarence is black, too, and in his late 50s. (As common for the 1970s, the musicians are sitting behind a half-open, glitzy but sheer curtain that can be lit in various ways. Their individual stands are decorated with the logo AL.) (Neuwirth, score, 1)*

The mirror not only reflects Lulu's body but also refers implicitly to Berg's palindromic score, itself a metaphor for Lulu's self-image based on male projections of her. The curtain onstage appears as another surface for projection, a possible two-way mirror. Without taking a detour into Lacanian explanations of the "mirror-stage" and its literary/artistic implications, it is helpful to note how much what is often called narcissism depends on another human being, rather than occurring in self-obsessed isolation (Downing, lecture). Even these stage directions take a very particular view of Lulu, which she – as a singer playing a role – may or may not mirror back with "very little make-up" or "a smug, condescending expression" (Neuwirth, score, 1) that implies a comparison to spoiled merchandise. The self-conscious branding of the musicians' stands may be a nod to Theodor Adorno's "culture industry," an image that, like many in the opera, draws attention to its own reification. The line "Lulu is black" announces the most obvious direction of Neuwirth's project, an "alternative" Lulu that is not without its own problems. As noted in the 2012 study *Blackness in Opera,*

> despite changing ideals about representing 'reality' onstage, and despite increasingly sophisticated and nuanced portrayals of black characters, there still exists the tacit assumption that the presence or portrayal of 'blackness' inherently pro-

> vides an alternative to traditional (that is, white, European, or both) power structures, even if a norm for blackness is established within the world of the opera (André, Bryan, Saylor, 7).

The "glitzy but sheer curtain" reference in the score seems to dare reviewers to use words like "sleazy," opening the difficult question of how much the opera's staging plays on, with, or against the very stereotyping King's and Jordan's quoted words speak out against. The legal battle over the *American Lulu* project adds the even more difficult question of appropriation, since Neuwirth's former collaborator is black and she is not. The score does not always mark characters racially; Neuwirth's specifications for a video of a little girl attacked by a man, accompanied by Djuna Barnes' and June Jordan's poetry about rape, do not indicate the girl's race; in the video sequence designed for the Berlin production, she is black (Jitomirsky, *Fragments*). The "alternate" Lulu voices, uncomfortably, the problem of self-definition according to gender or race markers. In Act Two she sings these words at the extreme upper range of the female voice, as if trying to escape her own body: "I have not once in my life ever tried to be something other than what I have been taken for; nor have I once in my life ever been taken for something other than what I am" (Neuwirth, score, 195-198).

The Komische Oper production, with stage direction by Kirill Serebrennikov, who has also worked in film, and video direction by Gonduras Jitomirsky, "supplements" the opera's textual-musical frame with projection screens that appear intermittently, in still images, in stop-motion animation, or in imitation 1930s silent film, behind and in front of a clear-walled, mobile box. Sometimes the box imitates a painting, Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*; sometimes it frames a cocktail lounge filled with silver-grey potted plants, in keeping with the production's minimalist color scheme. The opera's "intermedia film" nods to Berg's lost images with choppy footage in black and white, this visual trope itself a comment on the racial issues at stake in the opera; we see Lulu pleading with a yapping white commissioner [Appendix, Fig. 1] and falling through what could be a broken camera aperture. The scene repeats with the sassier figure of Eleanor, who falls into a scene in which she, in almost cartoon-like silhouette, is repeatedly raped (Jitomirsky, film). At several points in the opera, the singing Lulu appears in front of the glass box while, inside it, a body double does a strip-tease in showgirl feathers [Fig. 2]. Marisol Montalvo's physical interpretation of the role comes across as an athletic feat, not only in singing difficult extended passages in her upper range for most of the opera, much of it while mostly nude, but also in the stage directions' emphasis on rigorous gesture. Whipping her body from one side to the other, lurching forward with a gun in her hand, splaying herself upside-down on a bed, this Lulu works hard to resist being "fixed" as an object. At the same time, her silent showgirl-double lifts and swings her feathers at half this speed behind the singer, giving the scene an alternate but simultaneous temporality, as a split screen in film might do. By dividing the figure of Lulu into several live and projected bodies, moving at various speeds and in different degrees of jerkiness or smoothness, the production re-reifies

an its central image but also destabilizes it; the audience may not know where to cast its gaze, complicit in this objectification.

In a Berlin interview in 2013, a year after the opera's premiere and perhaps in an effort to counter negative reviews, Olga Neuwirth notes her wish to emphasize Lulu's character as a victim of the male gaze. Singer Marisol Montalvo states, as part of the same interview, that it is Lulu's own desire that demonizes her in the eyes of many previous directors; she sees Lulu sympathetically as "an intelligent woman who knows exactly what she wants," not as the temptress who "is a bad woman, she likes sex, she must die" (Neuwirth and Montalvo, Euronews interview). That Lulu dies anyway, not onstage or even in the singing body, but in a projected still image confronting the audience, heightens the sense of hot *and* cold "*theater of cruelty*" (Artaud, 79) that pervades Neuwirth's opera. Perhaps the image also disturbs because it depicts a living singer in a dead pose: as Roland Barthes notes, "the photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live;" even an actual corpse, photographed, can convey this effect, appearing as "the living image of a dead thing" (Barthes, 78-79). Artaud's concept of cruelty relates to the impossibility of "true" death in the "closed space" of most human experience, hence this easy conflation of "Real" with "Live" in apprehended images, and hence the need to stage death self-consciously in image and gesture, to light up the artificiality of pretending that "evil" – in this case the acting-out of sexually and racially motivated violence – does not exist (Artaud, 103. 104).

In the Bregenz/Edinburgh Festival productions of *American Lulu*, directed by John Fulljames, much of the action occurs not in or around a glass box but on a stage-within-the-stage surrounded by what the aforementioned "sleazy, fringed, golden-rain curtain" (Maddocks, par. 5). This curtain doubles as a projection screen for stock-exchange numbers, an enormous cartoon rendering of Lulu's face in profile, a "We Shall Overcome" icon, repeated images imitating Warhol's Marilyn series, and an animated film sequence showing Lulu's trial and imprisonment. The curtain's permeability allows for "entrances and exits at any point," as yet another squeamish British review concedes, while echoing the word "sleaziness" to refer not only to Neuwirth's opera but to Berg's as well (Hewett, pars. 5, 6). What these reviews fail to note is that in Fulljames' production, Lulu takes an active role in relation to her objectification, even within her "bead-curtain cage" (Hewett, par. 6). The singer portraying Lulu also plays with the curtain's materiality, parting it to look out at the audience and to walk out through a projection of her own image. Her recycled "selves" appear more easily deconstructed than they do in the Komische Oper production. In the Berlin version's brittle elegance, the "supplement" works by fetishizing Lulu's body into pieces, splitting it both spatially and temporally; in this production, the "silent opera" is grainier and more permeable. Lulu may not be free to un-play her part in racial and sexual injustice, but she does have the agency to take her own "false" images apart [Fig. 3] If, according to Mulvey's account, the "male gaze" is frozen at the fetishized female im-

age (Mulvey, 69), the breaking-up of that image by a living female body is at least a step in breaking the ice.

The central film sequence in Neuwirth's adaptation does much of the opera's recycling work invisibly, through its own history, beginning with Berg's mostly lost film and continuing through the mid-twentieth century. Though film-within-an-opera idea may have gone underground during the Nazi era, it re-emerged in Alois Zimmermann's sprawling, difficult-to-stage 1958 opera *Die Soldaten* (an adaptation of Jakob Lenz's 1775 play), which draws on Berg's precedent to include screen projections of a female character's demise at the opera's climax. A Stuttgart production from 1989, itself available on video, shows simultaneous stills on four screens suspended above the stage, with a loose floodlight swinging in front of them. As Artaud has noted, stage lighting, not just the visual materials it illuminates, can function like "an actual language" and "strip from the written poetry the gratuity that commonly characterizes it" (Artaud, 119, 121). Audiences may hardly pay attention to the singers' words in Zimmermann's opera, as the floodlight swings over projected images of a sealed letter, of a stoic soldier, of the female protagonist's fetishized and violated body parts, and of her screaming face. These images repeat, at increasing tempo, until the singing figure of Marie is stripped and violated onstage. The video production ends with a still shot of her naked, bloody body onstage, superimposed over the image of a tank. Zimmermann's goal, extending the Wagnerian idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* but to very different effect (shock, not hyponosis), is to "surround the audience" with an act of violence impossible to ignore, via stage action, film, and loudspeaker amplification (Kerner, 74). The build-up of images works in this production to "grow in a threatening exponential curve," as the accumulation of similar "presence[s]" can work in film (Bruhn, 80).

The final image of Neuwirth's *American Lulu* in the Berlin Komische Oper production, a larger-than-life shot of the soprano in the title role posing both nude and dead, recalls the last still in the Stuttgart *Die Soldaten*, but in a time when projection screens have become, if not the norm, at least unsurprising in opera. Images of the devastation in Hiroshima seem so appropriate to productions of John Adams' *Doctor Atomic,* they render the horror they depict almost innocuous. Does an image of physical and sexual violation in opera still carry the power to shock? When it occurs simultaneously with the lurching twelve-tone chord that opens and closes Neuwirth's adaptation, slamming Berg's palindrome to its updated conclusion, it does. As Adorno and Eisler pointed out in their 1947 *Composing for the Films,* the chord itself "produces an effect very much like that of a motion picture." (Eisler and Adorno, 24) In the image's artificiality and, at the same time, intimacy (one cannot help but recognize the singer Marisol Montalvo, just seen live onstage and here posing as if in a Blaxploitation *tableau mort*), combined with the *Verfremdungseffekt* of music so *un*-like the jazz and soul idioms associated with her character in the opera, the image is threatening in its very enactment of victimization. To combine several of Laura Mulvey's terms, in her psychoanalytic reading of female images and the "male gaze," the fetishistic aspect of scopophilia works here with the sa-

distic side of voyeurism (Mulvey, 65) to reify Lulu's body. If this were just one instance of her image fetishized above the stage, it might not carry discomfiting power; it is the accumulation of projected and re-doubled images, not Neuwirth's perhaps too-easily adapted music, that explodes at the end of the Komische Oper production. Reification works too well, in the sense of the Brechtian paradox (Jameson, 169), making the sight of Lulu's bloodied body appear as something very much alive, with the power to mirror back the audience – a convention literalized to great effect in a recent Broadway production of the musical *Cabaret* – in what the opera shows to be hardly a thing of the past, the two-headed monster racism and sexism. Perhaps this, more than a perceived mis-alignment of source and adaptation, is what has resulted in squeamish reviews.

Conclusion: Lulu Looks Back

At the end of Neuwirth's Act Three, the stage instructions give Lulu not one but two last looks in the mirror. The instruction "*(She turns away from him, goes to the mirror and studies herself)*" occurs first over a rangy pizzicato chord in the strings and again, on the very next page, over an eerie sway of glissandi and harmonics in strings and winds (Neuwirth, score, 384, 385). After sending away the men in the room, Lulu hears something and sings to herself, with her own glissandi at the top of her range, "Here we go again, someone's coming. Let's see who it is" (Neuwirth, score, 391-393). Over intensifying percussion and running scales, "*Behind a curtain in very dim light, a shadowy figure can be seen strangling Lulu. (By no means should the killer be identifiable!)*" (Neuwirth, score, 398). The final stage instruction notes in a blasé tone, "*Lulu's lifeless body lies there, sprawled out on the floor*" (Neuwirth, score, 399). A footnote indicates that the lights should go out with the orchestra's final beat – the last fortissimo chord scored as a collective grace note – without providing instructions for a projected image. In the Berlin production, the enormous dead-Lulu image flashes into view at the exact moment the last chord strikes. This chord, resounding back through Berg's "phantom" third act, may be the most effective musical moment in Neuwirth's adaptation. It collides with the final image, propels it off the stage. Predominantly white European audiences members may experience this moment not so much as witnessing violence but of *being* struck, even uncovered, by it, as if complicit in the act. Female audience members may also sense the horror of recognition, in women's vulnerability to random violence, regardless of race.

The repetition of Lulu-images throughout of the opera accumulates until it seems to take on its own visual agency: "Let's see who it is" (Neuwirth, score, 393). This experience of "image-consciousness implies a phenomenology of participation, not detachment" (Pfau, 128), what Artaud proposed in intensified form in his idea of "alchemical" or "cruelty" theater. Perhaps this participation results not so much from mental activity but from the audience's very passivity. As Susan Sontag notes in *On Photography*, "One is vulnerable to disturbing events in the form of photographic images in a way that one is not to the real thing. That vulnerability is part of the distinctive passivity of

someone who is a spectator twice over" (Sontag, 168-169). Though Sontag is referring to actual events seen later in photographs, the last image in *American Lulu* is in fact re-seen, after so many other images of violence toward black females during the opera's course, and in the wider context of images in news media past and present, up to the recent coverage of Facebook date-rape brags and gang rapes in India. In both Berg's and Neuwirth's operas, Lulu is required to sing her coloratura lines at such a high tessitura, she must modify her vowels until her words can hardly be understood; though Neuwirth gives her some brief monologues in which to speak her story, it is mainly through recycled images of her reified and re-reified body that she presses herself toward the audience, as if saying, "I see you seeing this, too."

Appendix

Fig. 1. Marisol Montalvo as Lulu in the intermedia film for Olga Neuwirth's *American Lulu*, Komische Oper, Berlin, 2012, film still by Gonduras Jitomirsky.

Fig. 2. Marisol Montalvo as Lulu and Della Miles as Eleanor, with body double, in Olga Neuwirth's *American Lulu*, Komische Oper, Berlin, 2012, photo by Sabine Brinker, Pictures Berlin.

Fig. 3. Angel Blue as Lulu in Olga Neuwirth's *American Lulu*, Old Vic, London, 2013, photo by Simon Annand.

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Stage Adaptations of Novels: 'Affordances' of Theatre in Two Stage Adaptations of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*

Abstract

Theatre – whether in the form of an 'adaptation' or not – is theatre. Following much of the current critical literature on film adaptations (e.g. Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 2007; Leitch, 2008; Hutcheon, 2006), in this paper I am therefore rejecting as far as possible any sort of 'fidelity discourse', i.e. that the stage adaptation should be 'faithful' to its novel sourcetext in terms of plot, characters, dialogue and resolution, or even, arguably, in 'theme' or spirit. In some ways a stage adaptation, as a recontextualisation in a new medium, *cannot* be faithful to its sourcetext, in part because of the 'epistemological commitments' (Kress, 2003) of theatre. More interestingly and constructively, I argue that because of theatre's multiple and enriching 'affordances' (Bezemer and Kress, 2008), many of which are not shared with the novel, it should not even try. I illustrate this with two non-deferential stage adaptations of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, to both of which the affordance of digitalisation is key. In one, a small TV-like screen facilitates representations of interiority (long seen as a challenge for theatre). In the other, sophisticated and extensive digital projection allows abstract and concrete images which go beyond visual enhancement of the *mise en scène* to foregrounding aspects of this particular retelling, and which give an appropriate nod to modernity and, in both the narrow (e.g. technological) and broad senses, to the value of change.

Keywords: affordance, epistemological commitment, Kafka, stage adaptation.

Introduction

Audiences and critics often praise stage adaptations of novels for their nearness to the sourcetext, and accordingly express disappointment if a particular scene, character, motif or perhaps what they see as the best line in the novel is omitted. This is understandable: audiences, as theatre managers and producers know, often buy tickets for stage adaptations (henceforth 'adaptations') because of their particular fondness for the

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sourcetext or – rather differently - because they wish their children or students to learn about the novel from the adaptation. Hence the frequency of adaptations in the theatre. But while one understanding of 'adaptation' may be direct line-by-line transfer (at least of dialogue) from page to stage, here I challenge the idea that a stage adaptation of the novel can ever be just this - even if all the lines from a novel somehow appear in the stage-play[1]. The two productions used as illustration in this paper are not simply 'inspired by' the novel – they are closer to it than that – but neither aims for 'fidelity'.

There are different reasons why an adaptation *cannot* be faithful to its novel sourcetext, which we can see as *constraints* (rather than obstacles). Most basic is probably the length of the novel in relation to the duration of its stage-play. In a pre-show talk prior to his *Wind in the Willows* (Manchester Library Theatre, 2011/2012), based on Alan Bennett's script, Director Chris Honer says, holding up Kenneth Grahame's novel: "now here's the book – it's 240 pages long, you read it out loud it would probably take six hours - this [holding up Bennett's script] is the play, it only lasts about two hours". There is simply no time to render the novel in full, so something (episodes, characters, conversations) must be cut. In the two adaptations of *Metamorphosis* I discuss below, for example, the three lodgers have been removed from the story; in Steven Berkoff's adaptation (used in this paper for comparison), which he both wrote for the stage[2] and directed, they were conflated into one. If an interval is required, the production will be divided in a particular way, perhaps creating its own theatrical need for a dramatic event at the end of Act 1.

Other constraints relate to the *materiality* of theatre (in interesting contrast to its potential for the symbolic). There is a limit to the number of actors who can fit on a stage (even if many were willing and able). The size of the stage itself will always be a constraint, as will the auditorium: if the seating is not raked, or raked only gently, this may limit what can be done at floor level. The number of scenes will be limited if changes involve complex staging, especially if digital projection is not wanted or not possible. This is in contrast to the novel (and the film), in which the number and type of scenes and settings are potentially unlimited. While theatre can arguably and *in principle* dramatise anything, and digital projection can help hugely here, a given production may not have the resources – technological, material, professional - to represent all scenes and settings. So an adaptation is likely to take place with fewer scenes and settings than its sourcetext, in particular fewer large-scale settings (wars, parades, riots), although of course a small patch of a battlefield (say) can be and frequently is shown. And actors are themselves material: it is not easy for them to convincingly die and lie as breathless corpses, for example, or appear in ghostly form after death. Animal 'actors' – who may be crucial to a plot and seen also to be so for a *production*; consider Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*, for which Steinbeck himself wrote the playscript - bring with them a range of extra considerations.

A further frequently identified constraint of theatre is its apparent inability (especially in relation to the novel) to show interiority: what a character perceives, thinks, feels and understands (e.g. Isherwood, 2008). Below I look positively at some options for theatre here.

Theatre: epistemological commitment

Reasons why a stage adaptation cannot be faithful to the novel can be conceptualised in terms of theatre's 'epistemological commitments' (Kress, 2003; see also Bezemer and Kress, 2008). Kress refers to the epistemological commitment of *mode* (e.g. image *vis á vis* writing). He cites representation of the cell/nucleus relationship in educational materials: in writing there is 'Commitment of the naming of a relation … "the cell owns a nucleus" '; whereas in image there is 'commitment to a location in space … "this is where it goes" ' (2003: 3). In other words, the image maker cannot *not* show the nucleus in physical relationship to the cell.

The novel (usually using the written mode alone) and the theatre (minimally, using spoken and visual modes) have different epistemological commitments. Let us take the example of a character's appearance. The novelist does not *have to* say anything about this at all; if s/he does, s/he is unlikely to describe the character from head to foot – hairstyle, clothes, accessories, footwear. This is partly because of word numbers but partly because it may not, simply, be seen as relevant. Theatre, however, must show appearance in its entirety: costumes (actors must - usually – wear particular items of clothing, of particular styles and colour), hair (is a woman's hair long or short? worn up or down? what colour is it?) and skin colour. So a character's stage appearance will almost certainly be represented in more detail than in the novel: she or he will probably be wearing a *range* of garments, a form of footwear, and a particular hairstyle. The novelist can select from this range, but a stage play (unless it is performed in the dark, or behind screens) must show all.

As a visual medium, theatre is thus 'epistemologically committed' to *showing* a range of things. One is the relative proximity of each actor on stage to the others: each must be *some* distance (near to or far from) each of the others. A further commitment is to some sort of action (at a given point, is each actor still – in which case, in what pose? or theatrically 'frozen'?, or moving – in which case, how?), to gaze (actors must be looking at *something*, or have their eyes closed) and to posture (standing or sitting; in either case, how?). Theatre here will have to go beyond the novel. The same is true of props. Particular props may be prompted by the novel, but detailed descriptions about size, shape, colour *and* historical appearance (and more) is unlikely to have been provided. Even if some such decisions are not are not consciously made by the Director or stage manager, each prop will have its own specificities. The point is clear: it is almost impossible that everything shown on stage *can* have been indicated in the novel; there are just too many possibilities. In this 'showing' sense, theatre is 'epistemologically committed' to a higher degree of *specificity*. Regardless of one's artistic position on 'fidelity', then, the stage adaptation *cannot* be faithful to its novel sourcetext. This was recognised for film adaptations nearly fifty years ago, when George Bluestone wrote:

> … mutations are probable the moment one goes from a given set of fluid, but relatively homogeneous, conventions, to another; … changes are *inevitable* the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium (1957: 5; Bluestone's italics).

This is equally true of adaptations, which, because of the specificity of the stage, will in a sense always go further than their sourcetexts.

The 'affordances' of theatre

While it can be easily accepted that an adaptation *cannot*, in the sense shown above, be faithful to its novel sourcetext, it is more controversial (at least outside the field of adaptation theory) to argue that, for reasons of creativity, it *should not try to*. The argument here is that the novel can do certain things 'better' than theatre, and theatre certain things 'better' than the novel. The notion of *affordance*, related to *epistemological commitment*, was introduced in 1977 by James Gibson in the field of design technology, to refer to the physical properties offered ('afforded') by something in the environment, as perceived by humans. For example, a doorknob 'affords' twisting and pushing; a chair affords sitting, standing and drying clothes on. In communication studies, associated with the notion of mode (text, image), an *affordance* is what a particular mode can (not must) easily express and represent; it is a 'source for meaning–making', with reference to its *potentials* (Bezemer and Kress, 2008; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). So while any creative genre or medium can in principle express ('afford') anything ('X'), in practice, some genres and mediums are much better at X than are others. This is a fuzzy, fluid, not an essentialist notion: the claim is not that plays do one set of things, novels another. The notion has however been little used in relation to theatre – despite the affordances of theatre being manifold. In the following paragraphs I briefly explore just some of these.

Most obviously, theatre (like film), is a multi-modal (mainly visual and aural) medium. As a *visual* medium, it is well able to *show*. And not only can it (and must it) show details of appearance, action, gaze and proximity as discussed above, it can also show facial expression, and fleeting and less fleeting angles of glance. As regards a production's *mise en scène*, facilitating and being informed by the Director's particular interpretation, screens afford shadows, and changes in size of what is behind them. Lights (and darkness) afford the possibility of focus: on a particular character, episode or prop.

The list of visual affordances, almost endless, now includes digital projection, including on several screens from several projectors simultaneously. This allows different moving imagery, of large and small scale and scope, which may complement or contrast with what is happening on stage. It also allows sound, and highly accurate integration of the visual and the aural, all preservable for posterity. What can be seen includes large-scale geographical literal representations, abstract representations and their juxtaposition. The potential for continual movement spans pre-existing documentary or feature film clips and new sequences of characters talking to or being watched by characters on the stage, for example in *Return to the Forbidden Planet* (Lancaster Girls'/Royal Grammar Schools, 2012), and Nicholas Hytner's (2004) adaptation of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (National Theatre, London). And although adaptations can always acknowledge their novel sourcetexts (and hence par-

ticular prior authorship), digitalisation affords further resources for this: projection in Oldham Coliseum/Imitating the Dog's production of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Dukes Theatre, Lancaster, April 2012), for example, featured moving pages of a book.

As an *aural* medium, theatre affords not only words spoken, and the possibility of dialogue, characters 'thinking aloud', or talking to the audience (hence interiority) – but also vocal qualities such as intonation, pitch, rhythm, tone and accent (indeed, is epistemologically committed to *each* of these for any given utterance). Theatre also affords the possibility of mimicry, hesitation and overlapping speech, the last of which is normal in everyday conversation, and which may indicate hostility or solidarity. (The novel, in contrast, cannot tell in a *non-sequential* way about (or even 'show') two characters talking at the same time.)

Actors can use language in a range of ways, from what is perceived to be naturalistic conversation to theatrical, poetic talk - the audience hears this; we do not have to imagine it. Theatre also affords the possibility of *minimising* dialogue, because so much can be depicted visually and otherwise aurally. And theatre affords the projection of sound *extraneous* to the characters: music, songs, weather, a whip…., which may be live, pre-recorded, or part of an aural-visual digital installation. All these (with associated symbolic potential) are likely to be closely related to the Director's particular interpretation, and there may be no direct literal correspondence at all between say, a particular sound and anything in the novel.

Theatre currently does not allow the audience to taste, although it has allowed us to smell. Tactile experiences are also afforded – the sense of rain, for example[3] - and are common in pantomime or other shows in which anything descends on the audience or is thrown into or around the auditorium. And even if the audience does not experience a tactile experience directly, we can *witness* touch on the stage. The novel can only tell us about this.

Actors themselves constitute theatrical affordances, responsible for imaginatively executing many of the affordances of sound and vision identified above. Steyn (1997) observes how Fiona Shaw, in *The Fire Sermon* (part of the adaptation of T.S. Elliot's *Waste Land*):

> Simply by crossing the stage, removing her cardigan and standing at a different angle to a different light bulb, [is] able to effect a plausible, unobtrusive shift from deep tragedy to music-hall and back again (1997: 2).

Wider directorial decisions are relevant here too. Having actors means that two sets of things can be going on simultaneously, a juxtaposition which in turn affords dramatic irony. A one-man or woman show in particular affords not only the idea of everyman/everywoman, but also the articulation and embodied materialisation (through action, gesture, posture, expression) of interiority. When Michael Gambon performed Joe in Beckett's *Eh Joe?* (August 2013, Edinburgh International Festival) he said not a word but responded to what was said to him, his face projected onto a large screen[4]. An actor playing more than one role in the same production can be directed in a the-

atrically principled way, so that, for example, a connection is established between two roles. In her playscript of *Ciphers* (2013), Dawn King indicates the four 'pairings' of the eight roles, suggesting that this is not just a matter of keeping costs down. Conversely, theatre affords several actors playing the *same* person at the same time, for example, Helen Edmundson's 1994 adaptation of *Mill on the Floss* with its three Maggies. Such actors can interact with other about what they are thinking and how they are feeling, externalising not only interiority but also internal conflict. A Director can also practice gender-blind casting, or deliberately cast men to play female roles, or *vice versa*, to *re-gender* the characters of the novel, to serve a particular interpretation.

While novel reading (other than in story-telling) is a characteristically solitary endeavour, theatre affords audience interaction. Pantomime maximally exploits this, but in many stage plays, actors look specifically at and even address particular audience members. The auditorium itself affords a further theatrical space for entrances, exits, or to indicate distance or height: Mermaids Theatre's *Angels in America* (2013, Edinburgh Festival Fringe), where the audience was in the stalls, concluded with a directional change of lighting and an angel appearing at the front of the circle.

But perhaps the most important affordance of theatre is theatricality itself – what Berkoff refers to positively as "the alchemical possibilities of the stage" (1995: 53) – as opposed to naturalistic productions. "If you give [the audience] a small gesture of something more abstract", he says, "such as the idea of a man as an insect, they will gladly fill in the rest themselves" (p. 40). Indeed, theatricality is constituted in part *by* the affordances of theatre. Given an acceptance of theatrical symbolic conventions, a red cloth on the floor *is* a bloodstain, feathers a bird, and a trapeze, flight. Theatre audiences *expect* simple, mimetic non-literal representations, such as non-existent coffee being poured from an actual coffee pot, and are (increasingly?) also open to furniture being represented by blocks (which may also be walls), to furniture and walls being temporarily represented by actors themselves, for example in an ensemble production, to anachronistic and visible use of technology to achieve a certain effect. In Chris Hannan's adaptation of Dostoyevsky's (1866) *Crime and Punishment* (Lyceum, Edinburgh, November 2013), the knocks and calls at the door behind which unlikely murderer Raskolnikov is slumped are amplified, the callers using visible microphones. From the perspective of the audience, the door being *behind* Raskolnikov helps us to share his perceptions. Physical theatre techniques (see e.g. Murray and Keefe, 2007) mean that an actor can externalise emotion with her or his body: an *embodiment* – often a dance-like one - of interiority.

Theatricality also affords puppetry (Francis, 2011). This potentially theatricalises the actor-operator and her relationship with her puppet: are they one and the same (shown for example by costume)? Puppets can have an additional theatrical role in the suggestion of the puppet character being *actually* (not only literally) 'manipulated' and/or 'ventriloquised' – as in HookHitch's Theatre's *The Turn of the Screw* (Edinburgh Festival Fringe, 2012) in which a human Miss Jessell operates a puppet Flora.

Basically, then, theatricality affords the dramatization of anything. And given theatre's many affordances, it would seem perverse for a Director not to make use of these in an adaptation, to serve and create his or her particular interpretation. *Any* production entails interpretation, of course (including those using a pre-existing *playscript*, as the words must be 'clothed'), but, given the various affordances of theatre, this is, I suggest, *particularly* so for a stage adaptation of a novel.

The novel

Although a novel does not have to tell a story chronologically, and many do not, as a *textual* medium, the novel is normally epistemologically committed to sequential, non-simultaneous, 'telling' depiction. Here it contrasts with the 'showing' modes of both film (with the potential for split screens) and theatre (for different action in different parts of the stage). As regards dialogue, because of the usual linear nature of the text, overlapping speech (which, as suggested above, may entail hostility or solidarity) on novels can only be *indicated* as such, even though this may be very important to a stage relationship. A constraint of the non-illustrated novel is that it can only *tell*.

An obvious affordance of the novel, as suggested, is that there are absolutely no constraints on where it can be set, in how many settings, over what period(s) of time or on what happens. Given theatricality and theatrical affordances, this is true of theatre too – but it takes talent and thought in bucket-loads, and may not be straightforward (or cheap) to achieve. Hytner's (2004) elaborate dramatization of Pullman's spatially complex three-part novel *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) for the National Theatre is a case in point.

The novel's affordance *par excellence* is often identified as showing 'interiority': what someone feels and thinks, including their motivations. These may be indicated through the narrator-character's use of the first person, or through an omniscient third person narrator who may focalise the character, perhaps through verbs such as *see, hear, imagine, think* and *believe* (Short, 1996: 268). The last three of these are cognitive, so how are we to know what a counterpart on stage is imagining, thinking or believing? Shakespeare used the aside and the soliloquy (most famously, Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' speech). In modern plays the soliloquy, however, noticeably used only with great care.

Interiority is accordingly frequently cited as one reason why novels should not be adapted for the stage, especially if the novel's 'essence' lies in this: "the inner life of Holden Caulfield or of Proust's narrator Marcel" (Rushdie, 2009: 4). (Often, of course, it does not.) Bluestone claimed that "The rendition of mental states – memory, dream, imagination – cannot be as adequately represented by film as by language" (1957: 47). Linda Hutcheon, however, characterises the claim that "interiority is the terrain of the telling mode" (2006: 56) as a *cliché*, and Leitch similarly includes the notion that "Novels create more complex characters than movies [and we can add stage-plays] because they offer more immediate and complex access to the characters' psycholog-

ical states" in his (2003) 'Twelve fallacies in contemporary adaptation theory'. While interiority may be a challenge for theatre, it is not necessarily, then, a constraint, as I show below.

Broadly, if they are to be included, "represented thoughts … must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds and visual images" (Hutcheon, 2006: 40). These include, but go beyond, voiceovers and narrators. In Waterhouse and Hall's dramatization of Waterhouse's novel *Billy Liar*, for example, Billy's internal monologue, key to his fantasy life and the novel itself, is exteriorised when Billy talks out loud to an imaginary character. In Nicholas Wright's playscript of Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, protagonist Lyra Belacqua's internal monologue is either omitted, replaced with action, or externalised through her words. In *Northern Lights* (Book 1), for example, we read "if he [Lord Asriel] caught her in her [the Retiring Room] she'd be severely punished, but she could put up with that" (p. 6). The playscript reads:

Salcilia: Kids can't go in there, and nor can women
Pantalaimon: Yeah, and it's probably haunted
Lyra: Good, that settles it. Come on, Rodge; this is gonna be fun.

In Helen Edmundson's adaptation of *War and Peace,* Anna's and Levin's internal monologues are externalised by having them constantly meet and argue (whereas in the novel they only meet once, at the end) (see interview in Sunderland, 2009). In Berkoff's *Metamorphosis*:

> Gregor recounts the agony of his day to his sister … I chose to take this 'dialogue' from Gregor's silent thoughts ….[I] put it into the mouth of a pre-insect existence so that we could see Gregor before the transformation took place (1995: 14).

And about his (2013) *Crime and Punishment* (see above), Director Chris Hannan says:

> For the whole of this book you're inside this guy's head, so how do we do that? It was about making sure that Raskolnikov has a direct link to the audience and can talk to them directly and that we keep … what's going on in his head, in front of the audience all the time. That was relatively simple because it feels in the book that he is continually having conversations in his head with other people (programme, p. 5).

Finally, it could be argued that novels themselves do not *show* actual thoughts, feelings and perceptions, we read *reports* of these: words, as signifiers of thoughts.

Two stage adaptations of *Metamorphosis*: an empirical contribution

In the remainder of this article I continue the discussion of theatrical affordances in the illustrative light of two different adaptations of Kafka's short novel *Metamorphosis* (1915). While the topic of film adaptations of novels continues to be staple fare for adaptation studies (see e.g. Elliot, 2013; Stam and Raengo, 2005; Naremore, 2000; Cartmell and Whelehan, 1999), scholarly work on stage adaptations is far thinner on the ground, tending to refer to adaptations of specific novels (e.g. Butler, 2003; Cox, 2000; Reynolds,

1993; Edgar, 1988; Bolton, 1987). Most relevant to this paper is of course Berkoff's (1995) *Meditations on Metamorphosis*, an account of the process of his 1992 Tokyo production, his tenth, which includes reflections on the previous nine.

The reasons for the dearth of work on stage adaptations of novels *per se*, it seems to me, are both practical and epistemological. Practically, a given stage adaptation of a particular novel may not be running anywhere in the world, at the time of interest. If it is running, the run will not be finite. I chose *Metamorphosis* primarily for its obvious theatrical challenges/opportunities – for which reasons Berkoff's have not been the only adaptations - but also because two productions were running in the same location at the time of data collection (see below), and because 'secondary' data was available in *Meditations*.

The practical constraints relate to the epistemological question of what the 'evidence' is to be when exploring a stage play (adaptation or otherwise). Is it the production as a whole? Is it one performance (if so, which, and why?) More concretely, if one of these is agreed in principle, again, given theatre's essential ephemerality (Phelan 1993), what then is the actual data? This depends on the research question (RQ). For some RQs, a *film* of a given production may suffice (see e.g. McIntyre, 2008) – for example, an RQ about which props are selected and the different uses to which they are put - although even here there is an assumption that this will be the same throughout the production. For a RQ concerning the visual perspective of the viewer, and hence angle of view, entailing whether the viewer is looking straight at or down at the stage, and his or her closeness to the stage, a film taken from a different, single point would not be adequate. For RQs concerning the deliberately fleeting – whether, how often and how thrown objects are caught, for example, or audience applause and how this responded to by the cast - film would not be sufficient either. These challenges do not however mean that stage adaptations of novels should be neglected in the adaptation literature; quite the contrary. But the researcher needs to develop and be explicit about her particular methodology (see below).

I propose two sets of RQs for the study of adaptations, the first relevant to adaptations (indeed stage plays) in general, and the second to the adaptation of a specific novel. The first set consists of 'generic' questions relating to what may be seen as theatrical challenges, such as:

- (how) is interiority addressed?
- (how) are changes in setting and the passage of time addressed?

The '(how)' is important, as it cannot be assumed that an adaptor or Director will wish to transpose features such as interiority or even changes of scene and time into a given adaptation. Related to these two RQs, and relevant to this paper, we can add:

- what theatrical affordances are drawn on?
- how do these inform/constitute the interpretation of the novel?

Kafka's *Metamorphosis* certainly creates an interesting theatrical challenge, or opportunity – and, accordingly, invites consideration of a range of theatrical affordanc-

es. On the surface, it is the story of Gregor Samsa, a young man who wakes up, late, to find he has become a beetle. Other than this, the novel can be described as a 'naturalistic' one. What really concerns Gregor is that he has overslept and his need to leave the house get to work (he is a travelling salesman), as he supports his family – his parents and his sister Grete, a talented violinist. The Chief Clerk from his company arrives and makes matters worse. Gregor cannot leave. Time passes and his family, in particular Grete, feed him, but inappropriately. The family let a room to compensate for the lack of income, but the lodgers leave when they encounter Gregor. His family become increasingly alienated from him. Gregor finally dies, weakened by an apple which his father has thrown at him embedded in his body, and the family apparently move on with their lives. The story is told by a third person narrator but focalised through Gregor. As Berkoff puts it, with a dose of irony:

> Kafka's story is told from Gregor's room, and the family are naturally shadowy, heard through the partly open door which they kindly don't shut so that their son can hear the familiar sounds of their activities from a distance (1995: 29).

This raises issues both of interiority, and, as the story does not only take place in several rooms and apparently over several weeks, changing settings and the passage of time.

The story contains several metamorphoses, including that of Gregor *while* he is a beetle, of the family as a family during the 'crisis', and in particular of Grete. *Metamorphosis* can be interpreted as being about the socially and personally damaging nature of capitalism, but more broadly as being about the social treatment of the marginalised, of those who do not or cannot fit into a social system, in Berkoff's words: "an allegory of the outsider … anyone who cannot conform to the norm acceptable to a society that is distinctly uncomfortable with damaged goods, or individuals" (p. 29). This includes religious readings (consider Kafka's Jewish origins, the apple, and Gregor's death; Bruce, 2007, 2002). The marginalised entity in a given production/interpretation thus does not need to be a breadwinner; indeed, the metamorphosis does not need to be into a beetle. And of course the relative emphasis given to the protagonist and to the family members (always assuming there is a protagonist and there are family members) can and will vary with particular interpretations.

The most obvious RQ specific to adaptations of *Metamorphosis* is surely 'How do they do the beetle?' In Berkoff's productions, Gregor is played *as* a beetle and *by* a single actor – who the audience have already seen in 'human' form. Of his 1992 Tokyo production, Berkoff writes:

> [Gregor] uncurls like a foetus, beginning as a tight ball: stick-like feelers of the insect slowly emerge as if he were being newly hatched …. First a clawed hand rises gradually from the inchoate mass, then another …. The hair-pinned legs jerk open a spasm at a time and his upturned face peeps through his open legs to the audience. Now his arms come through his legs, enabling him to hold them up while at the same time looking more creature-like. A thing on its back. (pp. 40-41)

While some might expect a 'naturalistic' portrayal, as far as this is possible, others will be open to an obviously theatrical one, such as Berkoff's, or that of Cambridge University ADC, who performed the beetle *compositely*: several actors in black moving and climbing leggily as one (Edinburgh Festival Fringe, 2009).

A wiser specific RQ however might be:

(i) Do they do the beetle? If so, how? If not, is something else put in its place?

As well as, with a nod to 'fidelity':

(ii) Is Gregor focalised (as in the novel)? If so, how?

I address these specific RQs below, in the light of the more general question of theatrical affordances.

The two adaptations of *Metamorphosi*s to which the remainder of this paper is devoted were both performed both in Edinburgh in August 2013 – the first by Resuscitate at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and the second by Contemporary Legend Theatre as part of the Edinburgh International Festival. Although Resuscitate would have 'signed themselves up' and paid their own expenses, and Contemporary Legend Theatre would have been invited, productions at *both* Festivals are expected to push artistic boundaries. While contrasting in many ways, both productions utilise a range of theatrical affordances in ways completely unpredictable from the novel alone.

Below, then, I apply the notion of *affordance* to theatre, using it to contest the prescriptive 'fidelity discourse' when it comes to stage adaptations, and provide an empirical study of two adaptations of (as indicated, something rare in the adaptation literature). But how was the data to be collected? Assuming it is agreed that the production as a whole is of interest, with the performance(s) viewed being seen as representative, it seems to me that the only real choice is fieldnotes, made during or immediately after the performance. Ideally the researcher will attend more than one performance; ideally she will go with a companion who will share recollections of details. The fieldnotes of course need to be focussed, addressing the chosen RQs. I therefore made fieldnotes on both productions immediately after watching them, supplemented with observations from my audience companions, as well as from associated documentation: the flyer for (i), the programme for (ii).

I am less interested in making comparisons with Kafka's novel as at looking at how the affordances of modern theatre, in particular digitalisation, are creatively drawn on in these adaptations.

The Resuscitate Theatre production

The Resuscitate production of *Metamorphosis*, performed at the Merchants Hall, to a small audience in Edinburgh, August 1 – 10 2013, is "inspired by the original" but "retell[s] Kafka's tale with a new and surprising twist" (flyer blurb). And it does. The question is indeed '**Do** they do the beetle?' 'Resuscitate' don't have a beetle at all: the metamorphosis in question is not from human to insect but from young to old. And

Kafka's male Gregor has become a female Grega. The script is devised, using modern English.

How is this done and how is it sustained? One key to this production is indeed digitalisation. The stage itself is a small rectangular area, in front of a wall, constituted by boards, on which a small screen is mounted at about head height on the right hand side. On the left hand side is the door joining Grega's room with the rest of the house. Grega thus remains in the foreground; we only see the family, in black and white (and hear what they say) on the screen. As regards interiority, although Grega (like Gregor) does not speak, and even though (or because) only the opinions of *the rest of her family* are actually (and strongly) voiced, we are *implicitly* invited to share Grega's perceptions, thoughts and feelings.

The affordance of theatricality immediately comes into play. We start by seeing young Grega 'in bed', i.e. on a mattress and pillow, vertical against the wall. She wordlessly goes through three cycles of waking and getting up and going to work: she rises, has a cigarette, makes a hot drink, takes a Lithium pill, is phoned by her employer to check she's on the move, and once on the bus briefly watches an episode of *Friends* – shown on the screen. Each cycle is performed at a faster and more frantic pace than the previous one, 'physical theatre'-style movements indexing Grega's panic[5]. The set is then darkened. On the screen we see images of hair changing to grey and skin changes: symbols of the process of this metamorphosis. We then see the actual transformation: old Grega (a kindly old woman, wearing a bun and woollen stockings, and identical spectacles to those of her younger self), a puppet with three operators, for her feet, hands and head[6].Still present, through exuberant physical movement young Grega expresses delight at not having to go to work. At the same time, she and we hear the family expressing concern about Grega's lateness, as we watch them on the small screen. The mother is spineless, the father angry, Grete is sympathetic and constructive.

While young Grega remains at the back of the stage, on her 'vertical' bed (as if she is looking down at the scene), old Grega takes her pills and makes herself a hot chocolate. Her pill jar (and money jar) are small versions of young Grega's full size ones. She opens a box containing her 'stereotypical old person' belongings – an inhaler, her knitting, some false teeth – and knits. Young Grega watches with interest and amusement. Old Grega has a cat (operated as a puppet), which she delights in and strokes and which shows her affection, (underlining her loneliness). When she (and we) hear the family arguing about what to do with her, she passes her money jar under the door.

Food on a tray is put under the door but old Grega (like Gregor) can't eat it properly; she loses two teeth. On the small screen Grete tells her parents that Grega now has a cat for company. Father is angry: another mouth to be fed. Old Grega watches television, shown on the screen: the introduction to Panorama, featuring elderly abuse in care homes. She switches the TV off.

During the night the cat escapes: we watch its movements on the screen (via a camera on its collar?). It creates havoc, knocking over the goldfish bowl, then comes back

into old Grega's room – with a dead goldfish. The following day Grete takes away the cat. Trembling, old Grega smashes her family photograph.

Grete comes in and she and young Grega express the awfulness of the situation, using parallel dance movements. The play concludes with young Grega and old Grega, in communication with each other, simultaneously swallowing an additional Lithium pill to take their own life.

Digitalisation in this production allows us to appreciate not only precisely what Gregor hears, but also, as she is in the foreground throughout (embodied as human and as puppet) and the family are distanced, to infer what she is feeling and thinking. Her own, very motivated actions are responses to their uncaring, hostile ones and this theatrical focalisation of Grega allows the audience to both comprehend and sympathise with her.

The flyer for this production refers to 'the way society treats the vulnerable' – for which wider issue 'old Grega' is a metaphor. While Kafka's 'worker/ant/beetle' functioned in a similar way but stressed a particular vulnerability, Resuscitate's production retains a critical focus on the unfairness of what happens to the marginalised, with specific reference to elderly women.

One obvious way in which Resuscitate's production differs from Berkoff's is that in the latter, "Gregor was seen through [the family's] eyes and they brought him to life by acting as a chorus for him, speaking about his needs – 'What's he doing now?' " (1995: 28). Resuscitate in contrast put Grega in the foreground (literally), and the family are seen through her eyes (we never even see Mother and Father in the flesh), as they are through Gregor's in Kafka's novel, and hence through the audience's eyes too. The adaptation by Contemporary Legend Theatre similarly puts Gregor in the foreground, but to an even greater extent.

The Contemporary Legend Theatre production

Contemporary Legend Theatre's *Metamorphosis* is a one-man performance by Taiwanese actor (and Director) Wu Hsing-kuo, accompanied by an orchestra of nine Chinese instruments and a cello. It was performed at the Kings' Theatre, Edinburgh, August 10 – 12 2013, to large audiences. Wu Hsing-kuo, as Gregor/the beetle (together and as one) sings and dances throughout; Gregor is thus again focalised. And while the 'one-man show' genre allows a focus on the human individual, the other characters are not quite backgrounded, as

Fig. 1. A one-man performance by Wu Hsing-kuo. Performed at the Kings' Theatre, Edinburgh, August 10–12, 2013. Photos by Kuo Cheng-chan and provided by Contemporary Legend Theatre.

Wu also performs Grete. This *Metamorphosis* is sung, in the manner of Beijing opera, in Mandarin Chinese, with English surtitles at the top left and right above the stage. When he is not wearing/carrying the ornate 'beetle' costume, Wu also dances and performs a range of acrobatic feats. The production is more a portrayal of the human condition through a lens of Eastern philosophy (in the programme, Wu writes: "even a little bug can float in endless time and endless space") than about the marginalisation and abuse of the vulnerable. Wu adds:

> This production is emphatically personal
> This is my Kafka, and Wu Hsing-kuo's metamorphosis!
> This is Western Existentialism, but also Eastern Nirvana!

This *Metamorphosis* also draws on Kafka's other writings: his love letters, and 'Before the Law', a fable within *The Trial*. It is divided into six scenes (as documented in the programme): A Dream/The Awakening/The Door/Love/Inhibition/Flying, of which Awakening, Love and Inhibition bear some narrative resemblance to the novel. Digital projection, largely black and white, is a key part of this visually-striking production from the start. With its ability to show continuous moving images, digitalisation here provides more than and is more powerful than a mere 'backdrop' – and more powerful than Berkoff's cyclorama: a large curtain which, through moving lighting, allowed "huge beetle shadows of the group downstage" to "slide and shudder over [it]" (Berkoff, 1988: 110). Digital projection in Contemporary Legend Theatre's production is far less limited.

The production opens with a dream: digital projection on huge screens at the back of the stage shows seas, mountains (as if we are flying over them), abstract shapes, Chinese ideograms, a small person, and a bed on the left. The protagonist is sitting at the left of the stage, watching, for some time. A black ball lands on the bed. A white cocoon hangs from the ceiling. A clock chimes, and the light changes with daybreak. Centre stage is a large white 'ice mountain', streaked with geometrical lines, with a path going up the side. A bed descends. A huge beetle comes through an opening, shocking in its size and detail (see above), and dances, Beijing-opera style. Its waving antennae are long, feathery, pheasant feathers – peacock-like at the bottom. The beetle's 'hands' are however flesh coloured.

When the dancing ceases, the beetle changes again to 'skin' – in a white skin-tight suit, with head markings – suggesting human vulnerability. This beetle hangs up-

Fig. 2. A one-man performance by Wu Hsing-kuo. Performed at the Kings' Theatre, Edinburgh, August 10–12, 2013. Photos by Kuo Cheng-chan and provided by Contemporary Legend Theatre.

side down from top of the ice mountain, facing the audience. The family's knocking on the door (on both sides of the stage) is shown through digital projection onto the large backscreens, with dramatic shaking of the large door knob. Gregor sings about his problems getting back through the door – echoing the novel. Father's, Mother's, Sister's and the Chief Clerk's words are incorporated into the lyrics: we hear their voices as part of the installation.

There is then another metamorphosis. Chairs, table and a dress come down from the ceiling. Enacting Gregor's sister, who brings him food on a tray, wobbling in with bound feet, Wu then goes through an elaborate routine of putting on feminine make-up and costume. This scene includes a projection of the protagonist's face from a different angle. Black and white petals come floating down. She wobbles up the mountain, losing one shoe after another, and destroys her musical instrument. Wu, first in a white shirt and black trousers, and finally black jacket and underwear, again suggesting vulnerability, then embraces his beloved painting - of a woman delicately coiffured (rather than wearing fur, as in the novel). Now Gregor, Wu clings onto it to but is attacked by apples thrown by his father, digitally projected as a host of large red apples rising up, and is injured.

The beetle lies still, apparently lifeless, a carapace, now a separate entity from Gregor. A projected, distinctly Western image of Kafka, in a stylish hat, talks to and encourages Gregor. Wu as Gregor in his skin-tight white suit turn talks to and worships the bug/carapace, both on stage and as projected on the screen, pleading with it not to die, and carrying it up the mountain. He walks into the light, through the door in the ice mountain. The beetle dances, suggesting freedom and release, and finally ascends.

Jonathan Mills, the Edinburgh International Festival Director, refers in the programme to this as "a uniquely 21st century approach to Peking Opera to shed new light on a European classic". This is clearly in part a reference to the digitalisation, about which Wu jokes, mimicking Kafka's famous opening to *Metamorphosis*:

> 'One morning, a Peking Opera actor wakes up to find himself surrounded by sets of electric technology….. He grumbles some incomprehensive sounds, incapable of communicating with others!' (programme, np, quotes in original)

adding "The next generation's life is governed by electronic technology, interactive games and the Internet. This is the reality we need to face". Wu's dramaturg, Keng Yi-Wei, observes: "traditional performance is surrounded by multimedia, which symbolises modernity". Modernity indeed entails an on-going and often difficult metamorphosis, living as we do with ever-developing information and communication systems.

Beyond this, digitalisation in this *Metamorphosis* affords foregrounding through visual and aural enhancement. In the novel, when the family knocks on Gregor's bedroom door, there is a 'cautious tap' from his mother, followed by 'his father was already knocking, gently, yet with his fist', and when the Chief Clerk has arrived, his father is 'again knocking on the door'. (This contrasts with the ring of the front door bell, by the Chief Clerk from Gregor's company.) In this adaptation, the cumulative

effect of the knocking is rendered through the visualised, projected vibrations of the huge door knob. A second foregrounding is the double visualisation of Wu Hsing-kuo as (as Grete) she at length applies her make-up: we see the actor on the stage, and her face projected – not onto the large back screen, but on a smaller, closer one, her face in relative close-up, allowing a reading of her reflective, fantasising mental state. A third foregrounding is the upsurge of huge red apples on both sides of the back screen. In the novel, Gregor's father was "shying apple after apple" and his mother "begged for her son's life". The huge apples visually portray the significance of this act. Fourthly, having Kafka appear in digitalised form to talk to the actual, embodied Gregor on the stage, allowing their interaction in two different modes, nicely underlies the post-modern nature of Wu Hsing-kuo's mystical rendering. It is also a nod to Kafka's authorship of the original, classic novel.

Conclusion

This exploration of two adaptations of *Metamorphosis* points to why it is not only epistemologically impossible for adaptations to be 'faithful' to Kafka's novel, but also that fidelity is not a productive aim, for the positive reason of theatre's very special, and very rich, affordances. Digitalisation is a relative newcomer here, but a powerful one. While digitalisation can facilitate naturalistic theatre, its visual and aural capacity is such that it also affords a range of *theatrical* contributions to any adaptation (or indeed stage play): not only to its visual/aural impact, but to the particular interpretation. While *Metamorphosis* has been performed perfectly well very recently without digitalisation (e.g. David Farr and Gísli Örn Garðarsson's adaptation, which they also directed, at the Lyric Hammersmith, 2013), the two productions explored here – which used digital projection in very different ways – illustrate its value as a theatrical affordance. While it would seem artistically insensitive to suggest digitalisation has improved theatre, given the rich, vast range of *other* available affordances, and the importance of imagination, it is certainly a welcome resource, in particular for its facilitation of interiority – if this is what a Director wishes to show.

Digitalisation does not, I suggest, offer anything to adaptations that it does not – very valuably - offer other stage plays (beyond further ways to acknowledge the sourcetext). And while a Director may choose not to use digitalisation, it would be a pity if this was because it afforded something the novel did not. Here, it *did* afford something Kafka's novel does not, but digitalisation as an affordance is not alone in this. Those who take the hard-line position that novels should simply never be adapted for the stage because they cannot be will always be negative and disappointed. Those who are open to the possibility of stage adaptations of novels as being something potentially wonderful, like all theatre, and who embrace theatre as a crucially visual, showing medium, will welcome its enriching affordances, of which digitalisation is just one, to facilitate a range of interesting, non-deferential interpretations.

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1 For example, reviewing Elevator Repair Service's *The Sound and the Fury*, Paul David Young writes "[Faulkner's] novel is read verbatim ... Characters speak their dialogue, adding 'he said' or 'Dilsey said' " (2008: 52-53).

2 An adaptation which has been used by other Directors.

3 Or even of mice running under the seats, as anyone who has experienced *Honey I Blew Up the Kids* at Disneyland will know. While associated with film, the same technique is afforded to (and by) theatre.

4 Edinburgh International Festival, 2013 - http://www.eif.co.uk/metamorphosis (accessed Nov. 11 2103).

5 Berkoff describes something similar: Amon (the actor playing Gregor in Tokyo):
executes a simple walk showing his progress through the day. He becomes tired and during the walk he looks at his watch, also in rhythm, until it looks like a video playback as he repeats the gesture with exactly the same expression of horror each time at his lateness (1995: 13).

6 In the production the three puppet operators wear black and white, but not the large spectacles.

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In Between Frames 2.0.: Time, Image and Remediation in Photography and Video Art (Two Case Studies)

Abstract:

The present essay addresses a number of issues related to contemporary visuality such as manipulation, quotation, remediation, unstable mediums, hybrid art discourse, and cross-referentiality, proposing the concept of In Between Frames as the main theoretical instrument. The term In Between Frames describes the median zone in arts and media productions, the "interstice" that breaks with appearances and conventions, and that defies any predictable accounts and established principles related to medium, technology, cultural patterns, or power configurations. Crucial in defining the conceptual and functional dimensions of being In Between Frames is the time factor. The artworks discussed here – Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80) and Adad Hannah's "video stills" – opt for an atypical temporality, one that undermines not only the narrative, understood in the traditional sense as a flow of sequences in time, but also – and this is my main argument here – the very definition of their own medium (photography and video, respectively). Undermining, as I will demonstrate, is not simply an act of negation, but rather a process of *remediation*: photography turns into film, and video aspires to the condition of photography – a way to recuperate, reevaluate, recite and recycle a medium by turning into its opposite.

Keywords: Medium, temporality, visual manipulation, photography, video, remediation, spectatorship.

Introduction

Firstly, *In between Frames* was an exhibition.[1] Actually, this came second since the concept was first, a concept born from a dialogue between an artist, a curator and a theorist. The present essay expands the theoretical premises formulated in the exhibition's catalogue and implicitly in our initial dialogue – hence the mark 2.0. – to address a number of issues related to the avatars of contemporary

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visuality: manipulation, quotation, remediation, unstable mediums[2], hybrid art discourse, and cross-referentiality.

In this sense, I propose the term In Between Frames to describe the median zone in arts and media productions that breaks with appearances and conventions. At the same time, it is a potential instrument for analytical and critical reflection on the same production area. Thus, In Between Frames is the locus of the "interstice," of that controversial in-between-ness that defy any predictable accounts and established principles related to medium, technology, cultural patterns, or power configurations. In this sense, In Between Frames reflects equally the unstable condition of the medium in specific cases in photography and video, and the changeable nature of the conceptual models (or "frames") in today's culture and society.

The notion of "frame" is employed here in both literal and figurative senses, that is, it is understood both as an instrument of visualization, and as a conceptual pattern. On the one hand, "frame" is seen in a formal, phenomenological and technological sense, as the element that defines an artistic or media image and its spectatorship. From this perspective, frame is what defines art or media, the matrix of visuality, a meaning that is rooted in Roland Barthes' definition of "the tableau" (formulated via Diderot, Brecht and Eisenstein). The latter, writes Barthes "is a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view." (1986, 173) Elaborating on the idea, Barthes continues: "The scene, the picture, the shot, the cut-out rectangle, here we have the very *condition* that allows us to conceive theater, painting, cinema, literature, all those arts, that is, other than music and which could be called *dioptric arts.*"(1986, 173). It is precisely this definition of the frame as a cut-out rectangle, "irreversible and incorruptible," that is questioned by the works analyzed here, thus deliberately engaging a polemic with their own visual identity. On the other hand, "frame" is understood here in a metaphorical sense, as a conceptual framework, as an interface for different mechanisms of signification. Seen from this viewpoint, the works discussed here represent a way to explore what lies between or behind these frames, established as definitive models through various aesthetic, institutional and ideological imperatives.

Crucial in defining the conceptual and functional dimensions of being In Between Frames is the time factor. Both cases discussed below opt for an atypical temporality, one that undermines not only the narrative, understood in the traditional sense as a flow of sequences in time, but also – and this is my main argument here – the very definition of their own medium (photography and video). Undermining, as I will later demonstrate, is not simply an act of negation, but rather a process of *remediation*: photography turns into film, and video aspires to the condition of photography – a way to recuperate, reevaluate, recite and recycle a medium by turning into its opposite. My analysis takes the works of Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80) and Adad Hannah's "video stills" as test cases for the arguments formulated above.

Movement, time and image in assorted combinations

Most commentators consider Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80) "canonical" examples of contemporary photography, but also an emblem for what was loosely called postmodernism. Such a claim is based on the ability with which Sherman uses mass-media codes, manipulates techniques of representation, employs self-referentiality and feminist discourses, makes parodic comments and ingenuous image appropriations. The latter refers to her photographic strategy to appropriate or re-construct well-known images and icons from the art history (e.g. Caravaggio) or contemporary popular culture (e.g. cinema). The series in discussion here, *Untitled Film Stills*, are organized in a series of 69 black-and-white photographs, where Sherman poses herself in various melodramatic guises that evoke the stereotypical feminine characters of B-grade movies from the 1950s and 1960s. The characters she creates are either ingénue girls or eye-catching vamps, either housewives or party "Lolitas". Although the images look exactly like the scenes from the films they try to imitate, the photographs enact a "drama" which *we know* is not real and in which the protagonist is not a Hollywood star, but the artist herself.

Fig. 1. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #21*. 1978. Black and white photography. Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Fig. 2. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #15*. 1978. Black and white photography. Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Adad Hannah's trademark works are still videos, a sort of *tableaux vivants* depicting, sometimes, banal scenes with ordinary people, other times highly staged and elaborated compositions. Unusual is the fact that the sequences are not unfolding: the actors are motionless, the scene is frozen, the time is suspended, thus giving the viewer the impression of a perfect still in spite of the fact that the video is actually running.

In front of these *tableaux vivants* the viewer realizes only after a while that what he/she is watching is not a photography, or a static image, but a video recording of a performance now played back on the screen. The "trick" is unveiled only by the little, almost indiscernible, imperfections of the actors' playing: eye blinking, breathing, swaying bodies. Among Hannah's stills we should mention *Room 112* (2004) a series of videos in which a few actors enact typical moments of TV broadcasts taking place in domestic interiors: interviews, soap-operas, sitcoms; *Mirroring the Musée* (2008), a performance-based video staged in a museum in which "actors" holding a mirror remain immobile for the entire duration of the shot. The video is showed on two flat monitors hanged on the wall in the exhibition. Thus, the video looks like a picture among pictures, a framed view among other frames – a way to comment and critically manipulate museum's typical display solutions. Another series is *The Russians* (2011), a body of work that exists somewhere between the candid documentary snapshots of Robert Frank, the highly staged images of Jeff Wall, and the mid 19th century parlour pastime of *tableaux vivants*.

Fig. 3. Adad Hannah, *Mirroring the Musée*. 2008. Video still. Video installation with two HD videos (4 min 42s and 6 min 5s). Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec.

Fig. 4. Adad Hannah, *Room 112*. 2004. Video still. Two-channel video installation, 14 min 11s.

What both Sherman's and Hannah's works have in common is the specific manipulation of time that affect their visuality and mediality. In the case of Cindy Sherman, the work persuades the viewer that the image one sees is actually part of a larger filmic narration. In this sense, each depicted sequence becomes a moment of "hyper-time": something that refers and links to other moments of the story that presumably exist yet are not effectively present or visible. This is a way to outsource the narrative in the hands and minds of the viewers: the latter are left to construct their own a story starting from the image they see, while linking it to other imaginary moments of the story (however, with links that prove to be broken). If it is to keep the same cyberculture-in-

spired vocabulary, then Adad Hannah's suspension of time can be deemed "runtime error." If in computer science this phrase names an error that occurs during the execution of a program, in our case, it describes a deviation from the usual "execution" of narration, of the time-flow, leaving instead for the viewer an image with a scene stuck in a unique moment.

So, can we speak about Sherman's photographs as an image of movement, now frozen by the intrinsic limits of the medium of photography? Or, to invert the terms, are they possibly movement-images? The analogy with the famous notion developed by Deleuze is tempting. Especially because it might be helpful to better explain the manipulation of temporality in this series of works. As Deleuze himself so very often has proceeded, I will borrow freely the term and give it an adapted sense. Deleuze defines movement-image as following:

> "[t]he movement-image gives rise to an image *of* time which is distinguished from it by excess or default, over or under the present as empirical progression: in this case, time is no longer measured by movement, but is itself the number or measure of movement (metaphysical representation). (…) The movement-image is fundamentally linked to an indirect representation of time, and does not give us a direct presentation of it, that is, does not give us a time-image. (*C2*, 271)

We can comment Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* as particular instances of Deleuze's "movement-images" and this is due to their capacity to provide "an image *of* time" expressed not through excess but, obviously, by default. Thus, *Untitled Film Stills* provide only an *indirect* image of time. The latter exists in this series only as a fiction; it is not measured by movement (the photography is a static medium par excellence), but it is a measure *of* movement: there should be – we are told – a "movie" from which these images are extracted. But, as we find out, in *Untitled Film Stills*, neither the action *per se*, nor the films do exist. However, these images are able to produce a "cinematographic illusion," one that has the power to change, if not the ontological status of the photography, then its perceptual status, that is, to turn, perceptually, photography into film. Nevertheless, the result is neither "pure" photography nor "pure" film, but something in between. Something in between frames…

In contrast with Sherman's images that tend to be a measure of movement (or movement-images) Hannah's images are a pure representation of time. Or, to keep the Deleuzian analogy, they might be assimilated to time-images. According to Deleuze,

> [t]he time-image does not imply the absence of movement (even though it often includes its increased scarcity) but it implies the reversal of the subordination; it is no longer time which is subordinate to movement; it is movement which subordinates itself to time. It is no longer time which derives from movement, from its norm and its corrected aberrations; it is movement as *false movement* as aberrant movement which now depends on time" (*C2*, 271).

Indeed what one can firstly remark to Hannah's videos is their scarcity of movement. The actors "frozen" in the middle of their actions cannot "generate" time; their

movement is a "false movement" which is subordinated to time. At Hannah, in the words of Deleuze, "the anomalies of movement become the essential point instead of being accidental or contingent." (*C2*, 128) Thus, they become direct presentations of time. Consequently, as Deleuze explains,

> "We no longer have an indirect image of time which derives from movement, but a direct time-image from which movement derives. We no longer have a chronological time which can be overturned by movements which are contingently abnormal; we have a chronic non-chronological time which produces movements necessarily 'abnormal', essentially 'false'. It can also be said that montage tends to disappear in favour of the sequence shot, with or without depth." (*C2*, 129-130)

Certainly, the minimal role assigned to montage (seen mostly in its cinematographic sense, as a dynamic and logic correlations between shots), or perhaps even more often, its complete absence is something that characterizes Hannah's videos. But the most evident feature of his works – both aesthetically and technically – is the use of "movements necessarily 'abnormal', essentially 'false'" produced by a "chronic non-chronological time". Video images are after all a static moment that refuses to unfold. This way of using time – and the fake movement it subordinates – is precisely what questions, if not quite collapses, the video as a medium. Video ceases to be video in its typical utterance – i.e. a continuum of images unfolded in time, appropriating instead the status of photography.

What can be deduced from the examples discussed above is that both artists use temporality in an illusionist manner: images present a story that doesn't exist, they rely on an absent temporality, although they suggest the presence of both story and temporality. Instead of presenting a story these works act to *presence-ing* it: they put forward an arrested moment, a present moment without past or future, of an equally illusionary narrative. It is then, particularly this *trompe le temps* effect that functions as a disturbing element for both narration and the medium.

It's about time (manipulation)

If we take a quick look around the art world, we find out that Sherman and Hannah are not the only artists who are preoccupied by manipulating time with visual consequences. One of the artists who effectively employ the image of time passing in his art is the Japanese-American On Kawara. His famous *Today Series*, begun in January 1966 and which still continues until today, consists in, until now, over 2000, canvases. Each panel contains nothing but the date and year in which it was painted, executed in a precise calligraphy. Talking about this amazing enterprise, art historian Pamela M. Lee writes that, "the intelligence of his work rests in its endless questioning of the presentness of art" (289). Indeed, his series depicts an "interminable now", where "*every day* – even tomorrow, even yesterday – is today" (Lee, 293). Like On Kawara's date panels, Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* seem to be unable to rise above their par-

ticularity, i.e. of their particular time. But in fact, what they present is not an "interminable now" of our time, but a "permanent moment" of a certain story situated somewhere in time; of a certain pastness and futurity of an imagined film.

Another way to deal with time as material for art, this time pointing not so much to presentness, but rather to endlessness, are the experimental films of Andy Warhol. For example, the film *Sleep* (1963) is a real-time recording (six hours) of a… sleep. In this case, time is controlled not at the level of narrative but as projection. The time is "actually faked," as Warhol describes it, not in the performance, though, but in the looping of the footage. Another film that manipulates time as a "perpetual present" is *Empire* (1964), an eight-hour static footage of the Empire State Building from dusk until dawn: the image is (almost) unchanging, but the medium that plays the film continues to move. The film was described by art critic Gregory Battcock as a "timeless 'real' time" (45), where, I would add, "timeless" is the apparent infinite duration of the film, while the "real" is identifiable in the slowly atmospheric and light shifts. As Pamela M. Lee suggests, *Empire* stands as an allegory for time located elsewhere; it speaks about a time with a future vector, while our body is anchored in the present. By watching it, we experience our body as a duration machine. Lee very pertinently observes that "these films, then, are one and the same time both *representation* and *experience* of duration, both subject and object. And that movement between the literalness of real time experienced by the viewer, its manipulation by Warhol as representation, and the projection into the future as constructed by the medium is a kind of bad infinity" (a term to which I will return shortly) (280-281). These films, to which we should add the twenty–five hour experiment "****", also known as *Four Stars* (1967), are remarkable particularly for their insightful and, surely atypical, treatment of temporality. "Their brilliance", writes Pamela M. Lee, "lies in their *seemingly* literal relationship to time – of extended duration – and this feature, coupled with the works' deadpan systemacity, amounts to the cinematic equivalent of minimalism" (279)[3].

Fig. 5. Andy Warhol, *Empire*. 1964. Black-and-white film, silent. 8 hours 5 min. at 16 frames per second. Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Indeed, Warhol's films represent a literal relationship to time: they present certain fragments of reality, recorded in a certain moment, offered *as they are* to the viewer. The only way in which subjectivity is involved – if one might call it that way – is in the extreme length of the films, unbearable for any viewer. Warhol films' resistance to spectatorship, their inherent boredom was read by some commentators, including Pamela M. Lee, as a possible ironic strat-

egy against technology's speed, or a satire upon the distracted masses. What seems to be certain is that Warhol himself never saw his films entirely. This is obviously not the case with Adad Hannah's "stills". Not only that they don't rely on an impossible spectatorship, but their video images, static as they are, do not have a literal relationship to time: what they show is not a direct image of a motionless object or body being there, but an indirect image of an action that refuses to unfold. *Representation* and *experience* of duration seems to be split.

Two other artists should be mentioned in this context, both committed to challenge the medium and spectatorship via means of time manipulation, but in a different manner than Warhol's. Michael Snow's *See You Later* (1990) and Douglas Gordon's *24 Hours Psycho* (1993), treat the moving image as a fluid substance with no clear (time or otherwise) limitations. In Snow's work, a banal sequence of, normally, 30 seconds is stretched in Super-Slow-Motion to last for almost 18 minutes. The staged action is intentionally mundane, but the extreme slowness of the image transforms it into an exceptional visual piece where the viewer is prompted to discover the subtlest of details. Gordon's work, instead, treats a Hollywood film as a readymade: he took a classic Hitchcock oeuvre and spread it out to a length of 24 hours (on a running time of two frames per second). Even more evident than in the case of Warhol's films, here spectatorship seems impossible, as is any comprehensible reading of the piece. The fundamental strategy of these films is the control and the manipulation of time at the level of projection, hence transforming time in duration and motion in stasis.

Unlike these artists, who use the literal time of the action (Warhol) and the extended time of the projection (Snow and Gordon), Hannah manipulates time *at the level of footage*: this precise moment is the faked time (actors frozen in pose and filmed as such). Even if there is a "technical" duration (the real-time running of the video player), the image tries to annul the time as a flow and to bring video to the condition of photography. If at Warhol, the viewer's body is the "duration machine" (Lee, 280), at Hannah, it is the actors' bodies that function as a duration machine: their frozen position induces an apparently perpetual time.

There is yet another aspect that makes the above examples and the works in discussion here dissimilar: while Warhol, Snow and Gordon's works have a marked beginning and a clear end (whatever extended in time would those be), this is not the case with Sherman and Hannah. Bringing up a certain moment from an uncertain place and then postponing its continuation *ad infinitum*, the narration refuses a fixed scheme, limited in time. Its boundaries go far behind and ahead the viewed moment in front of us. This occurrence of a continual or perpetual time can be related to Hegel's concept of "bad infinity". Hegel defines the term as an infinite repetition toward a goal that is never reached. This infinite "progress" is indeed the negation of the finite but not its overcoming. Bad infinity represents a permanent failure to sublate the inherent contradictions of the finite, or to transcend a certain (historical) moment. Bad infinity negates the very conditions of its possibility; it is a perpetual provisional state.

Seen from this perspective, Sherman's images fail to transcend the "immanence" of a single shot: functioning under the imperative of stillness, there is a reiterable definition of the respective "film" by the same image; the whole flux of the film is represented by a single image according to a circular logic. There is no *visible* progress, but a perpetual deferral, or, in other words, a "bad infinity". Hannah's videos illustrate in a more evident way the impossibility to reach the end and to accomplish the whole. One image equals the other, in no progression or logical development. Or, as Hegel writes, "Something becomes an other, but the other is itself a something, so it likewise becomes an other, and so on *ad infinitum*" (149). Being frozen in a scene that refuses to progress, each frame is practically equal with the other in a flux that points not to an end, but to a "bad infinity".

The medium is the passage

If artists such as Kawara, Warhol, Snow and Gordon contributed – assumedly or not – to undermine the perceptual "purity" of the medium, they remain, however, within their respective mediums: painting, film, video. Their works, radical as they are, don't negate the medium as such, but work with it, reaffirming it in its specific form (for example, slowing a film down is nothing but a way to point to its fundamental characteristics: that a film is a succession of shots in motion). Nevertheless, this is not the case with Sherman and Hannah's works, which strive to challenge and actually reverse the respective medium's established visual standards and technical principles. In other words, to manipulate medium's specificity. The latter much disputed expression is used here not in the positivist sense art critic Clement Greenberg (in)famously has given to it, but rather in the sense proposed by art theorist Rosalind Krauss, as "a pointing-to-itself" (4). In this sense, the works analyzed here point to their medium, but they do so by undermining its specificity.

A photograph, as it is usually defined, can only present an image of *what-has-been*. Not only that Sherman's photographs indicate also a sense of *this will be* (Barthes 1982, 96), but they also suggest a possible *this could be*. Not unlike the plot of a film. Although they don't have a discursive unity, they do have a certain imaginary possibility. The corollary is the fact that photography supersedes its own condition now translated into a filmic specificity. Or "nearly specificity" since, inevitably, their visual regime remains caught somewhere In Between Frames.

On the other hand, one of most important theorists of video, Yvonne Spielmann, defines video as "transformation imagery". As Spielmann explains,

> Whereas for photography and also for film the single image or a sequence of framed single images is what matters, video distinguishes itself by the fact that the transition between images are central and, even more so, that these transitions are always explicitly reflected and tested in new processes" (4).

It is precisely this transition between images that Hannah's videos challenge and contradict. Lacking any transitions and devoid of any movement *within* the individ-

ual frame, the videos condense time, thus remaining still in their photographic pose. Or, in other words, giving up the specificity of their video medium, just to make a passage towards a photographic condition. It is therefore stillness that facilitates this reversal. Deleuze sees the stillness of the cinematic image as a confrontation with photography. For him, the moment when film breaks down into stillness is a moment of self-referentiality of the medium; it is the moment when the viewer becomes aware of the film's existence as film, as a moving medium. However, this is not the case with Hannah's *Stills*. Lacking the immediate reference to images in movement (there are no other moving sequences with which still images to stand in contrast), they have a life of their own as *stills.* They tend to become – visually, although not technically – photography.

This process of transition from one medium to another is what media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin called *remediation*: "the representation of one medium in another" (45). The concept of remediation is an important contribution to the debates about (new) media, especially because it conceptualizes the relationship between old and new media not in opposition (or in a linear progression), but as part of a media genealogy that is based on connections and affiliations. While Sherman and Hannah's works "represent one medium into another", they are, however, particular cases of remediation. On the one hand, the particularity relies on the fact that while Bolter and Grusin insist that "remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital media", the works in discussion here are not what is generally called new media (they are, technically speaking photography and video, respectively). On the other hand, they are atypical remediation cases as long as the transfer, i.e. the remediation between one medium to another, takes place within the same work or media object. What is important to emphasize though, is that the source of the object's meaning, in this case, relies not in the absoluteness of the medium, but rather in its transitory character. The famous adage of Marshal McLuhan "the medium is the message" points to the non-specificity of the medium since the message can inhabit and refer to other mediums. Taking this idea a step further, Sherman's photographs and Hannah's videos prove that *the medium is the passage*. The passage to another medium.

Conclusion

As we have seen, time – or, to be precise, the unusual manipulation of temporality – equally defines and defies the meaning and the function of the medium in Sherman and Hannah's works. *Untitled Film Stills* are frontier-images between a presupposed previous (time) frame and an expected subsequent one; they belong to neither one, nor the other. They apparently link to other images but there is no real cinematic referent. There are only the recycled typologies depicted in the images that indicate that what we see should be pieces in a larger cinematic ensemble. But they have no clear position as they have no concrete context. As a consequence, they inevitably remain In Between Frames. If Sherman's image is the metonymic frame, Hannah's

image, is the sequence-plan; one is reduction, the other is extension. Since Hannah's video stills have no cuts, images are not referring to each other according to an internal (or external) correlative logic, dictated by diegesis or other visual determinants, but they are their own equal. Images are correlative as far as, frame after frame, they repeat themselves theoretically *ad infinitum*. "False continuity, then, takes on a new meaning, at the same time as it becomes the law" (Deleuze, 180). The image of this series breaks with the typical video art not by using juxtapositions and ruptures, but proposing a stasis of the visual flux, a halt somewhere in between actions, affections, and perceptions; or, in other words, *In Between Frames*.

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1 Exhibition *In between Frames*, curated by Horea Avram and Marius Tănăsescu. Artists: Adad Hannah, Anetta Mona Chişa & Lucia Tkáčová, Bettina Hoffmann, Jason Arsenault, Jérôme Delapierre, Perry Bard, Rozalinda Borcilă. National Museum of Contemporary Arts, Bucharest, 2011.

2 I prefer the plural form mediums instead of "media" in order to avoid confusions with the more general term mass media.

3 It is surely tempting to make a parallel between Minimalism and Warhol's slow time films. But, I argue, one aspect related to time makes them different. Minimalism's temporality belongs first and foremost to movement – the beholder's presence and deambulation within gallery – while Warhol's films are defined by motionless (non)action. His films can hardly be defined "movies". While minimalism is characterized by presentness, Warhol's films are characterized by a kind of "absentness". Minimalist works do not measure the time, but they create it through the viewing body. Warhol's films measure the time and simultaneously suspend it. It is important to remind here Michael Fried's comments on Minimalist art (in "Art and Objecthood", 1967) who points out the opposition between cinema and Minimalism. Cinema, he writes, is the "art that, by its very nature, *escapes* theater entirely" (140), and we should remind that "theatricality" was one of the main characteristics of Minimalist art. This is due especially to the differences of scale, to the phenomenological distance between what is projected and where we are standing as spectators.

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Appropriation as Alchemy in New Media: A Case Study

Abstract

Historically alchemists were concerned with the search or a lapis, the Philosopher's Stone, able to transmute lead into gold. A similar transformational process takes place digitally in the work of new media artists, whose computers and code are the equivalent of the philosopher's stone, becoming agents of transformation. This essay explores how both art history and popular culture is appropriated, manipulated and transformed by new media artist Jason Salavon (an American artist working in Chicago). Salavon's processes include performance of operations upon databases of appropriated images and the application of digital interference to recycled music, films, music videos and live television broadcasts using primarily C+ coding.

Keywords: new media, appropriation, digital alchemy, evolutionary biology.

Each thing has to transform itself
into something better,
and acquire a new destiny.

Paulo Coelho

In a preface to a catalogue of alchemical books written in 1944, C. J. Jung noted that many of these treatises had less to do with chemistry proper than a symbolic – even psychological – content, which expressed a collective unconscious through archetypes. Historically, alchemists were concerned with the search of a lapis, the Philosopher's Stone, able to transmute lead into gold. In the nineteenth century alchemy began to be applied in a more symbolic and philosophical fashion. Since its new goal was to undergo psycholog-

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ical and spiritual transformation as a means of accessing of the intellect through the senses, lead and gold became metaphors for internal states. At the same time, alchemy's focus shifted from the result of the transformation to the process. James Elkins has used the metaphor of alchemy to describe the working method and content of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings of the 1950s. A similar transformational process takes place digitally in the work of the Chicago-based contemporary artist Jason Salavon (b. 1970).

Salavon's computers and code are the equivalent of the philosopher's stone, becoming agents of transformation. The result is the production of an aesthetic through application of concepts reflective of his background in both fine art and computer science, combined with a burning interest in evolutionary biology. Salavon's works have in common the performance of computer operations on material appropriated from popular culture to produce an aesthetic that references the history of art and evolutionary biology simultaneously. These themes (popular culture, art history and evolutionary biology) are treated with a dual sense of irony and nostalgia. Salavon's conceptual aesthetic has developed through a variety of means, and, in this essay, his production to date is divided into two broad categories in order to trace his use of themes and materials in the transformational process of digital alchemy.

Relentless automation

Works that have in common the computer database fall into three categories: the first group consists of works that result from the performance of operations upon databases assembled by the artist; works that are the product of code applied to statistical data to create abstractions form a second category; and a third consists of works that create databases. An early work that merges elements of the artist's background as a computer game developer with his interest in evolutionary biology is *HeroTown1* (1998). Here software was written to generate 1024 unique superhero types autonomously based on a database of characteristics derived from existing models. The database generates new superheroes that conform to expected tropes but do not actually exist in comic books or computer games. The types, presented in a video component of the piece subtitled *Taxonomy*, in which each superhero becomes an individual for a half second, are then collected and presented as digital C-prints as panoramic group portraits. *HeroTown1* questions the human need for idealized role models, while recognizing that superheroes are typically outcasts or freaks who function on the fringes of society (a role also traditionally occupied by artists). At the same time the work references the commercial nature of the computer gaming industry and the derivative nature of many of its products. The *Taxonomy* created by Salavon's software references DNA's determination of bodily characteristics in human evolution.

One of Salavon's earliest assembled databases consisted of images of various cuts of beef (a taxonomy of types which at a cellular level are distinguished from each other based on principles of evolutionary biology). He then subjected that collection of images to a code that autonomously and relentlessly generated patterns from them. The

result was a series of works titled *Meat Doilies*, in which life and death merges with the fragile and decorative, while simultaneously parodying the presentation of meat platters on all-you-can-eat buffets. Any possible "function" of the original image is removed as it becomes part of a repetitive pattern. *Meat Doilies* also references a number of precedents from art history, including Rembrandt's presentation of sides of beef (and Bacon's appropriation of them), Jana Sterbak's dresses from the 1980s made out of flank steak (each titled *Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*), pop art of the 1960s, which made the common mass-produced object the subject of art, and pattern and decoration movement of the 1970s, which had as its goal the blurring of boundaries between high art and domestic craft. Similar references appear in Salavon's *Modern Lifestyle Mandala* (2002), which ironically juxtaposes the form of a Buddhist mandala, traditionally a metaphorical map to enlightenment (the basis of the pattern) with a content consisting of material goods (rejected by Buddha to achieve enlightenment). Simultaneously Salavon refers to the visual overload consistent with marketing strategies such as those employed by the GAP – where excessive piles of identical merchandise suggest to shoppers that they deserve to own a portion of American abundance. The *Modern Lifestyle Mandala* pokes fun at this marketing strategy by interfering with the order which makes it function, digitally transforming the products into a kaleidoscope of chaos.

Salavon has created several series of database-driven works in which the idea of patterning is developed in a more subtle way, through the merging of similar types of images. In the digital C-print *Every Playboy Centerfold, 1988-1997*, (1998) he explores and exploits the tropes of centerfold photography, while simultaneously creating an abstraction that denies their original function as objects of arousal. The individual original appropriated photographs are subjected to a mean averaging process conducted by code, resulting in an amalgamation that resembles the shroud of Turin and Gerhard Richter's photography-inspired blurred oil paintings, more than the nude women which make up their content. At the same time Salavon indicates the irony of a social situation that glorifies the nude as a time-honored subject of art history while decrying the same subject as pornographic (and thus not art) in a different, more functional context. In *Every Playboy Centerfold, The Decades* (normalized), (2002), Salavon completed an additional operation, normalization, which highlights similar color areas resulting in emphasis of the figure. These four images

Fig. 1. Jason Salavon, *The Class of 1967 & The Class of 1988*, 1998, Digital C-prints. Diptych in 2 sizes. 61" x 46.5" each. Detail shown: *The Class of 1967, right panel (the women).* Courtesy of the artist.

present a taxonomy of the centerfold, as changes in preferred poses (frontal versus profile), hair color, waist, chest and hip sizes are tracked through four decades in the shroud-like representations.

The obscuring of individual identity while preserving anthropological details also occurs in *The Class of 1967 & The Class of 1988* (1998). Here the popular culture source material consists of black and white yearbook photographs, which exist as a form of documentation of a particular moment of time, even though this type of photography is staged by the school that produces the yearbooks (which determines parameters for dress and posing) and to a lesser degree by the individuals depicted (who make other types of decisions about their appearance for a date they know they will be photographed) . Salavon created an amalgam of all of the students in his mother's graduating high school class from Fort Worth, Texas, and his own, twenty-one years later. Presented together they reveal differences in the preferred fashions and hairstyles of two points in the history of a specific place. The functional, quasi-documentary nature of yearbook photos as preserving each individual's life at the moment social independence is understood to occur – and more generally the idea of these photographs as markers of a specific time – are removed through the process of mean averaging and are transformed into a different type of documentation. In the spirit of the genre, Salavon has printed these works in two different sizes, to reflect the idea of a "portrait" versus a "wallet" photograph. Aesthetically these works are suggestive of Christian Boltanski's shrines to the victims of the holocaust – a body of work that frequently uses blurred photographs of individuals (who remain identifiable as such, even though they are not identified by name) in conjunction with other items, such as clothing and file boxes, to communicate preservation of archival information. While Boltanski frequently uses bare-bulb lights to illuminate the photographs in his installations, Salavon's works appear lit from within – as the bright white void exists where the details of facial features are expected and not delivered.

In 1999 Salavon began to source the images used in these amalgam works directly from the internet, which exists as a vast storehouse of information and images, easily the most prolific of current popular culture resources today. *76 Blowjobs*, (2001) utilizes the same process to remove individual detail and the function of images of fellatio. *Homes for Sale* (1999/2001/2002) are amalgams of realtor photos of single-family homes at the median price range in Chicago, Austin, Seattle and Los Angeles. Inspired in part by the artist's desire to purchase a home, these works visually reflect the late, form-dissolving style of J.M.W. Turner and the light and weather-effect driven paintings of the Impressionists. This is largely because the same concerns (light at various times of days, weather effects and seasons resulting in perceptual color differences) are manifest in the sourced images, which conform to local particularities (such as lot sizes and the frequency of rain in Seattle, for instance). Anyone who has searched for a home knows that what is presented in a realtor photograph is unlikely to re-present the reality of the property, and that after a while all houses begin to look alike (even

more so given the current trend in tract housing). Buying a house, after all, is a romantic dream usually divorced from the realities of home ownership and maintenance. Salavon's works produced by mean averaging, layering and justification – alignment of photographs of an equal size or at equal points – remind us that life is largely driven by averages used statistically to obscure individual results, whether test scores, gas prices or waist sizes.

Aesthetics of statistics

The apparent reliability of statistical data forms the basis for another set of works created by Salavon. Statistics do not in reality represent absolute truths, and are consistently subjected to shaping depending on the context in which they are presented. The questioning of universal truths, along with appropriation and irony, are hallmarks of postmodernism. Salavon shapes the presentation of statistics to yield an aesthetically pleasing outcome, and simultaneously prevents the data sets from functioning as originally designed. The information in Salavon's statistical works has been reframed as art, much as Warhol, Lichtenstein and other Pop artists repurposed prevalent popular culture forms of the 1960s as art. The closest art historical precedents for the aesthetics of works such as *Shoes, Domestic Production, 1960-1998* (2001), however, is Op art.

Fig. 2. Jason Salavon *Shoes, Domestic Production, 1960-1998*: *Fountain*, 2001, Digital C-print, 48" x 48". Courtesy of the artist.

Salavon's graphing of data tracing United States production of shoes into 31 categories, some of which overlap, have resulted in what he terms "psychedelic constellations." Digital C-prints provide different views of the same visualization structure. A DVD allows viewers to "fly through" the statistics, adding a virtual third dimension to the movement that in Op art paintings and Salavon's prints is a perceptual optical phenomenon. The result is the removal of the basic function of traditional information design (presentation of data in a way that is both easily readable and accurate). Salavon creates a visual experience that preferences the aesthetic over the intellectual. Yet, the work remains reflective of and dependent on the original concept, which reveals the end of domestic show production as "more profitable" labor standards abroad were exploited by American companies, and referencing it through the work's very structure. Shoes themselves are a lowly (quite literally) and humble object that can both form the basis for commonality (everyone wears shoes) and segregation (not everyone can afford Jimmy Choos). Shoes without the wearer suggest both presence and absence of the individual, as in the well-known case of Van Gogh's disguised double family portrait as a "pair" of left shoes.

The plotting of statistics graphically is a method of documentation that naturally results in this type of abstraction. *Height & Weight Distribution* (2001) takes what are in reality sets of controversial and contentious data having a bearing on everything from the economic impact that the current configuration of the "food pyramid" has on producers and distributors of milk, meat, grains and vegetables to the prevalence of eating disorders among teenage girls. Salavon maps the data in a way that means nothing beyond visual aesthetics – a fact underscored by the addition of a non-functional key to the images. Salavon's statistical works, in which numerical data is transformed digitally into art, might be used to pose questions about the source and reliability of data presented to a public who likely unaware of the "spin" typically given by advertisers, corporate executives and politicians. Yet the initial experience of these works inspires nothing but aesthetic contemplation of the formal elements of color and shape, and reference art-historical precedents such as Mondrian, Malevich or the late work of Kandinsky, all of whom merged theoretical concepts with presentation of formal elements.

Salavon uses the grid itself as a method for arranging information in works such as the predictive calendar in *The Sky, Chicago, 1998-2022* (1998), which also has an Op Art appearance, due in part to the variation of daylight hours in that city from Summer to Winter. The passage of time is calibrated using significant cultural dates (such as the 25th anniversary of John Lennon's assassination) and those of personal importance to the artist (including the prediction of his 50th birthday). Here Salavon blends one of the oldest methods for marking the passage of time (the passage from light to dark to mark a full day) with the predictive qualities made possible by computer technology. Again a transformation of digital information has occurred, resulting in a work that references the prevalence of photo calendars within popular culture and art history's traditional use of art to mark specific points in time.

Strictly digital information is abstracted and gridded to create two-dimensional patterns in other works by Salavon. *7956 Shades of White*, 1998 represents nearly eight thousand of the lightest colors available in the digital (RGB) realm. Salavon's use of the term "shade" is ironic, as these are in reality "tints." The term "shade" is used imprecisely by non-artists to indicate any variety of a color, without specific reference to whether that color was created with the addition of white or black. The random placement of these tints mirrors the placement of colors in palettes in programs such as Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop (which, while not arranged completely randomly will appear random to most users). White as an aesthetic exercise was accomplished by Malevich in his *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918) and was featured among the monochromatic palette of the 1960s Minimalists, whose low degree of differentiation suggested minimal amount of "art work" by the artist. Sol Lewitt in particular embraced grids and repetitive square forms as a method of transcribing mathematical data. Again Salavon references these art-historical precedents, while transforming them. While *7956 Shades of White* uses a fundamentally intellectual approach, and presents in the form of a grid, it also demonstrates to what degree (and in what great range)

computers are capable of producing exact colors, versus the manual method of mixing pigments. It is simultaneously simplified to the extreme (it is "only" white) and overloaded with specific digital information, which makes the idea or "concept" of white very complicated. *7956 Shades of White* only suggests that the artist conducted minimal work (for that is not the case). It is in fact a work with a high degree of differentiation – albeit digital differentiation – that mimics visual tropes associated with Minimalism.

The primary pigment colors of red, yellow and blue, along with white, gray and black, formed the basis of Piet Mondrian's Neoplasticism, which, like Malevich's Suprematism and van Doesburg's definition of Concrete Art provided a theoretical foundation for 1960s Minimalism. But Mondrian believed that art could have a curative utopian function – that perfect visual balance could solve social conflict (of theoretical if not practical concern to Mondrian living in a neutral country during World War I). The principles of Neoplasticism were applied to furniture and architecture by Rietveld, and to a degree by Le Corbusier in his Marseilles housing project (also a utopian enterprise). Salavon connects these artistic theories with principals of cellular automata reflective of evolutionary biology and emergent behavior as well as digital structures in computer code. The model in Salavon's *The Utopian Progress Automata* "builds" non-functional architectural forms out of colored and neutral blocks, creating various patterns through relentless automation of the programming. The blocks (which also represent limited "natural resources") visually reference child's toys, reflective of a time/space where universal harmony is plausible. While the formation of the structures may appear random to the viewer, they are in fact strictly rule-based. The very idea of "automating" or "programming" utopia is suggestive of both possibilities provided and fears triggered by computers.

Salavon uses computer simulation to model destructive forces in *The Domestic State Machine #1* (1999), a video installation in which four simultaneous points of view upon the same action (the movement of furniture in a domestic interior) are presented on monitors: a physics model that treats the room as if it were a die being rolled in a craps game controls the action. Four perspectives on each of nine simulations are conducted; in each the monitors reveal collectively a vision that cannot occur in nature (the ability to see an action from all four cardinal directions at once). This controlled chaos serves as an important counterpoint to the *Utopian Progress Automata* – unlike the simple blocks suggestive of childlike naivete, *The Domestic State Machine* has modeled furniture more like a doll house. In both there is not one state that is favored (a "win" versus a "lose"), only multiple possibilities of construction and disruption.

Salavon completes the ultimate disruption and reconstruction through digital transformation in *Flayed Figure, Male, 3277 1/2 square inches* (1998/2001). Art-historical precedents for flayed self-portraits include Michelangelo's self-representation as St. Bartholomew in the *Last Judgement* for the altar-wall of the Sistine Chapel. Marc Quinn's 1996 *No Visible Means of Escape*, and portrait sculpture *Self* (1991), made from his own frozen blood, are more recent articulations of the artist's body as artwork. For his *Flayed*

Figure, Salavon had the entire surface area of his skin digitally photographed. Hundreds of images of skin were then digitally divided into more than thirteen thousand half-inch squares and arranged vertically by luminosity from dark to light. Reproduced to scale, the resulting work simultaneously reveals more than the viewer expects and none of what the viewer expects from a self-portrait. The tradition of this genre is to reveal the individual identity of the creator as an individual record of achievements (as Picasso used them) or as a record of aging (in the case of Rembrandt, for instance). But Salavon presents another equally valid truth, by asserting that there is little separating the artist and the artwork (at least on some microscopic level). Salavon represents himself in terms of a particular vital (digital) statistic arranged in such a way to reflect formal concerns as a further expression of the conceptual aesthetic.

Art of the database

Salavon's interest in the merging of the concept and the aesthetic has lead him to develop code that allows him to direct computers to create works of art in a collaborative process. The result is the formation of databases of art that can then be displayed through a custom-designed browser interface, through video projection and as digital prints on canvas. In an early exploration of this process, Salavon developed Carpetmaker software to use automation to produce hundreds of aesthetically pleasing textile patterns later bound into a volume.

Fig. 3. Jason Salavon, *Golem*: *The Printer*, 2002. Various media. Dimensions variable (installation view). Courtesy of the artist.

Salavon's *Golem* of 2002 significantly expands and complicates the issues posed in the earlier software – a change indicated clearly in the choice of title. The Golem legend – a post-biblical, Jewish story of an automaton (a machine/man hybrid) – has been linked to everything from Mary Shelley's Frankenstein to cybernetics and the development of test-tube babies. The legend makes important distinctions between man and god – while man has the inherent ability to become creators (in God's image), the level of creativity (and imitation) is limited by sin; the creations of God are distinguished from the artificial creations of man by the presence of a soul. The golem, who received its life through language – the correct placement of letterforms on its body – presents a challenge to its human creator to acknowledge his primordial origins as soul-less matter. In each of the many variations of the story, the golem develops dangerous powers, and what was created as a servant becomes a threat to its human creator/master. Only through

the removal of certain letters from the golem can man regain control of what becomes a powerful monster (Levine 141). Like the medieval alchemist, the human responsible for golem's life is ultimately filling the role of a transformer of matter, rather than a "creator," as such. The significance of the language used to control the golem can be interpreted in terms of DNA, computer code, and art (as a visual language with identifiable formal components that can be rearranged *ad infinitum*).

In *Golem*, Salavon automated the production of 100,000 abstract paintings using code that he consistently modified during a five-month process to "direct" the aesthetics. Salavon analyzed paintings by abstract expressionists Diebenkorn, Hoffman, Rothko and Richter, analyzed for their stylistic characteristics, such as plane subdivision and color relationships, then code was written to replicate these principles. Salavon's purpose in *Golem* was to utilize what he terms "relentless" computer automation to create works that read as man made rather than machine produced. In fact they exist as more of a collaboration, since the artist compulsively oversaw the production process, "harvesting" images from the bank of computers daily and making changes to the code as a result of the output. The 100,000 paintings produced, which are numbered chronologically, demonstrate both the evolution of the code and the artist's increasing ability to manipulate the aesthetic result.

In addition to the stylistic mimicry of abstract expressionists, Salavon's *Golem* appropriates a number of other art historical issues, not the least of which is the very nature of art and the artist's role in its creation, first posed (if not completely theorized) by Marcel Duchamp's readymades beginning in 1917. The question of whether a machine can produce "art" was posed first by Jean Tinguely, who developed "meta-matic" drawing machines beginning in 1955. His initial intent was to declare a work of art itself as capable of a creative action that was always in process and thus never complete (Museum Jean Tinguely 41). But in fact the "meta-matics" were collaborations between humans and machines capable of producing something without function (art). The only possible "failure" by a "meta-matic," according to Tinguely, was the statistical impossibility of production of two identical works. In the earliest "meta-matics" the human activity was limited to choosing the drawing implements and placing the paper on the machine, while the "Cyclo-Matic" of 1959 used human cyclists, rather than electricity, as its driving force. Other of Tinguely's machines paired lack of function with movements modeled after humans to express both a fear of machines and the irony of their man-made creation as a larger part of culture in general. Any "product" of these machines was deemed secondary to the transformational process suggested by constant movement (Museum Jean Tinguely 59).

Tinguely's "meta-matics" have been rightly identified as preludes to the later-twentieth-century angst caused by computers as well as debates about the level of "creativity" made manifest in works produced with the aid of computer technology (Museum Jean Tinguely 44). Salavon extends, twists and complicates these notions in *Golem*. The computer is both a tool and a collaborator; the artist farms the images from an assem-

bled field of printers in a merging of technological and natural processes; parallels between computer code and DNA are reinforced. The printed nature of Salavon's resulting paintings turn abstract expressionist works into a pop-art format (comparable to Andy Warhol's silkscreens on canvas) and doubly question the exact nature of "high" art while parodying Warhol's desire to "be a machine."

While Salavon's aesthetic and mechanized process has precedents in the history of art, the underlying concept references the history of computer science. Each painting/print produced in the sequence conforms to the Turing Test developed to determine whether or not a computer program is successful at modeling human ability to think (as proof of intelligence.) While Tinguely wondered whether machines could make art, the Turing Test asks whether machines can think. In its modern manifestation, the latter test pits a human interrogator against two "unknowns" – one human and one computer. If, during the course of asking questions of each, the interrogator misidentifies the machine as human, the latter passes the intelligence test. Salavon's project turns the audience of these artworks into Turing's interrogator. Three methods of display (*Projection*, *Browser*, *Printer*) challenge viewers to consider the works as man-made in various time-space formats. The digital projection displays each painting for 6.5 seconds in short sequences, taking more than a week to display the entire collection of works. The browser displays the works as a database that can be perused by viewers, who can manipulate the size of the individual images (from micro to macro) and navigate through them using a dual-panel monitor and trackball interface designed by the artist. 100 of the works became unique objects when they were printed onto canvas using a large format Hewlett Packard printer. This latter enterprise reveals the digital nature of the "brushstrokes" – as pixelization evident in the printed paintings is not visible in either of the other formats.

Salavon's commission *Bootstrap the Blank Slate* for the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art's Digital Gallery also uses the principles of the RGB digital color model to inspire the creation of works that consist only of color and line. Launched in June 2003, *Bootstrap the Blank Slate* promotes a strictly formalist aesthetic articulated using programming language for structure and the internet as a method of data collection and distribution. Salavon has used Macromedia's *Lingo* to design a work that accepts viewer/user inputs (whether intentional or random) to create an ever-expanding database of "works of art" identified only by number. The artist explains: "sprouting from a singular null state, the piece records, converts, and stores the collective actions of its participants into an ever-growing population of image-pairs" (moca.org). Salavon's interest in evolutionary biology is expressed in his description of the image-pairs produced as genotypic and phenotypic (the former term expressive of the specifically genetic constitution of an organism, as distinct from its physical appearance; the latter, the environmentally *and* genetically determined observable appearance).

In Salavon's system, the viewer/user becomes part of the machinery used to generate works of art. The artist has provided the first color grid, which performs accord-

ing to a specific set of rules, discovered only through experimentation with the structure. Color choice, as well as line width, are controlled by clicking and dragging on the genotypic grid and other "rules" can be predicted as a result of experimentation with actions of the mouse. A viewer/user who masters the rules can produce "figurative" works and graffiti in addition to "abstract expressionist" digital paintings.

A clue to Salavon's theorizing of the artist's identity versus that of the viewer/user is provided in his artist's statement through his pairing of a quote from evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins: "It follows from the idea of evolution that there is one uniquely correct branching family tree of all living things" with a citation from *Genesis*: "And a river went out of Eden to water the garden" – a quote which was paraphrased by Dawkins for the title of a second book (moca.org). Salavon's *Bootstrap the Blank Slate* mimics – using digital color – the evolutionary paradigm. This work is another type of golem; its creator, responsible for the code that controls it, has turned over its operation to scores of viewers/users who make it work, not unlike Tinguely's cyclists powering a "meta-matic" drawing machine.

Bootstrap the Blank Slate can only be accessed after downloading plug-ins, which requires the viewer/user to customize his/her computer environment to be in harmony with that of the work to be viewed. The viewer is presented only with a color grid (the genotype). Any mouse movements made against the grid by the viewer are recorded and the work "builds" a visual representation of the color and movement (the phenotype). Browsing the pairs already created allows viewer/users to choose a different "parent" structure for subsequent submissions. The process appears limitless and deceptively simple (for the code that records and processes the activities of visitors/participants is complicated). While the viewer/user participates directly, contributing to the database assembled by Salavon's work, the artist retains authorship because the individual viewer/user is assigned only a number; his or her individual identity has been stripped in the process. The viewer/user is both essential to the process and dispensable.

While the work is somewhat collaborative in nature, and viewers/users might have a great deal of control (once they believe they've figured out how the piece works), Salavon's work does not allow them to retain "ownership" of works submitted, other than an assigned number in the database. Thus to an extent the user is manipulated by the artist to participate in the production of a desired database of "art" – a phenomenon aided by the accessibility provided by the internet. Salavon prefers the term "user connectivity" versus "interactivity" as a better estimator of the peer-to-peer role of the viewer/user in the *Bootstrap* environment – as new users connect to elements previously produced by other users rather than those fostered by the artist/programmer.

The title of the work embraces fundamentally different definitions of "bootstrap," creating yet another division between the identity of the artist/programmer and that of subsequent users/viewers. In popular vernacular, "bootstrapping" suggests the use of available resources to make the best of a particular situation (with minimal outside assistance) – in other words, "do the best you can with what you are given." Salavon's

lack of instruction for use of the work implies that the viewer/user should "figure it out for himself or herself" – again alluding to the illusion of control given over by the artist/programmer. At the same time the absence of "functionality" in the strict sense reinforces *Bootstrap the Blank Slate*'s position as Art.

The "average" viewer/user is less likely to be aware of the evolutionary etymology of the term bootstrapping as it was appropriated from biology and applied to personal computing to describe the generation and propagation of structures in the digital environment through code (analagous to DNA). This second meaning is part of Salavon's insider's joke – it reflects how his art works within the open space of the internet, but is more-or-less unintelligible those outside of the world of computer programming. In its form, however, *Bootstrap the Blank Slate* promotes a modernist [formalist] aesthetic. Despite the complicated structure of its inception and implementation (through code), despite its resulting form (a database), the work is, after all, about color and line – the most basic of formal elements. As R.L. Rutsky has states in his 1999 book *Hich Techné: Art and technology from the machine aesthetic to the posthuman*: "it is in modernist art that a different conception of technology begins to emerge, a conception in which technology is no longer defined solely in terms of its instrumentality, but also in aesthetic terms" (73). Salavon realizes the aesthetic potential of both the mediated space and the viewers/users movements within it.

Interference as an artistic strategy

Salavon's *Bootstrap the Blank Slate* might be seen as a type of artistic interference which takes place in the virtual space of the internet which is bordered by the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, the artist, and the viewer/users. A second major category of Salavon's work to date involves the application of interference to appropriated music, films, music videos and live television broadcasts. An early use of this idea appears in *Self-Portrait (The Jason Salavon Show)*, 1998.

In this work, the artist designed custom hardware and software to overtake the operation of a TV remote control, resulting in a device to autonomously tune a satellite system to what Salavon would most likely watch on TV if the artist was personally controlling the remote for a full month. The use of problematistic likelihoods (rather than a rigid system) resulted in the machine surfing channels pe-

Fig. 4. Jason Salavon, *Self-Portrait (The Jason Salavon Show)*, 1997, Satellite hookup, custom hardware & software, Dimensions variable (installation view). Courtesy of the artist.

riodically. Unlike Tony Oursler's use of surfing as part of the artistic process to generate content for his projected works, Salavon's surfing is a result of the automation of the remote control. The viewer is forced to watch what the artist would watch as the machine literally stands in the place of Salavon himself. Surfing is an activity that has since moved from TV viewing practice to the internet, a phenomenon clearly understood by Salavon, who blurs the lines between different types of technology as often as he does the line between fine art and popular culture.

Other manifestations of this "interference" takes three different forms, although in some works more than one of these appears simultaneously. In the first, the narrative sequences of the appropriated material are rearranged. A second involves the replacement of the narrative content with pure color arrived at through mathematical averaging. The third subjects video or audio material to a justification and layering process. Each of these processes is analogous to those used on the database of digital still material as discussed above, but the nature of film – specifically in terms of a moving sequential narrative accompanied by a soundtrack – provide additional materials for artistic manipulation, beyond the most obvious visual component. The computer, in addition to custom-designed hardware and software, remains the philosopher's stone; the interference provides the method of transformation. The application of interference to disrupt popular culture originals also recalls the "artistic interventions" staged by performance artists of the 1960s.

Salavon first reordered filmic narratives in *The Grand Unification Theory* (1996/1997). The digital C-prints of this series are comprised of gridded film frames from four movies – *Star Wars*, *Snow White*, *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Deep Throat* – chosen as prime representatives of their respective genres. While each of the films is represented in its entirety (at one frame per second), the narrative sequences have been reordered according to the relative luminosity of the frames, with the brightest in the center and the darkest on the outer edges. While the basic data contained in the narrative sequencing is preserved, each frame's relative placement has shifted as a result of the application of code and the creation of a database of still images. Thus the resulting works "read" as purely visual abstractions, as the soundtrack that not only underscores the narrative progression, but enhances it, has been removed. From an art historical perspective, the breaking of narrative sequence, the blurring of genres (which could here be extended to traditional genres of painting) and the replacement of themes with abstract form communicates an interest in modernist formalism; the rearrangement into a new sequence, which appropriates and manipulates the original simultaneously, demonstrates the application of postmodern artistic principles.

In other works Salavon has preserved the sequential arrangement of frames, but layered a number of appropriated sources on top of each other, to create a richer type of amalgam than those produced from still images. This process usually requires a method to justify or register the sources using reference points that the material has in common. Salavon's only completely audio work to date – *The Song of the Century*, (2000) – layers dozens of versions of the Beatles' hit *Yesterday* (the most "covered" song

in history). Renderings of the song ranging from Michael Bolton to En Vogue are registered at the point of the first "Yesterday"; versions with particularly long entrances provide a soft entrance that builds to a first crescendo at the registration point. The resulting sound resembles the cacophony of singing bar patrons, yet retains its identification with the original. At the same time it posits a compelling comparison between appropriation in the visual arts and the space between "sampling" and "covering" in the popular contemporary music industry.

Another production of this type is *The Late Night Triad*, (2003), which consists of three parts: *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* and Late Show with David Letterman. From six months of video-recorded monologues from these major talk shows Salavon selected sixty-four nights for each, then layered and "left-justified" the programs' audio and visual tracks from the beginning of the opening sequences for 3 minutes and 20 seconds. The resulting video projections – presented as a "triptych" format typical of religious paintings – are animations of what Salavon calls "ghosts of repetitious structure and nightly activity" (salavon.com). The blurred, yet nonetheless recognizable figures of Leno, O'Brien and Letterman appear to be almost the result of spirit photography. The movements of the hosts reveal relative levels of anxiety and the particular editing preferences on each show, as well as what could be called the "deep structures" of late night talkshows. Broadcast in the same time slot, these shows, which each hinge on the personality of their respective host, command a huge share of nighttime television and simultaneously fracture the viewing audience into cliques. Salavon's aesthetic goes against the grain for higher-definition video development and in fact presents a blurred image reminiscent of the early history of still photography. Yet this blurred aesthetic is not the result of a lack of control, but an application of yet another structure provided by computer code.

A final group of works produced by Salavon retains narrative sequencing but reduces each frame of the appropriated source to an average color, resulting in what appear to be minimalist grids of a particular formal element. In *MTV's 10 Greatest Music Videos of All Time* (2001), Salavon has appropriated both the ranking and the music videos from MTV, removed the soundtrack and digitized each video's visual content, and simplified each individual frame to a mean average color, which is then presented in its original sequence. The resulting abstractions (which nonetheless carry what could be called a latent narrative content) exist without the two components that make up music videos: pictures and music. The original "function" of the video is removed, leaving pure aesthetics (art) in its place. In a sense Salavon has appropriated the content of Pop Art and the form of Minimalism. Salavon reverses the strategy of Damien Hirst, who has forcibly inserted narrative content into minimalist forms, in works such *as The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991). The appropriated material becomes the site of an exercise in perception and focus, demonstrating not only that anything can be art, but anything can be formalist, modernist art, arrived at through postmodern means of appropriation and manipulation.

Fig. 5. Jason Salavon, *The Top 25 Grossing Films of All Time, 2 x 2* 2001, Digital video projection with audio, 2 hours 20 minutes looped, dimensions variable (installation view). Courtesy of the artist.

Salavon's *The Top 25 Grossing Films of All Time, 2 x 2*, (2001) also incorporates statistics and the process of layering of audio and video, producing a minimalist grid of flickering colors that runs in a two-hour and twenty minutes loop. A grid of four colors represents the color averages in the sequential frames in each film; the full projection consists of 100 individual squares of color, arranged according to sales figures from left-to-right and top-to-bottom. The abstracted, simplified moving frames for each film are re-synched with its unaltered soundtrack – resulting in a layering of the soundtracks (similar to the process in *Song of the Century*) combined with the color abstraction process from *MTV's 10 Greatest Music Videos of All Time*. The flickering patterns change and dissolve as each movie ends and its four gridded spots are left blank until just *Titanic* remains. Again the function of the appropriated originals are removed during the course of the digital transformation accomplished by the artist. Gone are the blockbuster special effects and the sex appeal of the films' stars, with the respective plot's progression, twists and resolution. The differences among film genres are similarly rendered moot while elements of structure and rhythm remain. While the original narrative sequence remains, it is abstracted on the visual level and layered on the audio level. In short, one order has been replaced with another, in a process not unlike the manipulation of DNA strings by today's geneticists. While Salavon's presentation of this work is through digital projection, he has completed similar works to be displayed on monitors (such as *The Top Grossing Film of All Time, 1 x 1*, (2000), which presents only Titanic in all of its 336,247 frames) and *The Top 6 Grossing Films of All Time, 2 x 2* (2000).

Salavon has accomplished the ultimate manipulation of real-time broadcast through custom hardware and software, and combined the color averaging process

in *Everything, All at Once*, (2001) that treats any type of video input (TV, VCR, DVD, Satellite) as a database from which pure poetic abstractions of color are extracted. The result is a monochromatic television experience, the creation of a constantly shifting and modulating Rothko-like color field, from the most banal digital feed of game shows, news programs and commercials. The soundtrack from the original appropriated medium plays unaltered, bringing the degree to which digital transformation is accomplished to the viewer/listener's attention. A large-video projection version, *Everything, All at Once (Part II)* 2002, allows the viewers to "surf Time/Warner Cable's complete offerings as a pure abstraction." It's still the *Jason Salavon Show*, in the sense that the visual is controlled by the artist, but, like *Bootstrap the Blank Slate*, the viewer/user is given some control, and, more importantly, the illusion of total control in the creative process.

Despite the "popular" and frequently non-aesthetic source material he uses and the ease with which social or political ideas can be extracted from his works, Salavon's stated approach to his work is aligned closely with parts of Theo van Doesburg's manifesto *Art Concrete: Basis of Concrete Painting* (1930), in particular that the work of art should be fully conceived and formed in the mind before its execution and that constituent pictorial elements (as well as the final finished work) have no significance outside themselves. The mechanical, "anti-Impressionistic" technique advocated by van Doesberg is accomplished by the action of the computer. Unlike Concrete Art (or more generally Constructivist principles), Salavon's work derives its formal qualities from nature and is presented with sensuality and sometimes sentimentality.

Using digital technologies, Jason Salavon has transformed and filtered the reality of his appropriated material, creating metafictions for viewers to experience in new ways. The processes of alchemy involved the transformation of common material to rare and precious material. In Salavon's case the clutter of contemporary life, the proliferation of popular culture images around us are transformed into the rare work of art. Stripped of their common function, these items of popular culture become a source of abstract beauty and a source of aesthetic contemplation. They reflect the beauty that exists in the common, obscured by function and the proliferation of images in the mass media. While alchemy was based in scientific processes (specifically those of chemical putrefaction or entropy) the transformation *seemed* to occur as if by magic. Salavon's code similarly functions in a seemingly magical way, operating as it does beyond the visual realm and beyond the conceptual comprehension of the average audience member. But the code is science and is predictable – in a mathematical if not in an aesthetic way. Salavon's tool of transformation is not the philosopher's stone, but the computer and the code that controls it. Databanks of imagery culled from internet research becomes the prima fascia content. Through its transformation the everyday objects and obsessions of contemporary life become a source of aesthetic awareness and provide a focus for contemplation of the structures – both deep and shallow – with which society is preoccupied.

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"Digitalization" of Art Activism. Case Study of the Cluj-based Collective MindBomb

Abstract

Critical attitudes regarding controversial social contemporary issues could take the form of art activism. The Cluj-based collective MindBomb is a hybrid critical voice, combining political art and activism. Initiated in 2002, following the model of the San Francisco Print Collective, it reunites professionals from creative industries, who refuse to reveal their individual identity. MindBomb has conducted a series of public actions in the city of Cluj-Napoca, and also in various other cities in Romania, on topics such as democratization of the public space, aesthetics of the public space, corruption practices of the political class, as well as ecological matters related to the cyanide extraction of gold in the Apuseni Mountains. If the first series of actions consisted in the production of visually poignant posters illegally scattered all over the city, the last actions took place mostly – and legally – in the digital world, on social networks such as Facebook.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the process of 'digitalization' of art activist practices of MindBomb, i.e. to investigate the collective's use of Internet technology and social media in comparison with similar worldwide art activist initiatives and in the broader context of contemporary social movements. It can be asserted that the use of Internet and social media by art activist groups or collectives could be simply understood as means of increasing activist art's effectiveness in terms of producing social change. However, what we argue is that the improvement of effectiveness – reaching larger and global audiences – generated by the 'digitalization' process is not only scope broadening, but it has an impact on the very nature of art activism. Subsequently, along with analyzing the types of images MindBomb creates – via appropriation, recycling, detournement or cultural jamming –, we examine the thin line between art activism and political activism.

Keywords: art activism / activist art, art activist practices, political activism, digitalization, Internet, social media, contemporary social movements, social change, appropriation, recycling, detournement, cultural jamming.

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RECYCLING IMAGES
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Introduction

Situated on the indefinite area in between political activism and political artistic production, art activism spans almost half a century of history. Its hybrid nature makes art activist practices expand their scope far beyond the art world, yet never reaching the effectiveness of politi-

cal activist organizations. This leads to a permanent scrutiny of art activism from the part of both the public and the art world professionals in terms of either its capacity to induce social change or its artistic nature. After a temporary remission due to the process of institutionalization of activist art from the 1990s, art activist practices and collectives are, since 2003 – the starting point of the Second Iraq War –, continually blooming in the Western world. Nevertheless, in Romania artistic initiatives in this direction are rather absent due to the local artists' resentment of political engagement inherited from the Communist times. The major exception is the Cluj-based collective MindBomb, initiated in 2002, following the model of the San Francisco Print Collective[1]. What distinguishes MindBomb in present-day art activism is that it reunites professionals from creative fields – artists, architects, designers, journalists or writers – who have agreed upon concealing their individual identity to the public. Both its diverse membership and collective identity, as well as its projects / actions and their social impact make MindBomb a highly challenging case study from the perspective of art history, aesthetics, political science, and that of social theory.

For more than a decade, MindBomb has conducted a series of public actions in the city of Cluj-Napoca, and also in various other cities in Romania, on topics such as democratization of the public space, aesthetics of the public space, corruption practices of the political class, as well as ecological matters related to the cyanide extraction of gold in the Apuseni Mountains. If the first series of actions consisted in the production of visually poignant posters illegally scattered all over the city, the last actions took place mostly – and legally – on the Internet, on social networks such as Facebook.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the process of 'digitalization' of art activist practices of MindBomb, i.e. to investigate the collective's use of Internet technology and social media in comparison with similar art activist initiatives and in the broader context of contemporary social movements. It can be asserted that the use of Internet and social media by art activist groups or collectives could be simply understood as means of increasing activist art's effectiveness in terms of producing social change. However, what we argue is that the improvement of effectiveness – reaching larger and global audiences – generated by the 'digitalization' process is not only scope broadening, but it has an impact on the very nature of art activism. Subsequently, along with analyzing the types of images MindBomb creates – via appropriation, recycling, detournement or cultural jamming –, we examine the thin line between art activism and political activism.

The theoretical framing of the present paper is that of contemporary art theories, equally embedded in art history, art criticism and aesthetics/philosophy of art discourses. The option for this theoretical framework is motivated by the primarily artistic nature of art activism that includes activist art among the contemporary artistic practices. The methods we employ are conceptual evaluation and art critical analysis. Yet, due to the scarce academic literature on the MindBomb collective, we also

use qualitative sociological research instruments, such as empirical observation and results of informal interviews.

I. Art Activism in the New Millennium: From Community-based Art to the Web Space

Defined as "a site-specific and ephemeral micro-action in the larger panorama of social work and activism" (Acevedo-Yates), yet strongly connected to the artistic sphere, art activism started in the 1960s. That does not mean that politically or socially driven art has not been produced before. It has, and not just in the way that "art is always, in some sense, already politicized" (Bradley 9). Art aimed at fostering change and revolution had been produced long before the sixties. It is sufficient to consider Futurism, Russian avant-garde, or Dada – when the idea of the artist as a social worker emerged –, as well as artists-workers alliances from the San Francisco Bay Area, active after the WWII. However, the 1960s brought about a deeper consciousness about the *activist* role that political art and artists might undertake.

As noted by Lippard, "[t]he greatest legacy of the 1960s … is the 'community-based' arts, otherwise known as 'interventionist' or 'dialogic art', which has more quietly contributed to social change since the 60s" (Lippard 408). It is important to note that the 'general' public did not recognize community-based art as artistic, since "much of the work [the artists] do best is virtually invisible as 'art'" (Lippard 415). This is the case of art produced by artists involved in Situationist International – SI – or by the collectives San Francisco Poster Brigade and Mission Grafica. The disrupting public actions of SI were not acknowledged as art by the 'general' public, neither were its posters for supporting May 68. This situation is similar for the posters of San Francisco Poster Brigade in support of I-Hotel in San Francisco, and those of Mission Grafica, focused on Central American solidarity with the struggles against US sponsored right wing governments and paramilitary groups (Hazelwood).

But not its invisibility as art was at stake when art activism had to face severe criticism. The questions that activist art practices were confronted with concerned their ***"limitations, long-term sustainability and impact"*** **(**Acevedo-Yates), that is, their capacity of inducing social change. It was more than once asserted that such endeavors all too often become a game in itself, addressing a limited audience, confined to the art world. Even when this was not the case, their social impact was deemed insufficient. As Acevedo-Yates puts it, the key-question is whether activist-artists are "merely presenters of a social problem instead of agitators." In other words, the very artistic nature of art activism was contested. Artists-activists, while using artistic means, risked restraining themselves to the status of presenters of social or political issues and thus never reaching the status of 'true' activists.

Against this recurring issue, Lippard bluntly states: "haven't we always known that art alone cannot change the world and that the support of the majority for the avant-garde is unlikely?" (420). Nevertheless, as Lippard continues, **"**[w]hile artists are nev-

er the vanguard of political movements, once they are swept into action they can be valuable allies" (409). Accordingly, activist art is never effective in itself: it should always ally itself with clear public-agenda social movements or NGOs.

Besides continuous debates regarding its effectiveness, the 1990s brought in another issue concerning art activism: even though aiming at criticizing institutions and disrupting the mainstream, many activist art practices have become institutionalized. Radical artists working in the field of activism are now established names in museums and galleries, while activist actions are part of the aesthetic realm. Thus, the problem of the effectiveness of art activism has been addressed from a different perspective: how can an art be activism in a truly mobilizing or destabilizing way? How can there be an art activism that is spared the danger of merely re-enforcing the institutional frame and status quo within which and against which it is undertaken?

Challenged by such questions and conundrums, activist art has known a period of relative remission by the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the millennium. However, since 2003 new historical and social developments – Second Irak War, Economic crisis, Arab Spring, Occupy movement – led to strenghtening and diversification of artistic practices that aim at producing social change. Subsequently, these recent art activist practices "seek to document, reflect, supplement or intervene in representations of conflicts world-wide … What is primary … is the possibility of representation and counter-representation of points of political fractures" (Costello &Willsden 12).

The diversification of artistic practices consists primarily in the use of new media. Consequently, if untill recently art activism was predominantly conveyed to the field of political art by contemporary art theorists, in the past decade it geared toward media-based art. This appropriation is explained by Kholeif as follows: „[w]hile political activism and the impetus behind new media art may be mutually exclusive, they are bound by the idea of 'open' flow of democratization via digital communication technologies." Moreover, the transformation of the artist's role into that of "a tinkerer or hacker, capable of cracking open the confines of insular capitalist hegemony and educational hierarchies" (Kholeif) generated by media art was soon to be employed by art activism. The open source ideology, already embraced by media artists, was reclaimed by artists-activists, thus enabling a new generation of free tools of access, as in the case of several programs and projects associated with the Arab Spring like Wael Shawsky's MASS in Alexandria, Egypt, and the Home Workshop Program in Beirut, Lebanon. However, the best known example in this respect is the Critical Art Ensemble, a collective of five tactical media practitioners of various specializations, including computer graphics, web design, film/video, photography, text art, book art, and performance, whose projects address issues such as MGOs or tactical media.

While criticizing the nowadays political elites, who fail to subject their thinking to examination, this new type of art activism makes Plessner claim that "[a]ctivist artists have dislodged themselves from the concerns of the modernists and, indeed, postmodernists and instead embed their interventions in public discourse in such a way that is

distinct from previous eras. What is different from previous (Dada, Situationist etc.) is that these artists occupy an intellectual space previously filled by a political class". Plessner's confident diagnosis, distinct from Lippard's moderate one, implies that activist art practices, taking place mostly in the "borderless and stateless space of the web," have shifted toward the political realm. The following question arises: is activist art still art or it has been smoothly absorbed by political activism?

To sum up what have been discussed so far, the framework within which we address the case of MindBomb collective is informed by the following questions: is activist art effective in itself or does it need to employ alliance strategies in order to induce social change?; is it sustainable on the long run?; has Internet technology only broadened the scope of art activism or has it modified its nature?; and, finally, is activist art still art or has it been smoothly absorbed by political activism?.

II. The MindBomb Collective

Manifesto, Actions, Campaigns

The MindBomb collective was remarkably active in the public space ever since its founding. The collective set out to use the socio-political poster – for the first time in a coherent manner in post-communist Romania – in order to raise public awareness about what its members considered to be key issues of the time, yet hardly present as such in mainstream media and on the agenda of the Romanian political class.

The group's first actions took place in the context of a very weak Romanian civil society, a situation that the Cluj-based art collective tried to both address and change. Thus, what they called "postering actions," characteristic of the first four years or so of the group's activity, aimed at raising awareness about controversial issues and crucial problems of Romanian political and social life. The group felt that those topics were of increasing interest to more and more of their fellow citizens, who, however, had no effective means to actually present and debate them within the public arena. MindBomb assumed the task of voicing those issues, of getting them out in the public space, and to stimulate the debate. Accordingly, thousands of posters were spread in Cluj and other Romanian cities, in several "campaigns" consisting in such "postering actions," which, after careful planning, were undertaken literally overnight.

The use of the poster as a visual instrument for reaching such goals was justified in the MindBomb manifesto in activist, rather than artistic terms. Moreover, in reference to Acevedo-Yates's above-mentioned approach to activist art, it should be noted that MindBomb's manifesto views the role of the poster as a tool for social "agitation," not just for mere "presentation" of social problems: "The poster is not dead; it is alive. It speaks with your very own voice. Posters themselves change nothing. Posters incite us. Posters remind us. Posters make us think. We take to the streets. We expose ourselves. We do not seek to destroy but to create. We are not angry; we are indignant" ("MindBomb Manifesto"). It is clear that the collective aimed at stirring thought and

action via the use of posters. For MindBomb, posters were a means for activation and not for passive awareness of social and politic problems, via the messages they conveyed through images and texts.

With such a platform as conceptual background, graphically poignant images and equally witty, and often acid texts of the posters denounced the corruption of the political class – arguably the collective's main topic for several years –, demanded changes and transparency with regard to the use of public space by local authorities, challenged arbitrary political and administrative decisions, and urged the public to speak out and speak up as citizens.

The posters deployed clever visual tactics and witty discursive messages, many borrowed from the fields of graphic design and advertising, sometimes maintaining a moderately passionate tone. Against the background of a colorful splash, remindful of a washing product commercial, the text "Daily Corruption" (Fig.1) underlines the omnipresence of the practice. A bilingual Romanian- English text, placed on a chromatically elegant background, interrogates the passer-by: "Did you think today?". Another one features a visually manipulated graphic portrait of Ceaușescu, Romania's former Communist dictator, containing the following text: "When you weren't able to say anything, you wanted to scream … Now that you can, why aren't you speaking?" (Fig.2). The refference to Ceaușescu is hardly a random one. The Communist tyrant went to great lengths to silence any voices of dissent and to render freedom of expression in Romanian public sphere virtually impossible, which was one of the causes of the resentment that led to the Revolution in December 1989. Freedom of speech has been re-

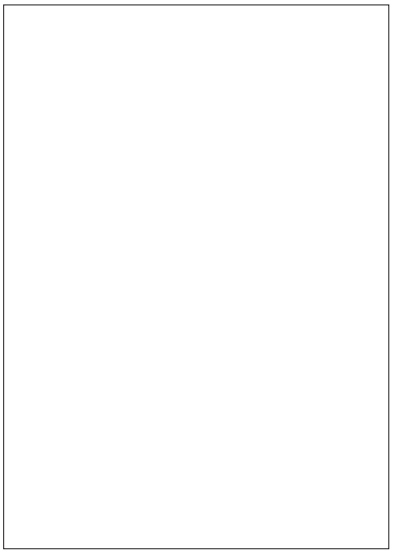

Fig. 1. "Daily Corruption", Credit MindBomb

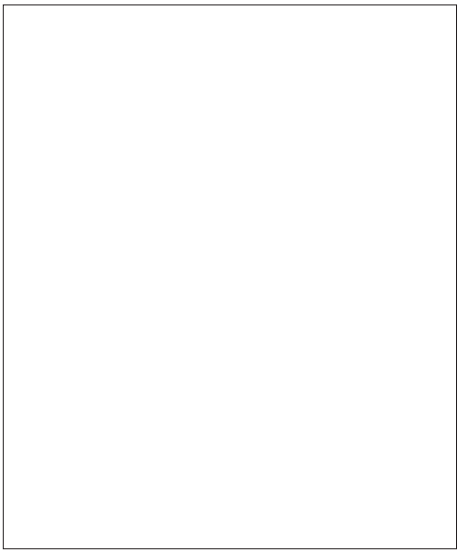

Fig. 2. "*When you weren't able to say anything, you wanted to scream … Now that you can, why aren't you speaking?*", Credit MindBomb

gained in society; yet, in MindBomb's view, the fact that it was scarcely used was one of the main reasons for the weakness of civil society and of Romanian democracy in the decade following the popular uprising.

The aesthetic quality of the image is deemed to be of great importance: it consists of carefully constructed compositions, as well as good quality, professional printing. The aesthetic appeal of the images seemed to function as a strategy to get the message through, since the posters certainly got some attention during the first half of the years 2000. Thus, MindBomb's actions and posters, often imbued with a dose of bitter humor and irony, became quite known especially among students, who constitute a large part of Cluj's population, and who has become a reservoir of future members of the collective. However, the local administration did not find the posters 'appealing' and therefore many of them were removed from the city walls, while representatives of the city council and the mayor's office formulated accusations of vandalism and "unauthorized protest". Reacting to one such action of poster removal, the collective claimed the right to freely use the public space, and asserted that protest actions in a free society, as long as they do not cause harm to fellow citizens, should be completely free, arguing that such a thing as an "authorized protest" is nonsense: "freedom of expression is not obtained with a receipt from the city hall" ("Protest împotriva Primăriei din Cluj").

Two main shifts can be identified in the collective's activity, occurring roughly after 2006. Firstly, as briefly mentioned before, especially in more recent years, the collective has changed focus from their "postering actions" – without ever completely giving up this practice – to posting the digital versions of the posters and their slogans on the Internet, using social media as the main instrument for disseminating their campaigns. Secondly, the collective has decidedly focused on opposing the controversial mining project from Roşia Montană, one of the most questionable development project designed in post-communist Romania. Henceforth, the ecological dimension of MindBomb's actions amplified considerably, the collective being one of the main supporters and designers of an increasingly vast and remarkably enduring protest campaign titled *Save Roşia Montană*. The issue, for that matter, has recently become perhaps the most important cause for public debate in Romania. Starting with September 2013, thousands and thousands of people have marched the streets of Bucharest, Cluj and other major Romanian cities, pressing the government to withdraw a bill that blatantly and legally contestable favors Roşia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC) – a group in which the main stakeholder is the Canadian mining trust Gabriel Resources – in its attempt to start the vast cyanide mining project.

Together with Alburnus Maior – an NGO made up of locals from Roşia Montană, who refuse expropriation in order for the mining company to start extracting gold – MindBomb asserts that cyanide-based extraction of gold at Roşia Montană has a serious potential to cause an ecological disaster. This claim is based on previous projects conducted by Gabriel Resources in other countries and on the opinions of various experts affiliated to institutions as diverse as the Romanian Academy, the National

Geological Institute, the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj and UNESCO. Leaving a huge cyanide lake behind is just one of the signaled problems with the company's proposed endeavor, for the ecological issue is connected with social and cultural implications by the promoters of *Save Roşia Montană* campaign. Thus, MindBomb's posters and manifestos produced during the last years and disseminated via internet bring to public attention that the implementation of the mining project risks leading to the destruction of valuable cultural heritage sites and will most likely have a severe negative, social and economic impact on the region, on long term.

What MindBomb is particularly denouncing is the publicly expressed support by Romanian politicians – regardless of their political color and regardless of court decisions against the mining project – for the Roşia Montană Gold Corporation and this against the will of a significant part of the local community, represented by Alburnus Maior NGO. Moreover, what they have tackled is a long media blockade with regard to the project, as mainstream media, most of which has been broadcasting RMGC advertising, have mostly been silent about the anti-mining protests.

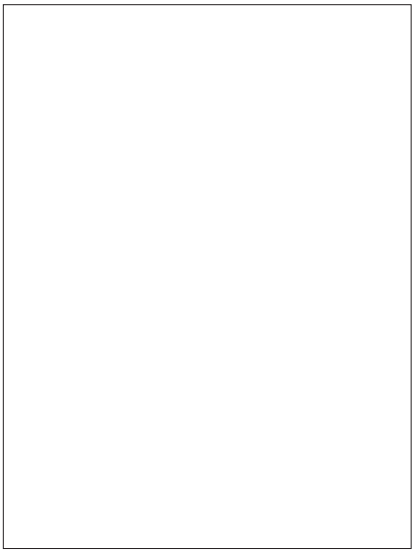

Fig. 3. *Save Roşia Montană* campaign logo, Credit MindBomb

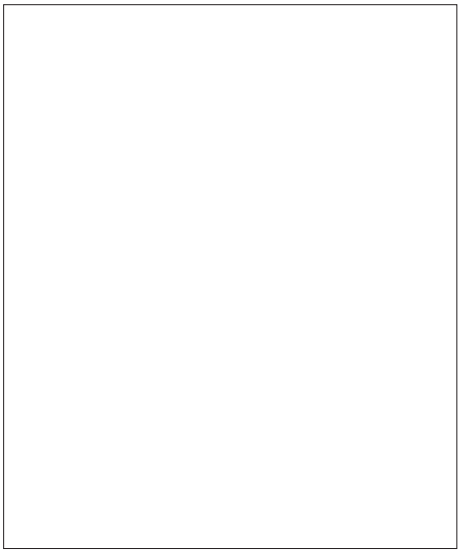

Fig. 4. "Massacre media", Credit MindBomb

Consequently, ironic and accusatory images of all main Romanian politicians involved in decision-making regarding Roşia Montană were posted on the Internet – mostly via Facebook – from President Băsescu to Prime Minister Ponta. National TV broadcasting companies were accused – under the general label "Massacre Media" (Fig. 4) – of serving illicit interests, instead of practicing journalism in the public interest. Ecological concerns are stressed as capitally important instead of mere strange ideas of a minority in the Romanian society. The images used by MindBomb are of re-

markable technical accuracy, artistic competences being savvily used to purport protest messages and appeals to solidarity.

The second major shift in the collective's practices, with important implications to be analysed in a further section of this paper, has to do with more broadly using of the digital format of the poster and, more importantly, with the intense usage of social media for spreading messages and ideas. Thus, 'digitalization' and the shift towards the use of social media as main channel of communication and campaigning are deployed as tools for producing poignant political satire, for raising awareness, and for trying to foster social change. MindBomb's Internet posted logos and images often gather over 100.000 viewers, while the number of young volunteers involved in the collective's actions increases continually. This tool seems to have been used with a noticeable degree of effectiveness.

Appropriation, Recycling, Detournement and Cultural Jamming as Artistic Instruments

"Appropriation" has been a frequently used term to describe a widely used artistic strategy employed by a significant number of contemporary artists during the last few decades. Specifically in relation to art, the procedure has been presented in terms such as these: "To appropriate is to take possession of something. Appropriation artists deliberately copy images to take possession of them in their art" (Gersh-Nesic). Producing one's own art by deliberately and explicitly using previously existing images has been often associated with the cultural ethos of postmodernism, appropriation art being often seen as a symptom and a manifestation of it (Krauss cited in Rațiu 259, 271). Nevertheless, it has been rightfully noted that there are several significantly different ways of artistically deploying appropriation tactics (Shurkus 1-3). If some artists use it in the sense that they 'copy' other works of art, preferably notorious, in order to produce their own, as it is the case of Sherry Levine, others prefer to take hold of non-artistic imagery for the same purpose, as Richard Prince does, when using media images, namely magazine advertising.

Accordingly, the appropriation artists entertain complex relations to the practice and to the images they use. In the process of appropriation, the original meaning is displaced, its original intentions are deconstructed and the message is reshaped. The appropriated images are not just taken in possession, but also recycled, being put to a different use than the initially intended one and thus retaining a critical quality by embedding a critique of the idea of authorship, of contemporary power relations as purported by media etc. Recycling allows for multiple layers of meaning to overlap in one and the same image. To refer to a notorious example, when recycling images of cowboys from Marlboro commercials, while specifically emphasizing the artificiality found at the core of advertising's politics of desire, Richard Prince also "effaced his authorial presence while obliquely preserving an ironically macho identification between himself, as artist, and the romantic outsider figures of the cowboys" (Hopkins 212).

The potential for critique that is contained in the artistic procedures of appropriation and recycling has been appealing for artists-activists of the last decades, many of whom devised more specifically critique-oriented practices, one example being the Situationist *detournement*, which is significantly related to the actions of the MindBomb collective. The conceptual and visual discourse of their posters proceeds precisely to recycling and manipulating largely familiar elements in a way which is similar in essence to the situationist model, yet not completely congruent, for it is not reduced to using art productions of the past. In *Internationale Situationniste* #1, detournement is used as "short for détournement of pre-existing aesthetic elements" and it is defined as "[t]he integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu," and "[i]n this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of those means. In a more elementary sense, détournement within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which reveals the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres" ("Definitions").

In line with Situationist International, MindBomb uses detournement of mainstream media discourse. For example, a TV public campaign from 2002, trying to encourage the public to consider adopting children and using the slogan "Orphanage is not a home" is the referent of the poster "The House of God Is Not a Home" (Fig.6). Broadcasted by major Romanian TV channels, the slogan and the campaign understandably got to be familiar to a rather large audience. The MindBomb poster uses this situation to get their message through. The poster also appropriates the general outline of a Byzantine icon – an item familiar to any given Romanian public – and uses the image of naively drawn construction site full of churches, placing in the foreground several figures of homeless people. "The message is very direct and explicit and refers to the lack of implication of the Orthodox Church in the problems of the community" (Bejenaru), while also addressing problems related to the lack of public housing.

The same type of discourse based on detournement was deployed for the 2004 poster, "Devoted Mayor – Mayor to Vote" (Fig.5). During the campaign for local elections, posters proposing a fake new candidate for the public office of mayor were spread overnight around the city. The candidate, a middle-aged, self-contained and determined looking man, was promising, in the poster's text, among others, to never misuse public money, respect ethnic and cultural diversity – an important issue in a multicultural city as Cluj –, to not switch parties during his mandate as most Romanian politicians do and so on. In this circumstance, it is the typical discourse of the political class that is appropriated, "hijacked." Instead of notoriously unreliable and infatuated campaign promises, the poster tries to give shape and voice to civil society demands and expectations of reformation in regard to the political class. The same analysis can be applied to the "Buy one, get one free. International adoption market" poster only that this time it is the logic of the capitalist / consumerist discourse of advertising that is hijacked.

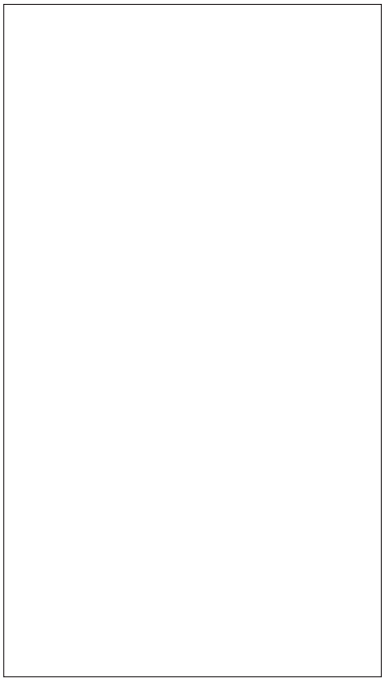

Fig. 5. "Devoted Mayor–Mayor to Vote", Credit MindBomb

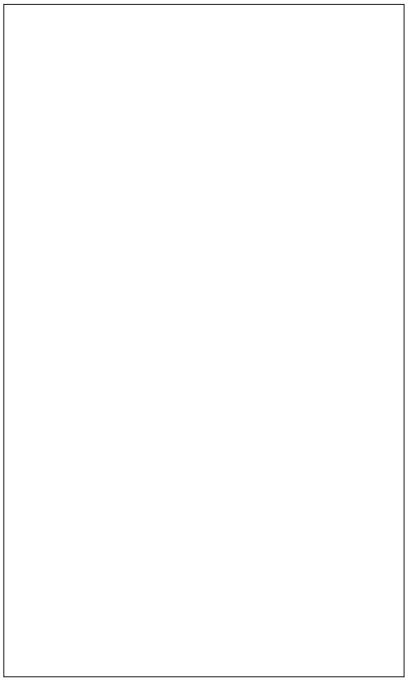

Fig. 6. "The House of God is not a Home", Credit MindBomb

In these last two cases especially, the recycling of an "official" type of discourse brings to mind the concept and the practices of culture jamming, which can be described as a particular form of postmodern recycling of discourses, forged in the assumed spirit of the Situationist *detournement* (Lasn xii) and mainly focusing on mainstream media channels of communication as object of manipulations and critique. Although culture jamming is usually related to new media, the core concept of undermining – via re-using, "misusing" and so on – a mainstream media message is present here as in the actions of the famously assumed impostors, the Yes Men[2]. Firstly, one should not forget that it was in relation to action on posters and billboards that the term itself was initially used, its situationist roots thus being plainly visible: "[t]he term culture jamming was first used by the collage band Negativeland to describe billboard alteration and other forms of media sabotage" (Dery). Secondly and more importantly, one should note that the very essence of the attitude behind the posters, and, generally speaking, behind the MindBomb actions is also consistent with the collaborative drive, with the demand for profound, structural societal change, and with the general optimism fuelling culture jamming practices around the world, as discernible, for example, in Lasn's book *Culture Jam* (xi).

From the Art World to the Political World

Significantly influencing the profile and meaning of their actions, the double shift that MindBomb undertook around 2006, namely the move toward 'digitalization,' the emphasis on communicating via social media, and the focus on the issue of Roșia Montana, brought the collective in the realm of contemporary Internet activism. As the collective is getting more closely connected to NGOs such as Alburnus Maior and as the protest voices against the mining project get more numerous, one might see its trajectory of moving from an activist art collective that was rather a singular voice to a loosely organized, yet coherent organization that is becoming part – and motor – of what can be seen to be a more articulated social movement. As previously defined, in relation with the space of the web precisely, "social movements are not organizations, not even of a particular kind … They are networks of interactions between different actors, which may include formal organizations or not, depending on shifting circumstances" (DellaPorta and Diani, cited in Rodgers 61). Very important in the case of *Save Roșia Montana* campaign is the fact that MindBomb's experience and practices were put at work in order to steer attitudes, to rally supporters – from volunteers involved in concrete actions, such as activities meant to safeguard the potential heritage site or organizing protest marches to public figures – and to raise awareness about the cause, under the circumstances of a media blockade. Thus, *Save Roșia Montana* looks convincingly as a social movement, also from the perspective that "what is common to all social movements is the desire to find a voice for the un- or under-represented" (Rodgers 62).

It can be argued that 'moving' in the space of the Internet was an adequate tool to deploy in order to reach the goal of mobilizing supporters and generate concrete social action. The specific features of Internet technology – i.e. the socializing force of technology, in Deuleuzian terms – provided the means for a rather marginal societal issue to become an increasingly significant public matter around which various other social demands were articulated. It is the web's friendliness toward multi-channeled communication, democratically issued by multiple and various users / actors that favored such an evolution of *Save Roșia Montana* campaign. Thus, "perhaps the most significant feature of the Internet in respect of political space is its capacity for multi- logicality. […] [I]t offers extensions of the one-to-many form of mass media and introduces many-to-many facilities for the first time. To put it another way, it encompasses the features of traditional media and adds new ones. The multi-logical communication of the Internet operates through email and web pages, and permits interaction between multiple users through newsgroups, mailing lists and discussion groups. Interactive groups may form around a specific social or political issue" (Rodgers 62).

In a process presently unfolding, it was the 'digitalization' and shift toward the Internet that allowed for, or at least crucially favored what seems a local, or at most, a national issue to raise international attention. Thus, meetings of support for the cause

took place in various cities all around the world, while mutual solidarity messages between Roșia Montana activists and Halkidiki protesters from Greece against cyanide mining of gold were acknowledged by international organizations like Greenpeace and UNESCO. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, due to its 'digitalization', *Save Roșia Montana* campaign – visually and conceptually fueled by MindBomb – is following the path of internationalization other ecologist imbued, yet broader socially reaching causes[3].

Consequently, one may argue that the 'digitalization' of MindBomb's actions is not just a tactical move, for it had consequences, perhaps un-anticipated ones by the collective. The move to the web space is a crucial part of the evolution of the collective, which, from acting predominantly as an *art* activist organization, started to manifest itself as an art *activist* one: MindBomb smoothly shifted from the artistic realm to the activist one.

Conclusion

The framework within which we addressed the case of the MindBomb collective was informed by the following questions: is activist art effective in itself or does it need to activate alliance strategies in order to induce social change?; is it sustainable on the long run?; has Internet technology only broadened the scope of art activism or has it modified its nature?; and last but not least, is activist art still art or has it been smoothly absorbed by political activism?.

As for the first question, MindBomb is no exception from Lippard's diagnosis. Their public postering actions from the first years, though acknowledged beyond the local art world[4], were mainly accredited as artistic actions as they had a limited social impact. It was the alliance with Alburnus Maior NGO and *Save Roșia Montana* campaign that decidedly improved their effectiveness in terms of inducing social change. Yet, what is exceptional about the Cluj-based collective is its long-term sustainability, particularly in a strongly challenged – economically, politically and socially – society as the Romanian one. In our view, this is mostly due to the noteworthy commitment of MindBomb founding members, as well as to its loose structure, thus allowing new members to join the collective. Moreover, the programmatic refusal to reveal their individual identity played a crucial role in escaping members' temptation to build careers within the art world.

The two last questions regarding MindBomb that we have articulated are interconnected and the most difficult to answer. They touch two key-issues: the impact of Internet technology and new media of communication – i.e. social media – on the very nature of art activism and its possible critical shift toward the political.

Political art with an activist approach has been around long before the era of the Internet. Among the precursors of nowadays internet-based activist art and art collectives, movements like Futurism, Russian Constructivism, Dadaism or Situationist International have been already mentioned, yet Fluxus or Mail-Art are also to be point-

ed out (Neumark 2-17). However, the shift from object, that is from the poster, and even the stencil on a wall, to non-locational image – i.e. the Internet circulated image – is more than a shift in medium and has further reaching consequences. As previously noted, "the shift from object to process – deconstruction, intervention, reconstruction, reception – is not a purely technically driven one, from item to information. Rather it is a cultural shift in general" (Braun 75).

It is obvious that the versatile and borderless space of the web facilitates activism and networking, be it by the means of art or by others. However, the use of Internet leads to subordination of the artistic dimension of activism to the political one: art activism turns to political activism. Yet, what distinguishing MindBomb from similar art activist collectives is its strong focus on the aesthetic qualities of the images they create, as explained above. Because of this, MindBomb is still situated on the thin line between art and political activism. Nonetheless, it is impossible to predict what will happen with the collective in the next years, as it also depends on the evolutions of contemporary social movements in Romania and all around the globe. To paraphrase Lippard[5], even when the fog around recent social movements clears away, these new activist art practices will remain import as they are the sign of a new social era.

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1 Taking San Francisco Print Collective as a model was personally motivated: one member of the American collective was born and educated in Cluj, being friends with the founding members of MindBomb.

2 See http://theyesmen.org/

3 See the case study on the anti-GMOs movement in Rodgers 99-106.

4 See the articles published in the Cluj-based newspapers like *Ziua de Cluj* or on various blogs and news Internet platforms.

5 "[E]ven when the media fog is cleared away, the exhilarating and finally tragic substance of that decade […], though now threatened by cultural amnesia, will remain important until an equally widespread social upheaval comes about for activist artists" (Lippard 408).

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Digital Debris in Internet Art: A Resistance to the Epistemology of Search

Abstract

The paper, explores the idea of digital debris in Internet Art. Here, I will understand digital debris as words typed in search engines and which then disappear; bits of obsolete codes which are lingering on the Internet, abandoned web pages, broken links or pieces of ephemeral information circulating on the Web 2.0 and which are used as a material by practitioners. While many anthropological and ethnographical studies are concerned with the material object of the computer once it becomes obsolete, very few studies have analysed waste as digital data. The study intends to demonstrate that such instances of discarded hidden, elusive and ephemeral pieces of information are to be found in art practice. More specifically, it is within the framework of Internet Art practice that digital debris are frozen in their fluctuating course and gain visibility. The paper will focus on two works, symptomatic of two different eras in the development of Internet Art, i.e. *Jodi.org* by Jodi (1993) and *Data Diaries* by Cory Arcangel (2003).

Keywords: debris, digitality, information, ephemerality, memory.

If German media theorist Wolfgang Ernst has stated that the future of media archaeology lies in data trash excavations (2013: 140), the essay will depart from the object-oriented ontology defended by Ernst and will examine at the methodologies deployed in the recycling of digital debris for artistic purposes. Accordingly, the critical focus will shift from a cultural investigation of discarded data through the contexts in which a piece of work is produced to the internal logic and processes at play within a piece of Internet Art. It will be shown that digital debris can be used as a critical tool to undermine

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what art historian David Joselit calls the "Epistemology of Search", the act of recycling, re-framing images instead of producing new ones. As such, I'd like to argue, that the appropriation of digital debris deploy a strategy, which creates a halt, a pause or a slowing down of the logic of networks. The essay will be an opportunity to map out the ways in which the Epistemology of Search is subverted by digital debris. In order to question the status of digital debris once they are incorporated, and considering that the notion of digital debris I'm submitting is a contingent conglomerate of information, I will anchor the argument in a historical perspective by referring to precedents in the manipulation of language and will consider to what extent the method employed in the retrieving of digital debris is a renewal of the *procédé* used by Raymond Roussel in his *New Impressions of Africa* (*Nouvelles Impressions d'Afrique*). The paper will also underline the consequences of the system developed by Jodi and will address the ontological parallel that can be drawn between Roussel's language and Jodi's in which artifices are instrumentalised to subvert networks.

In his book *After Art*, the art historian David Joselit asserts that contemporary images hold power in their capacity to replicate, remediate and disseminate at 'variable velocities' (2012: XIV). Joselit hopes "to link the vast image population explosion that occurred in the twentieth century to an epistemology of search" (2012: 89). For him the Epistemology of Search symbolises the 'breakdown of the era of art' where 'art', 'defined as a private creative pursuit leading to significant and profitable discoveries of how images may carry new content, has given way to the formatting and reformatting of existing content.' (Joselit, 2012: 89). Thus the author shifts the critical focus from art production to what images do once they enter circulation in heterogeneous networks. The book is an attempt to identify the circulation of images and the configuration of links and connections they create in heterogeneous environments. The pattern of dissemination and connections of these images is what Joselit names formats. It reads:

> formats are nodal connections and differential fields; they channel an unpredictable array of ephemeral currents and charges. They are configurations of forces rather then discrete objects. In shorts, formats establish a pattern of links or connections. I use the term link and connection advisedly because it is through such modes of association, native to the World Wide Web, that composition occurs under conditions of image population. (2012: 55-56)

The format defined by Joselit doesn't take into account the content of what is connected but stresses that 'in economies of image overproduction' the key is 'connectivity'; this is the Epistemology of Search' (Joselit, 2012: 55-56). Following the idea of connectivity regardless of what is connected, Joselit also explains that what matters now 'is not the production of new content but its retrieval in intelligible patterns through acts of reframing, capturing, reiterating, and documenting. What counts in other words, is how widely and easily images connect.' (Joselit, 2012: 55-56). At first sight, it seems that the re-appropriation of digital debris seems to echo the act of reiterating, retrieving

and reframing that Joselit is articulating. It could even been argued that digital debris would act as agents which, by connecting bits of information from different contexts, facilitate an Epistemology of Search. However, on closer inspection, I'd like to submit that the two examples of Internet Art studied here are actually manifesting signs of resistance to the Epistemology of Search.

Data Diaries offers a contemporary account of a work, which explicitly deals with digital garbage, i.e. documents that are necessary to run a computer but which are hidden under the sleek interface of the software and which are left aside in the RAM of the computer, which may be why British art historian Julian Stallabrass argues that there is no trash in digital information (2009: 180).[1] *Data Diaries* is an exercise of *RAM fishing* which consists in looking for pieces of information, which are stored in the RAM of a computer. Data in the RAM never gets erased but is re-written until the computer shuts down and restarts. As a result, data, which have been generated and accumulated during the use of the computer, is accessible. At the time when the work was produced, a QuickTime file was made of two components, a header and the data. In *Data Diaries*, Arcangel disassembled the header from the data and then erased the data each header corresponds to. Since a QuickTime file has no error system, by activating only the header, Arcangel tricks the computer and forces the machine to play any kind of data stored in the ram. The artist repeated that action every day during a month and thus revealed the hidden data that has been generated. The result is eleven hours of video material fragmented in 31 short videos, one for every day of the month.

Fig. 1. Cory Arcangel, *Data Diaries* (2003) screen capture at http://www.turbulence.org/Works/arcangel/ (reproduced with kind permission of the artist).

The work is a collection of short videos with sounds that are data generated and time based. Interestingly, the procedure carried out by Arcangel recalls the systems

that LeWitt was setting up for himself in his late 60's drawings. Both start from creating a set of rules and instructions for the work to perform in and let the system doing the work. LeWitt's heritage takes on a new meaning for Arcangel is actually digitalising and thereby radicalising the approach that LeWitt initiated. Arcangel is setting up what Manovich calls a low-level of automation, "in which the computer user modifies or creates from scratch a media object using templates or simple algorithms" (2002: 32). Even if, in *Data Diaries* the computer doesn't start from scratch it nonetheless modifies, through automation, the "media object", here the debris, it retrieves by rendering them visible. It could be argued that the work, by conferring visibility to the data it is manipulating, undermines the transparency of the interface as a medium, which remediates. Ultimately one starts to realise that Arcangel's work is not solely about an aestheticisation of obsolete data but about an instrumentalisation of dismissed data. The instrumentalisation of data is rendered possible through what new media theorist Lev Manovich names transcoding. In his *Language of New Media*, the author stipulates that transcoding is probably the most substantial consequence of the computerisation of data. According to Manovich, New Media is comprised of two layers, i.e. the 'computer layer' and the 'culture layer', which can overlap and intersect with each other through transcoding (2002: 63). Arcangel, by offering to the viewer a psychological reading of his computer memory is turning digital debris into an autonomous system, which turns upside down the status of the interface. Since digital debris are themselves the projection of a cultural concept onto a technical reality, they allow dialogue that takes place through the interface between the computational and the cultural.

Following up Arcangel's account of discarded data, it appears now that digital debris represent a conflation of the computational, the cultural and the interface. According to cultural and media theorist Alexander Galloway in his book *The Interface Effect*, interfaces are spaces in themselves. The computer screen is no longer a passage such as a window or a door for communication to get through nor is it a point of mediation or a connection between physical space and virtual space. For Galloway, the interface contains another layer: the intraface. Galloway defines the intraface as a zone of indecision between two opposite directions the edge and the centre. The intraface is a not a threshold but a zone which belongs to the aesthetic and within which the edge and the centre are "subsumed and contained within the image" (Galloway, 2012: 41). As Galloway states it (2012: 26), communication is absolutely successful when completely transparent, when the means of communication become unnoticeable, as in Arcangel's *Data Diaries,* the interface becomes intraface and delivers an imperfect communication. It is that imperfect communication which resists the Epistemology and Search. Consequently, the intraface becomes an autonomous zone of activity, which also impacts, among other relations, on the interaction with the viewer.

Interestingly, it seems that there is also the aestheticisation in which the debris are inscribed, once they are incorporated into art practice, that allows a slowing down the Epistemology of Search. Among the first generation of Net artists, Jodi's practice with

its viral aesthetics represents the most striking implementation of the waste aesthetic. In 1993, The Dutch/Belgian duet of artists working under the name of Jodi created a piece called *http://www.jodi.org/*. The piece represents an instance of early Internet graphic design and has been subject to several reconfigurations throughout the years. The website opens on an unintelligible jumble of green texts, figures and punctuation which are all flashing and mimic the appearance of a computer virus. The webpage then leads to an enigmatic map of the website where links redirect to a series of dead ends filled up with Internet debris which send the viewer back to more dead ends. The piece, in its aesthetic, borrows elements from a military vocabulary and as such reminds the viewer of the origins of the Internet. *Jodi.org*, comprised of various fake webpages, broken links and constructed glitches, deliberately nurtures an aesthetic failure which is also viral, where technology imitates technology and mirrors itself in an endless maze riddled with digital debris that have been created for the piece and not always retrieved from the Internet. Thus Jodi's deploys an allegorical stratagem, which aims at blurring the lines between artifices and the architecture of the web. Such an allegorical or to put it differently detoured approach to the debris Jodi is using, is what enables the duet of artists to install a halt within the Epistemology of Search. Such a pause of the Epistemology of Search is rendered possible thanks to the implementation of artifices in data, which lures the viewer and creates a fiction out of codes, thus undermines the functionality of codes by employing them just for their aesthetic qualities.

Fig. 2. Jodi, *www.jodi.org* (1993) screen capture at http://www.jodi.org/ (reproduced with kind permission of the artists)

The posture towards data that Jodi is experimenting seems to resonate with what French playwright and poet Raymond Roussel pioneered with language. The most visible trace of such an enterprise is, Roussel's *New Impressions of Africa*, which stands out

from his previous writings. The book is comprised of four cantos, which all together describe, for the most part Roussel travels to Egypt and his imaginative depiction of the battlefield after Napoleon's victory at the Battle of the Pyramids in 1798. The poem seems to function as a list, a sort of dictionary in verse an enumeration of debris found in the aftermath of the Battle of the Pyramids[2]. Yet, *New Impressions of Africa* wasn't composed according to the same principles as for instance his novel *Locus Solus.* Michel in Foucault in *The Death an The Labyrinth*: *The World of Raymond Roussel* points out that Roussel only partly revealed some of his stratagems. Indeed, *How I wrote certain of my books*, written by Roussel and published after his death in 1933 conceals more than it reveals. The book is meant to give clues to decipher some of Roussel early novels but completely omits some of the most important works as a playwright and poet. Thus no lead is given to understand *New Impression of Africa*. As Roussel declares it: "It goes without saying that my other works, *La Doublure*, *La Vue*, and *Nouvelles Impressions d'Afrique*, are absolutely outside of this process" (Foucault, 2006: 7). Here by "process", Roussel refers to the *procédé*, according to which for instance he substitutes some of the letters of a word that won't change dramatically its sound but which completely alter its meaning, leading to a playful sense of confusion in the reader. As Foucault stipulates, one shouldn't forget that *How I Wrote Some of my Books* is before anything else one of Roussel's book and as such one is led to think that his last book too, contains its own secret. In other words, the book is meant to be deceiving, refusing to clarify the poet's most important works by focusing on minor plays. Thus, according to Foucault, Roussel's *New Impressions* is partly allegorical since the meaning of the text is hidden, detoured in a system that inverts the structure of the poem by placing parts of the structure, the *procédé* what Foucault calls the horizon on the foreground and the meaning of the verses in the background. In a similar fashion, *http://wwwwwwww.jodi.org/* reverses the relationship between interface and network. Therefore the flashing jumble of green text that the viewer faces as she or he enters the website happens to be the HTML source code of the diagram of a bomb. The diagram appears in a new window if one clicks on the source page tab of his Internet browser. Thus, the message of the website is revealed underneath the *façade* of the work which is displayed online. I would like to pose that the strategy adopted by Jodi shares some of this enigmatic principle and throughout the revealing of data that they are undertaking, by highlighting some links and connections within the network of the web Jodi, in a quite Rousselian fashion conceals more than they connect with the network they are using. A little bit like Roussel, by explicitly displaying the structure of the opening page, Jodi are concealing some aspects of their work too. Indeed, like Roussel, with his planned strategy of revealing his practice, Jodi are turning their work in a form of oxymoron figure, which conceals as it illuminates, rendering the work even more impenetrable. The viewer is left to decide what is real and what is fake, what is a debris and what is an artifice, the secret of *Nouvelles Impressions* is not disclosed in *How I wrote certain of my books*, for as Foucault concludes, if it would be possible to completely explain Roussel's

poetry and plays by virtues of some codes and secret it wouldn't be a Rousselian piece. Indeed one of the specificities of *New Impressions* is the extensive use of parentheses that Roussel is performing. The poet builds a system of long sentences into parentheses, which are nested into several layers of parentheses. *Nouvelles Impressions,* unlike others Roussel early works, with its use of parentheses unfolds a process of elucidation. As Foucault puts it:

> In *Nouvelles Impressions* it takes the strange form of an ever-expanding elucidations always interrupted by the parenthesis of a new light shed on the subject. (2006: 9)

Each parenthesis that Roussel deploys is like another room in Jodi's website. Here the poetical parenthesis echo the use of < and > that each Html tag requires. For the author of *Death and the Labyrinth,* the reader of Roussel's poems is thus led to read them as one walks into a subterranean corridor. As in Jodi's website where the viewer is navigating in a succession of digital passages, Roussel's poetry becomes a mineral web that leads quickly from a 'banality to a treasure', from the real to the impossible. The expanding elucidations, not only form a labyrinth through which the reader's imagination evolves but turns the poem into a 'dark machine' as Foucault puts it which by use of repetition creates a void where meaning is swallowed up and 'words hurl themselves in pursuit of objects, and where languages endlessly crashes down', leaving the reader with an infinite indecision (Foucault, 2006:138); like in Jodi's work where the inner structure of codes, hyperlinks are crashing upon themselves as to create a viral aesthetic. In parts, *New Impressions* seem to have been exposed to some semantic explosions, which have turned, the whole poem into a battlefield scattered with fragments and consequently generates more and more debris. According to Foucault, the incorporation of all the parentheses, acts as, "explosive light[s]" (2006:9) that break the rhythm of the descriptions by promising to elucidate the examples Roussel chooses. However, the promises of elucidating the text are quickly interrupted by the intrusion of another parenthesis which instead of shedding "another brightness, originating from the preceding one" to the text, holds and, suspends time (2006: 9). The use of parenthesis is one the principles according to which Roussel is -for Foucault- immobilising meaning (2006: 24). Meaning is also immobilised through a pause that's occurring within the doubling of language and where an "enigmatic figure rises at the threshold of language: a motionless close-up which withholds its own meaning" (2006: 22). Foucault enthusiastically describes every Rousselian poem as a party, but silent parties, like a mute *fête galante*. At the same time still and frightening.

If Foucault describes *New Impressions'* meaning as being immobilised or as a fortress (2006: 9), John Ashbery also shares this point of view and describes the Rousselian poetry as being crystallised. He even borrows a metaphor that Henry James used in *The Golden Bowl* to translate the hidden relationship between the Prince and Charlotte. For James, the hidden relationship between the two characters is like an elaborated pagoda without any visible entrance. For Ashbery the analogy with the pagoda reflects the

understanding that "behind their polished surface an encrypted secret probably exists". Ashbery adds that it is "this persistent feeling of not knowing precisely what he is up to paradoxically adds to the potent spell of the writing" (1991:16). Jodi seem to have inherited from Roussel's intention. *Jodi.org* represents instances in which the viral aesthetic at play displays an incomprehensible grid of coloured codes which themselves open to a vast variation of codes. The codes seem to be partly readable and as such strengthen the frustration of the reader and the understanding that there might be some reason and logic behind what is immediately perceivable.

The generative aspect of the poem is developed as a stylistic device which aim is to duplicate language. Thus, throughout the 415 verses of the text and the 200 examples that Roussel is describing, the author has dislocated language to such an extent that it becomes doubled.

> The result is even more effective because the sentence being repeated no longer refers to things themselves but to their reproductions: sketch, cryptogram, enigma, disguise, theatrical performance, a spectacle seen through glasses, symbolic image. The verbal doubling is carried on at the level of repetitions. (2006: 25)

John Ashbery who talks of a "stereo effect, which enhances the experience", also comments upon the doubling of language in Roussel's work (1991:16). If, for Roussel words duplicate things and language lifts from itself the object it refers to when you repeat it, Jodi's manipulation of data separates the codes and the information it refers to in order to incorporate a separation with the medium which supports it. Language in both Roussel and Jodi's case has a revealing power. In the instance of Roussel's poetry, Foucault explains:

> It's as if the function of this doubled language was to insert itself in the minute separation between the imitation and what it imitates, to bring out the flaws and duplicate that imitation to its greatest extent. Language is a thin blade that slits the identity of things, showing them as hopelessly double and self-divided even as they are repeated up to the moment when words return to their identity with a regal indifference to everything that differs. (2006: 25)

According to Foucault, beyond Roussel's monotonous wave of language, there is a question regarding the validity of language to depict things and its deceptive nature. In Roussel's world, the loyalty of words is "imperfect" and the reader can't trust them. According to the poet words "should represent the things that are their proper masters but instead they distort and degrade them." Like the data employed in Jodi's work, "words are bad actors who botch their roles. They are copies made of used, leftovers, pre-fabricated and reprocessed materials" (2006: ix). Roussel was preoccupied with the prefabrication of words, and has exhausted their artificial quality in order to reveal their distinct betrayal nature. *Jodi.org* seems to bear some concerns about the status of words as visual artefacts. By aestheticizing digital debris, Jodi is creating an assemblage in perpetual oscillation between its statuses as a semantic object and a visual artefact. It is that unstable and on-going nature of digital debris as a continuum of infor-

mation that intervenes within the Epistemology of Search. The Epistemology of Search feeds on a saturation of the network it is located in. In order for the Epistemology of Search to function as a system, it needs to not only connect images between themselves and to re-capture them in different fashions, but it needs to do so by creating intelligible patterns of links and connections through the agency of formats. According to Joselit, formats have the capacity to be a "configuration of force[s] rather than discrete objects" or "nodal connections and differential fields" to "channel an unpredictable array of ephemeral currents and charges" (2012: 55-56). A format is the digital equivalent of an analogue medium, it "regulate[s] image currencies (image power) by modulating their force, speed, and clarity." (Joselit, 2012: 52-53). By their process-based dimension, digital debris, once they are displaced in a piece of work, undermine the capacity of formats to clarify the images they are connecting. Through the act of blurring they undertake, the digital debris observed here, complexify the task of formats that strive to isolate intelligible patterns of meaning within the saturation of networks.

It was intended in this essay, to introduce the specificities of digital debris in art practice and to unpack the ways according to which they are infused with a form of criticality, which is disturbing the Epistemology of Search as, defined by Joselit. As a preliminary stage, I have outlined the conceptual framework of digital debris and have introduced the notion of Epistemology of Search. The aim of the study was to perform a microanalysis that would encompass the polyformic nature of the processes at play in the retrieval of digital debris in Internet Art. It has been shown that digital debris undermine the Epistemology of Search following three main strands. First, through the example of Cory Arcangel's work, I have demonstrated how digital debris were actually revealing the hidden underlying architecture of the web and how that affect the validity of the notion of a transparent interface. Then, the paper focused on the idea of artificiality and confusion as a way to distil the logic of the epistemology of Search. As such, digital debris, because of the displacement they've been through and the new meaning they acquire once displayed in another context, complexify the meaning of the interface and creates an assemblage of significance which weights down on the Epistemology of Search. As Jodi describe it in an interview with Net-Art theorist Josephine Bosma, "the work we make is not politically oriented, except that it stands in the net like a brick" (Bosma, 1997). In this instance, I would like to submit that the brick Jodi is mentioning is an assemblage of signification that, temporarily, creates a halt in the Epistemology of Search and which thereby renders their work political.

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1 The piece *Data Diaries* was commissioned by Turbulence in January 2003 and is still accessible through the site http://www.turbulence.org/Works/arcangel/.

2 The poem has been written in a caravan with blinded windows that Roussel had built for himself so that he could compose his poems without being distracted by the sight of the outside world.

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In Praise of Translation – Recent Intermedial Transpositions in Video, Print and Installation

Abstract

In this essay different approaches to recycling images, generated by diverse technologies from historical print to most recent digital video, are discussed with reference to the notion of translation. In a broad interpretation of the notion of 'recycling,' the concept and practice of 'translation' serves as a methodological tool. Specifically, it aids the elucidation not only of the reusing of imagery, but of media and processes in the context of 'expanded printmaking' as a vital aspect of intermediality (or interdisciplinarity) in contemporary art. Despite the fact that prints and printmaking are an undertheorised area of contemporary art, various modes of historical, as well as more recent print practices lend themselves to appropriation, adaptation and recycling, and the utilization of the critical potential that these approaches afford.

Addressing questions of the nature of camera image, time and labour, German Christiane Baumgartner transposes video footage into the historical technique of xylography. Columbian Oscar Muñoz reprocesses photo booth type 'portraits' through a performative modus of printing, which involves screen printing with charcoal dust on water. Thus, he stages a complex interrogation of various media and their role in identity construction as well as their specific political connotations. Regina Silveira's *Mundus Admirabilis* (2008) appropriates 18th and 19th century entomological print forms, combines them with ceramics and textiles, and transforms the gallery space with plotter-cut vinyl into an immersive environment with a unique aesthetic, political and affective charge. My essay starts from the assumption that in the selected art works conventions and systems of value that are associated with materials and images undergo a change that is comparable to linguistic translation. In this way, the three chosen artists' transpositional strategies not only extend notions affiliated with media and processes, they also question established values of originality, authorship and cultural conceptualizations of the copy.

Keywords: translation, copy, intermediality, contemporary art, expanded printmaking.

In this essay different approaches to the recycling of images are discussed with reference to the notion of translation. The images are generated by diverse technologies, from historical print to most recent digital video. In a broad interpretation of the notion of 'recycling,' the con-

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cept and practice of 'translation' will serve as a methodological tool. Specifically, it aids in the elucidation not only of the recycling of imagery, but of media and processes in the context of 'expanded printmaking' as a vital aspect of intermediality (or interdisciplinarity) in contemporary art.[1] Despite the fact that prints and printmaking are an undertheorized area of contemporary art, various modes of historical, as well as more recent print practices lend themselves to appropriation, adaptation and recycling. Such artistic methods draw on and foreground the critical potential that these approaches can afford.

Hence my aim is to study closely what such 'translations' mean in the context of an expanded or intermedial print practice. I am going to do this by investigating the work of three artists whose practices involve the deployment of various established, as well as unusual media and procedures. I will principally focus on the temporal, spatial, aesthetic and material operations that are involved, including associated notions and systems of value and other cultural significations.

Of course, printmaking has a long established history of adaption or translation of works that were initially executed in another medium, such as painting and drawing, and now photography and video. This practice continues, especially (but not only) in the most prominent and pervasive examples of printmaking that enter the circuit of international contemporary art.[2] In contrast, the artists under consideration here employ modes of printmaking in conjunction with other media or processes to create their work. Of relevance are the specific combinations in one work of different media and their distinctive nature.

While not necessarily representative of the most common expressions of such media composites, the chosen artists are typical of the pervasive multi- or intermedial approach of contemporary art as it pertains to printmaking.[3] Printmaking has always had a close affinity to being a 'multi-medium,' due to its diverse manifestations as 'printed matter,' such as illustrated books, posters and so on, and also due to its proximity to translation. Furthermore, in addition to translation, the notion of the 'copy' is built into printmaking. One might even speak of printmaking's 'privileged' connection or affinity with the copy due to the various transfer processes that are involved in making a print, especially the presence of a matrix from which the image issues.[4] Recent heterogeneous print practices thus revisit printmaking's always already multiple identities while rejigging and expanding them.

Translation

I am following one prominent strand in translation studies that has been taken up in visual cultural discourse by authors such as Bal and Morra, who define translation 'as a poetic, hermeneutic, political and experiential mode' (9).[5] The word 'translation' denotes the activity of a translator (Bal's 'experiential' element), but also the end result of the process of translating, the translated text (which in its turn elicits another experiential mode, namely its reading/reception by an audience). In the present context

this differentiation is important, as it places a certain emphasis on the production, that is, the performative element that is the making of an artistic work as well as the final 'product,' the work of art and its relationship with the viewer/audience. Translation also encompasses the 'crossing of boundaries between media' with which I am concerned here (Bal and Morra 6).

As evident, I am using the concept of translation in its broadest sense of transformation. Philosopher John Sallis, in his discussion of *Midsummer Night's Dream* with its multiple translations, states: 'Most obtrusively presented is the sense of translation as change in form, condition, appearance, or substance, translation as transformation, as transmutation' (31-32). It is to be noted that translation does not only affect the 'target' language, i.e. the language into which a given text is translated. As Fabbri observes, 'to some extent' translation 'compensates for defects of the [original] text' (189), in other words, the source language is affected too. He links this compensatory quality of translation with 'Peirce's "infective" notion by which meaning accretes in translation' (ibid). As the ambiguous connotations of the adjective 'infective' suggest, such alterations to both languages or semiotic systems can be regarded as positive, as an increase in meaning, effect, affect or, alternatively, as the 'perversion' of the initial text/language/semiotic system.[6] In the context of intermedial practices this 'perversive' capacity of translation is hugely attractive and even instrumental for artists who are interested in making visible and/or subverting established material, media and/or broader cultural and political values and hierarchies.

It is to these aspects of translation that I will refer in my discussion of the chosen artists.

Intermediality

Despite different approaches and methodologies in various fields that have been debating the concept in recent years, there is, according to literary theorist Irina Rajewsky, agreement as to 'the definition of intermediality *in its broadest sense.* It refers to relations between media, to medial interactions and interferences.' Hence, it can be applied 'to *any* phenomenon involving more than one medium' and 'thus to any phenomenon that – as indicated by the prefix *inter* – … takes place *between* media. Accordingly, the crossing of media borders has been defined as a founding category of intermediality' (51-52).

Rajewsky is fully aware of the conceptual problematics that is entailed in the underlying assumption of fixed media 'with tangible borders.' This is especially so, if one takes on board W J T Mitchell's questioning of the 'premise of discernable media boundaries' and his much-quoted assertion that 'all media are mixed media' (215). In other words, Rajewesky notes, 'medial purity precepts should themselves be understood as discursive effects and thus, not least, as the result of procedures of power, of inclusion and exclusion' (52).[7]

Given this theoretical critique and the tendency in art works of the last decades 'towards … a dissolution of the boundaries between different art forms' (52), it seems, as Rajewsky herself acknowledges, somewhat 'démodé' to debate intermediality. Yet, she asserts the necessity to speak about (media) borders, since 'any kind of theoretical dismantling of the term "intermediality" is confronted with concrete intermedial practices in the arts for which … media borders and media specificities are indeed of crucial importance' (53).[8]

Therefore, Rajewski exhorts, 'we need to ask (not to cease to speak of) what we mean when we talk about "individual media," medial specificities or of crossing media borders.' In other words, the often cavalier critical attitude and theoretical vagueness regarding much current art practice demands a consideration of actual media transformations and the notion of media boundaries that are entailed therein.

Hence, Rajewsky proposes intermediality as a 'critical category for the concrete analysis of individual medial configurations' (54). As there is not 'the **one** criterion of a medial border crossing' [my emphasis] this requires a way 'to distinguish groups of phenomena, each of which exhibit a distinct intermedial quality and a particular way of crossing media borders' (55).

Rajewsky proposes three intermedial categories:

1. '**medial transposition** (Medienwechsel), also referred to as medial transformation, as, for example, film adaptations of literary texts.' (In other words the phenomenon which has been defined elsewhere as 'transmedial,' as discussed earlier.)
2. '**media combination** (Medienkombination), which includes phenomena such as opera, film, theatre …. Sound Art installations … or to use another terminology, so-called multimedia, mixed-media and intermedia forms.'
3. **'intermedial references** (intermediale Bezüge), for example, references in a literary text to a specific film, film genre or film qua medium (that is, so-called filmic writing), likewise references in a film to painting, or in a painting to photography and so on' (55).[9]

Implied in such operations is the presumption of '*a priori*, conventional delimitations of those media or art forms' (60). This means that '"the idea" of one or another individual medium *can be*, and … frequently *is*, called upon in the recipient' and is equally available to the producer/artist (ibid). Obviously, any answer as to what an 'idea' or conventional attributions of a medium/art form are, is dependent on and varies with 'the historical and discursive contexts and the observing subject or system' (61). Furthermore, as with translation, 'the overall actualisation or realisation of the other medial system is impossible.' Put quite simply, 'dance theatre cannot truly become painting.' Here medial specificities and borders emerge, which make clear that certain basic medial constraints must be considered' (62). One could add that it is often precisely such differences, or even constraints, that are of interest to artists.

Rajewsky's conclusion attests to the productiveness of a reflection on the notion of 'borders' or 'border zones' between media. The latter can be understood 'as enabling structures, as spaces in which we can test and experiment with a plethora of different strategies' (65).[10] Similarly, Marie-Laure Ryan's comments, made in reference to genre, medium and narrative, capture a related, vital point in my view. Ryan points out that media 'should not be regarded as collections of properties that rigidly constrain [the form of narrative], but rather as sets of virtualities which may or may not be actualised, and are actualised differently by every instance of the medium' (290). In addition to exploring the specific medial strategies, it is with this sense of media as virtualities that I approach the activities of the chosen artists.

Copy

Canadian philologist Marcus Boon maintains that, culturally, a comprehensive rethinking of our attitudes to notions of the copy is necessary. As he points out, despite the fact that copying and the copy are a 'pervasive' feature of (not just contemporary) culture and life itself, 'there seems to be an almost total lack of context for understanding what it means to copy, what a copy is, what the uses of copying are' (6). His book attempts to redress these lacunae by taking the notion of the copy beyond 'the legal-political constructions which dominate thinking about copying today' (8).

I am particularly interested in the relationship of the notion of the 'copy' with repetition. Boon declares that 'one simple way to put it is that a copy is a repetition' (81). He places the copy in analogy to repetition when he cites Deleuze's much-quoted statement from *Difference and Repetition*. Deleuze argued that we can understand repetition only '"once we realise that variation is not added to repetition in order to hide it, but is rather its condition or constitutive element, the interiority of repetition par excellence"' (qtd in Boon, 81). Just as difference is constitutive of repetition, so, Boon argues, 'copia necessarily involves variation in the constitution of what we call "copies"' (81). Referring to Gabriel Tarde, the French sociologist whose ideas on repetition were instrumental for Deleuze amongst others, Boon suggests that in repetition/copying 'something else happens.' 'Difference manifests itself in repetition and marks a transformation that happens within repetition' (91).

Taken in such generalised terms the notion of copy/repetition as difference/variation may appear rather too pat. Yet the point I want to make is this: While the concepts of intermediality/translation allow us to take a closer look at the differences/variations involved in intermedial art practices, due to cultural and disciplinary conditioning we generally tend to emphasise variation/difference over the copy/repetition factor. Therefore it strikes me as worthwhile to repeat [sic] the emphasis on copy/repetition. Rather than displacing the focus from the copy on to translation, I would therefore like to place it right into the centre of the reflection on translation and intermediality.

Artists

I encountered the work of the three artists in the context of *Philagrafika*, the inspiring biennial print exhibition, curated by José Roca in Philadelphia, USA, in 2009/10.[11]

Addressing questions of the nature of the camera image, time and labour, German Christiane Baumgartner transposes video footage into the historical technique of xylography. Columbian Oscar Muñoz reprocesses photo booth type 'self-portraits' through a performative modus of printing that involves screen printing with charcoal dust on water. Thus, he stages a complex interrogation of various media and their role in identity construction as well as their specific political connotations. Regina Silveira's *Mundus Admirabilis* (2008) appropriates 18th and 19th century entomological print forms, combines them with ceramics and textiles, and transforms the gallery space with plotter-cut vinyl into an immersive environment with a unique aesthetic, political and affective charge. Printmaking is an important constituent in each artist's approach, even if only one (Baumgartner) can be called a 'printmaker.'

In the chosen art works conventions and systems of value that are associated with materials and images undergo a change that is comparable to linguistic translation. The artists' transpositional strategies not only extend notions affiliated with media and processes, they also question established values of originality, authorship and cultural conceptualisations of the copy.

The first work I wish to consider is that of Christiane Baumgartner. Her wood cuts of the urbanised landscape are based on and filtered through the medium of video. The ancient relief technique of the wood cut has experienced a much-commented upon revival in recent years.[12] Yet, the combination of wood cut and video is relatively new,

Fig. 1. Christiane Baumgartner 'Luftbild' 2008/9, Woodcut on Kozo paper, 260 x 350 cm / 102.4 x 135.8" (Image courtesy of Christiane Baumgartner and Alan Christea Gallery © DACS).

although not unique.[13] Baumgartner translates these two historically and technically diverse image technologies into an intermedial fusion or an 'intermedial referencing,' in Rajewsky's terms, where only one of the employed media manifests itself. This conflation sets both individual media in relief (pun intended), in other words, it allows a deconstruction of the 'idea' of their 'conventional' qualities (Rajewski). Their combination also results in 'the accretion of meaning' as noted by Fabbri in respect of the transformation between two signifying systems.

Baumgartner invades the stilled, singular video image with dark and light horizontal lines. Although suggestive of the graphism of analogue video 'noise,' these lines may be inspired but are not truly caused by this familiar pattern.[14] The image or scene emerges, ostensibly, in spite of this 'noise.' But this is not so. It is perfectly possible to translate the densely graded tonal structure of a camera image into a relief process such as the woodcut by following the tonal gradations through a varied texture of incisions as, for example, in Vija Celmins's *Ocean Surface Woodcut* (1992). Baumgartner employs a different method. The positive-negative relationship which conventionally defines the relief technique of the woodcut consists in the literal exposure of the drawn (and to-be printed) line that describes its object or image area by cutting away anything that is extraneous to it.[15] This is in contrast to the incising of the descriptive line in etching or engraving. In Baumgartner's case, it is really the 'noise' or interference in form of horizontal (or patterned) lines which reveals the image/scene and not, as often in the conventional woodcut, the contouring lines or areas. Only by alternating the width and texture of the repeated line is the object/image represented.

If the line of the woodcut traditionally helps to represent the actual object/scene, it often does so transparently, without ostensibly drawing attention to itself, although there are ample historical and more recent examples where the opposite is the case.[16] But in Baumgartner's print the insistent, repetitive wefting foregrounds the mechanistic, mediated operation of the technique. Moreover, the image is re-constructed as a mere surface or screen, as well as a represented scene. Despite the fact that the straight line in modernity has come to be identified with machine-like precision, this is not the case here.[17] By the same token, the evidence of the artist's touch in the lines' wavering, slightly undulating quality is not symptomatic of an expressive, unitary self. It acts more as a reminder, an index of bodily discharge and manual labour rather than as the expression of an inner self. Hence it points to rather than divulges the personal. Besides, such performative markers of the artist's toil place her into a broader socio-economic framework, as represented by the increasing intermeshing of the body with technology and the changes that ensue for both self and work (artistic and non-artistic). Still, the densely worked surface yields an affective charge that counteracts the seemingly neutral geometry of image and lines.

In the language of the woodcut, its basic functioning as a mere alteration between or repetition of light and dark, of the black ink and the whitish colour of the paper are exposed. Simultaneously, in addition to the analogue video with its linear graphic or-

ganisation, as we have seen, the underlying structure of the digital image with its binary on/off mode are referenced. Thus, the means of this particular intermedial fusion, of the analogue/digital video still and the wood cut, are foregrounded.

Besides, Baumgartner's linear manoeuvres complicate the visibility of the image, quite literally: Up close, her images seem to dissolve and are not only unrecognisable but almost vertigo-inducing. It is only by searching for an appropriate distance, depending on the size of the image at which the viewer is looking, that a decipherable 'scene' becomes apparent.[18] Metaphorically such manoeuvres remind the viewer of the lack of translatability that is part and parcel of all images and vision itself (Derrida; Garner, 60ff). More specifically, such intrusive meddling is pertinent to the automatic realism that is still implied by the camera image, notwithstanding the possibilities of digital manipulation.

In other respects too, Baumgartner's uni-dimensional adaptations turn out to be revelatory devices. The derivation of the single image from potentially thousands of moving frames is intimated by an apparent arbitrariness in terms of the chosen subject, view and composition. It is through these iconographic terms that the images exhibit their banal medial source. The subject matter consists of ostensibly mundane 'non-places' (Augé), such as the motorway in *Lisbon I-IV* (2001) or a generic looking, mechanically planted or 'fabricated' forest in *Deutscher Wald* (2007).[19] Even if one disregards the multifarious translation or copying processes during the production of the image [20] and concentrates on the iconography, one could argue that the source image already possesses the character of a copy: One motorway is like any other, the perfect simulacrum; an industrialised forest is similarly a copy of a copy of a copy and so on. Moreover, Baumgartner's apparently random, 'artless' framing with its 'point-and-shoot' quality further emphasises the copy character of the image as a multiple. This is made particularly evident in a series like *Lisbon I-IV* which does comprise of four nearly identical images that are selected from the video stream. Hence, in terms of iconography, it is appropriate to speak of the resulting individual images as repetitions with variations.

Baumgartner's intermedial wefting (or patterning) recasts the age-old print technique of the wood cut as a repetitive, mechanistic, 'mediated' operation. Concurrently her procedure injects time and movement into the still image, thereby transposing characteristic elements of the moving image into the stationary wood cut. This comprises not only the seemingly indiscriminate halting of the moving image but also the far more arresting stillness that comes from the condensation of time through intensive and prolonged labour. The result of this intermedial fusion is the haptic, affective and conceptual transformation of both media and the attendant 'accretion of meaning,' as noted by Fabbri.

The second work that I am considering is Columbian artist Oscar Muñoz's *Narcissi in process*. This piece, started in 1994, consists of a set of on-going photographic self-portraits, or, to be more precise, of photo booth images based on the artist's face. Unusually, these are printed with charcoal dust on water in shallow vitrines by a spe-

cially developed screen printing method. The containers are lined with paper, often maps or other printed matter, which is sometimes torn. Onto this 'ground' the pigment eventually settles during the gradual evaporation of the water. In terms of its intermedial quality, the work can be defined as a media combination (Rajewsky's second category), oscillating between photography, print, sculpture and installation. The combination of silk screen printing with photography is all but new and reproduction/repetition is built into both photography and the screen print (the latter is after all a commercial technique for printing multiple labels and such like). It is the specific materiality of the translation which is novel and striking. However, as I will show, the processes of translation go beyond this.

In terms of iconography and genre, Muñoz's photographic images can be read as a rejection of the humanistic, expressive qualities of (self-)portraiture connoting a stable, self-sufficient subjectivity:

- The image, with the artist's dead-pan expression and frontal stare, resembles a mug shot, the closest a representation of a person can get to being a mere generic mechanical double or copy. Despite its function of proving individual authenticity, the mug shot maps the inauthentic: One image is the same as the next, a multiple or a copy. (One only has to think of the instructions defining a passport photo with its exactly repeatable detailed positions of head, direction of the gaze and so on.)
- The copy-factor of the multiple, so crucial to print, is further emphasised by the serial nature of the work in which the portrait appears with no ostensible variation other than those related to age. (This is unlike the performative enactment of multiple subjectivities as with many other artists in the last forty years.)
- A further intimation of the notion of the copy persists in the support on to which the image eventually settles. Everyday printed matter such as newspapers or maps reference the literal and metaphorical inscription of the subject within the citational social discourses through everyday graphic communication.

Seen from the angle of intermedial combination, Muñoz's translation of the photograph into print invests both with an unusual degree of materiality. This is a factor which is customarily ignored in favour of the photograph's content, as Elizabeth Edwards (2004) and others have shown. The increase in physical substance is simultaneously accompanied by the dematerialisation of the photographic image/print through the gradual evaporation of the image's carrier, the water.

The actual material into which the image has been transposed, namely decompressed charcoal, in other words, miniscule specks of concentrated, opaque 'dust,' is both suggestive of the chemical grain of analogue photography, as well as the pixelation that underlies the digital photograph. Likewise, it recalls the densely compounded surface matter of print. In addition to undermining the photograph's 'reality factor,' the treatment of the image as a field of unstable 'stuff' evades the notion of creative agency that could so easily be allied with a self-portrait. This is especially the case

Fig. 2. Óscar Muñoz, Three works form the suite, *Narcisos en proceso* (Narcissi in Progress), 2010 (first conceived 1994, series ongoing). Screenprinted charcoal powder on paper floating in water in six Perspex vitrines. Each vitrine measuring 49.9 x 50 x 10.3 cm. Image courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art. © Photo: Constance Mensh.

as the image is not only filtered through the 'automatic' medium of photography, but also the mechanical print, resulting in an 'in-between' character with an 'oscillation between both' (Rajewsky).

While the charcoal dust with its suggestion of extreme tactility accounts for the haptic appeal of this work, dust's simultaneous connotation with evanescence is reinforced by the volatile liquid surface. Thus, temporality is quite literally infused into (and metaphorically inferred by) a still image that most evocatively speaks of time, namely the human portrait. The attendant deterioration of a portrait into a formless 'blot' holds disturbing implications for the image as print or photograph. It is an obvious and alarming reminder of the dehumanising practice of obliterating the facial features of the victims of criminal and political violations in oppressive regimes, Muñoz's home country Columbia amongst them. The instability of the image therefore generates a specific metonymy of disappearance (Matheson). The work functions, indeed, as a memorial testimony.[21] In addition, the appearance of the blot can be regarded as an example of the 'informe' that challenges social (and artistic) categorisations, as theorised in art theory, following Georges Bataille.[22] This may be further linked to questions around the possibility of intermedial combinations and the limits of representation in both photography and print.

Finally, the unstable nature of the physicality of the image reinforces not only both media's unfixed nature but also the subject's unstable self. This interpretation is compellingly suggested by the title *Narcissi in process*.[23]

Instead of the customary responses to Muñoz's pieces in terms of memorial testimony, as mentioned earlier, in the context of the present discussion it seems to me that its conception as a series also bears the character or function of a traumatic repetition.[24] This is even intimated in Ovid's version of the Narcissos myth: 'Even when he was received into the abode of the dead, he kept looking at himself in the waters of the Styx' (qtd in Lomas, 11). While it is not possible to follow up this quite different mode of repetition here, I hope to have shown how the artist's translation between the different media of photography and print and the specific material and conceptual quality of this translation creates an intermedial combination which disturbs and exceeds conventional associations with both media. Furthermore, the 'extra,' that translation here adds, signals larger aesthetic, philosophical and political issues. At the same time it alludes to and questions 'medial constraints' on the one hand, and the 'in-between' character of some media combinations, to which Rajewsky refers, on the other.

How do the concepts of translation, intermediality and the copy that have guided this investigation operate in relation to Brazilian artist Regina Silveira's installation at *Philagrafika*?

In *Rerum Naturae* (2007-8) and *Mundus admirabilis* (2008-10) Silveira's translation is occasioned by a literal transfer of small engraved printed images from 18th and 19th century entomological books into both a two-dimensional and three-dimensional format, namely as surface 'décor' on the walls and floor of the gallery and on a set table's crockery and table cloth.[25] These multi-medial strategies result in the creation of an installation that relies on a telescoping of different orders of scale.[26] Silveira's piece fits the now firmly established category of installation art, as theorised by Claire Bishop. It also complies with Rajewsky's second category of 'intermedial combinations.

The artist exploits print's reproducibility at different levels. Compared to Baumgartner and Muñoz she engages in the most direct and fertile replication or copying: The individual motifs are copied from sources that are already multiple copies, namely illustrations in books. Besides, they are duplicated in different material modes or media, as indicated above. Furthermore, the imagery in the gallery comprises of multiple copies of individual insects, sometimes at different scales.

Against this factual description we have to posit an account of the work's effects (and affect): As is often the objective of installation, its spectacular character, intended to match as well as to counter pervasive consumerist stagings in shopping malls, on screens and so on, tends to overwhelm the viewer. Here it can be felt viscerally as an invasion. This is due to the multiple, contradictory yet potent connotations of Silveira's anthropod imagery and its magnification multiple times beyond its natural size.[27] But then, there is nothing 'natural' about Silveira's phantasmagoric vision.

If the work, at first glance, appears to be based on a mere reproductive method, there are actually a number of operations and changes in register at play and hence, in effect and cultural signification.[28] Despite the potentially distancing element of a historical, graphic as opposed to a contemporary, 'realistic' photographic imaging style,

Fig. 3. Regina Silveira 'Mundus Admirabilis', 2008-10, Plotter-cut and digitally printed vinyl and Rerum Naturae, 2007-08, Screenprinted transfer and overglaze on porcelain, hand-embroidered linen. Collection of the artist. On view at Moore College of Art, Philadelphia on occasion of Philagrafika 2010. © Photo credit: Jo Ganter, Glasgow.

enduring socio-cultural associations which have been affiliated with insects remain present in the work.[29] With an underlying assumption of insects as being wholly different from human beings, attitudes and behaviour towards these invertebrates can summarily be characterised by two contradictory, yet often correlated responses: A sense of wonder on the one hand and utter denigration on the other.[30] In relation to the former, Silveira draws on and seems to enjoy the reference to, even the cliché of (not only Latin-American) magic realism with its baroque 'lack of emptiness,' 'departure from structure or rules' and its 'extraordinary plenitude of disorienting detail' (Alejo Carpentier).

By the same token, the agglomeration of imagery, its sensory assault, repeats one of the represented species' most pronounced attributes, namely its 'swarming' which typically provokes fear in humans.[31] Swarming is a signifier of insects' multiplication and fecundity and portends an absolute disregard of inner or outer boundaries, as conceived by humans. Instances of 'the abject' (M. Douglas), they are met with aversion and disgust. The reference to biblical and other calamities and its allegorical translation into the contemporary context of global and national warfare, corruption, environmental catastrophe, disease and so on easily presents itself to the viewer.[32]

Then there are the various changes in scale that mark the transposition from small to big print. If insects in most environments might be compared to the cultural form of the 'miniature' and hence turn the human body gigantic, within Silveira's installa-

tion the human body, if not exactly being turned into a miniature, certainly becomes reduced and swamped. The gigantism of the imagery has further implications. As Susan Stewart has argued, 'while the miniature represents a mental world of proportion, control and balance, the gigantic presents a physical world of disorder and disproportion' (74).

But the shift from two-dimensional illustrations to three-dimensions through the application of the, albeit flat, images onto the architectural features of the gallery generates incommensurabilities that further serve the subject. The perspectival depth that an individual motif holds by itself becomes flattened. The effect is a certain 'deflation' of the architectural space. Both facets lead to a distortion of perspective and hence, a further disorientation of the viewer, as well as an interrogation of one of the foundational principles of the Western representational system.[33]

In Silveira's intermedial transactions between the two-dimensional image and different modes of three-dimensionality not only are the media boundaries of print challenged and magnified (literally and metaphorically) but also the conventional binary division between nature and culture is strikingly exploded. If translation embodies the infective quality that Fabbri (189) has noted and with it the 'accretion of meaning' through translation, then Silveira's translation of historical print forms fulfils this function particularly with regard to the virulent propensity of the print as copy. Coupled with an equally copious iconography, instead of the popular reference to modern plagues, as suggested by some authors and Silveira herself, I would like to propose a different interpretation. Boon considers copying as 'a sign or symptom of or scapegoat for [this] primordial plasticity of name and form to which Philippe Lacou-Labarthe gives the name "mimesis" fully aware that in naming he is representing and thus freeze-framing the instability' (89). Silveira's piece allows the viewer fully to experience this 'plasticity of name and form' that exceeds its linguistic fixation.

I hope to have shown how the various translation processes of the artists in creating works that can be defined as intermedial, demonstrate, as Rajewsky argues, the persistence of conventional 'ideas' (including material processes) and associated values regarding the different media that are combined. Nevertheless, a close inquiry also reveals that not only certain conventional 'ideas' regarding individual media are called upon. The realisation of the works also means that the artists have ignored the conventional boundaries or gaps between media. This entails a combination of hitherto unusual media, as with Baumgartner, or an untypical viscerality for both media as with Muñoz and an exposure of the art print's other, namely its status as multiplicatory reproduction and its potential for spatialisation in Silveira's case. Yet, as truly intermedial art works, the final pieces also exhibit what Rajewsky has called an 'in-betweenness' or 'oscillation between media.' It is in these interstices that the 'constructedness' of media and hence their mutability becomes visible. The differences that are thus exposed in the process of translation become the site of individual media's 'virtuality' and potential for change. This oscillation may also account for the specific ef-

fect and/or affective charge of such intermedial works. As John Sallis has pointed out, such transformational potential becomes 'entrancing, enrapturing, enchanting' (32).

Finally, the multiple references to copying and repetition that characterise the manifold translation processes involved in printmaking in general are repeated or foregrounded in the work of the different artists under discussion here, as I have shown. They make visible what Marcus Boon holds to be a topic of central concern, namely a re-evaluation of the notion of the copy as a basic condition of life – and, I would add, art.

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1 Intermediality is one facette of influential curator Nicholas Bourriaud's concept of the 'altermodern' - his attempt to identify and conceptualise current cultural and artistic trends in a global context. Interestingly, the altermodern is also characterised by 'translation' (Bourriaud). Since the 1990s, this mode of translation in art manifests itself in a 'proliferation of re-use and recycling of earlier styles and innovations' (Pooke, 11). Further criteria of the altermodern, such as 'mobility, heterogeneity, transmission and hybridities' can also be linked to translation (Pooke, 11). These features apply to the broader field of contemporary art practices but can also be observed at the level of individual media. Yet, as Grant Pooke in his recent overview of British art says, it remains unclear 'what the "translation" alluded to as part of the altermodern will actually mean in relation to present and future art practice either in UK or internationally' (Pooke 12). Hence the necessity of a closer investigation of such practices.

2 In the British context this applies to some print editions by Damien Hirst or Howard Hodgkin, to name but two examples. It can also be observed in the publishing activities of print publishers, such as Charles Booth-Clibborn's Paragon Press, which consists of a virtual roll call of British and international contemporary 'blue chip' artists. I am not denying that such transmedial operations raise fascinating issues of translation in themselves, but they do not interest me here.

3 I have chosen work where I consider print to be a major component of the final image/object. At its most simple, this entails the preparation of a matrix which is then applied to another surface. Jose Roca, the curator of *Philagrafika*, a ground-breaking international print exhibition in Philadelphia, USA, expressed this broad approach to an 'expanded' notion of printmaking thus: 'We considered a print anything that had three components: a matrix, a transfer medium, and a receiving surface.' (Roca, Prints)

4 Hence, printmaking's marginalisation in modernist art practice which can still be felt. The modernist expressive authorial signature style (and with it, the signed limited edition) was adopted in printmaking from the late 19th century to bring printmaking in line with the most dominant strain of modern art. It acted as defiance against print's character as a copy.

5 For the idea of translation as hermeneutic, see also Paolo Fabbri (186-187). Influential translation theorist Lawrence Venuti distinguishes two large categories which underpin conceptualisations of translation, 'based on different assumptions about language': The instrumental or pragmatic category regards 'language as communication, expressive of thought and meaning.' Meanings are based 'on reference to empirical reality.' The hermeneutic classification sees language as 'interpretation, constitutive of thought and meaning; meanings shape reality and are inscribed according to changing cultural and social situations' (5-6). Obviously,

the second category is most crucial to art practice, however, category one should not be dismissed out of hand, as there is always a pragmatic element to art practice, too.

6 John Sallis refers to the Greek etymological roots of the word 'to transfer' which also includes 'a sense that disturbs the otherwise smooth transition across an interval: to transfer something is also to change it … to alter it … to pervert it' (32).

7 See also Schröter who argues that the 'intermedial field produces definitions of media' and not the other way around (Discourses, 4-6).

8 See also Elleström: 'If all media were fundamentally different' it would be 'hard to find any interrelations at all; if they were fundamentally similar, it would be equally hard to find to find something that is not already interrelated. Media, however, are both different and similar and intermediality must be understood as a bridge between medial differences that is founded on similarities' (12**).** See Jens Schröter for a discussion of the ideological stakes that have been, and often still are, affiliated with the term 'intermedia' and the phenomenon of 'intermediality (Schröter, The Politics).

9 In category one, the meaning or outward appearance of the particular works, executed in distinctly different media, remains unchanged. Categories two and three 'aim at an intracompositional intermediality', in other words, they involve '"a direct or indirect participation of more than one medium" not only in the formation process, but "in the signification and/or structure of a given semiotic entity"' (Rajewski, 56), hence their meaning and outward appearance are mutually affected. However, with regard to category three (intermedial references) 'only one conventionally distinct medium manifests itself in its specific materiality and mediality' (58). In respect of media combinations (category two) Rajewsky notes that 'the various modes of such configurations may range from a mere 'coexistence' to a '"genuine" integration or interplay' (56).

10 As evidence for a new recognition of and interest in such border zones, see a recent publication by art critics Eva Grubinger and Jörg Heiser (eds) titled *Sculpture Unlimited* which explores the relevance of traditional sculpture within today's seemingly 'unbounded' practices.

11 Leipzig-based Christiane Baumgartner has been steadily gaining international recognition in the last ten years. Her prints have been on show in the Albertina, Vienna (24.10.2012 – 01.01.2013), notably one of the foremost and largest collection of prints in the world. Columbian Oscar Muñoz maintains a strong presence in his home town of Cali, Columbia. His international profile has been growing since his participation in a group show at the 2007 Venice Biennale, with exhibitions at San Francisco MOMA and in Belfast in 2012 and exhibitions in Lima, Peru (2013) and the Jeu de Paume, Paris (2014). Brasilian Regina Silveira's work has been on view extensively in South America and internationally, including the US. Her most recent European exhibitions were in Denmark (at the Køge Art Museum, Køge, 2008), Poland (Lodz, 2010) and Spain (La Coruña, 2012). In 2013 she is exhibiting at various venues in the US with a solo show at SCAD Museum, Atlanta, Georgia.

12 See, for example, Coldwell (Printmaking, 50).

13 At Philagrafika, the Indonesian artists group Tromarama exhibited wood cut as an animated video piece http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGAysE1vz7U [Accessed 13/10/2013].

14 Baumgartner: 'Actually I did not use the existing monitor lines for my woodcuts, although many people do think this is the case. I created my own raster' (Roca, Baumgartner).

15 This is not to say that artists have not long interrogated and subverted this aspect of the technique. See, for example, Edvard Munch's *Woman on the Beach*, 1898 or *Angst*, 1896 in which there is a constant reversal of the contouring line as either positive (black), or negative (white).

16 See endnote 15.
17 See Ingold 'How the line became straight' (152-170).
18 Baumgartner herself links this complication of the surface and visibility to the scale and size of the image and the desire to involve the viewer directly: 'If you want to see how it's made you need to go very close but in order to create an image you have to get some distance, so you have to move your body to read the work and that's why I make certain images monumental.' (Coldwell, Christiane Baumgartner).
19 There are other, more loaded scenes referring to military events, past and present, such as *Transall*, 2002, which I am disregarding for the purpose of my argument here.
20 These occur between the video image (in some cases the videoed television image), digital manipulation software, such as Photoshop, its printed output which is transferred to the wood block, the cutting of the wood block and finally the transfer of the wood block matrix to paper.
21 See José Roca (On Óscar Muñoz).
22 The 'informe' or formlessness is something that breaks down classifications and thereby represents an 'undoing the whole system of meaning' (Foster et al, 245).
23 Unfortunately it is not possible to delve into a potentially promising study of copia in relation to the Narcissos myth. See Lomas's exhibition catalogue and his study of the myth in contemporary art, including Muñoz's work, in relation to psychoanalytic theories.
24 See Van der Kolk.
25 As seen in the gallery of Moore College of Art and Design during *Philagrafika* (2009-10)
26 The formation of a site-specific immersive environment with its viewer orientation occurs through, firstly, wall paper-like print and floor covering (employing industrial, computer-printed vinyl); secondly, three-dimensional design objects in the tradition of the altered ready-made (achieved via decal, the transfer of printed imagery from one surface to another - here china) and thirdly, craft-oriented embroidery on a table cloth.
27 Amongst Silveira's insect species that do not naturally occur in the same environment, there are clearly recognisable types of caterpillars, moths, ants, scorpion, dragon fly, ordinary fly, beetles, cicadas, spiders, bees, wasps, mosquito and others.
28 Silveira's transfer through montage of diverse species from different natural habitats, geographical locations and historical periods, executed in a variety of realistic styles, is unified through the graphic quality of the selected image fragments. On the latter, see Silveira's comments in Roca (Regina Silveira).
29 See the illuminating entries in Hugh Raffles's fascinating *Insectopedia* (129; 173; 184).
30 See Raffles (129).
31 See, the entry: 'My nightmares' (Raffles).
32 The title of some versions of the installation has carried the addition 'and other plagues'. See extended formats of the installation in 2008, Brito Cimino Gallery, Sao Paulo; 2007, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Brasília; also 2007 at MAP - Museu de Arte da Pampulha - Belo Horizonte. (Information on Silveira's web site http://www.reginasilveira.com/). See also Navas and Buhl Andersen. It could be argued that there is another, more specific metaphorical reference entailed, namely the hybridisation that has been regarded as one of the characteristics of globalisation and postcolonial identities. In many respects, Latin American and especially Brasilian artists regarded both their art as well as their culture as 'hybrid' avant la lettre. (See Buhl Anderson, 2).

33 Within the broader context of Silveira's work as part of the second Latin American avant garde her frequent deployment of shadows, traces and tracks intentionally probes this foundational principle of the Western representational tradition. Silveira has frequently made this point herself. See also Buhl Andersen and Navas.

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In Search of Lost Forms: Contemporary Landscape as Post-production

Abstract

In this essay, I propose a reflection on the shifts occurred in contemporary art production and theory that changed the focus from a homogenous flux of discourses, to an artistic production characterized by indetermination, fragmentation, heterogeneity, multiplicity and playfulness. Reclaiming the established artistic forms and models remains one the most typical manifestations of the contemporary artistic poetics, an aspect that reveals new angles for interpretation at the dusk of the postmodern age. I propose the term "nostalgic paradigm" to analyze this larger past-oriented artistic strategy, seeing it not as a romantic return to the past, nor as a postmodern appropriation of the present, but rather as a form of fulfillment, of revitalizing models in the form of post-production. This eventually creates a different form of originality, which denies equally the laws of modernism and the postmodern precepts. The landscape (painted or built) is at the center of this analysis, a choice guided by its importance as a provider of models, and the revival the genre is enjoying now. The conclusion of this essay is that the current approach to landscape art rejects the productive models that generated it in the first place (sublime, meditation, study), preferring instead forms of creation that can be identified with what Nicolas Bourriaud calls "post-production".

Keywords: Landscape, painting, (post)-postmodernism, re-production, post-production, nostalgia, cultural remake, memory.

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The nostalgic paradigm of (Post)Postmodernism

What has been called postmodern art – namely, the changes in art production taking place between the sixties and the late nineties – is neither conservative nor avant-garde; while rejecting any form of conservatism, postmodernism also denies avant-garde's seemingly emancipatory role. For postmodernists, avant-garde is over and originality is nothing but a myth (Rosalind Krauss). Postmodern imaginary

relies on a network of multiple stylistic conditionings that attempts a reconciliation with the modernist and pre-modern "isms", suggesting in a way that it is trying equally to continue and to "put an end" to the forms of a certain type of historically established sensibility. Thus, it is quite often that referencing to the forms of the past becomes a true *rewriting* of the artistic models. One example in which revisiting the previous models means an act of rewriting them – this time in the field of painting – is the work of Anselm Kiefer. His large-scale works unveil his propensity towards the landscape painting tradition, resumed both in its modernist dimension and in its postmodernist interpretation. The resurrection of the great pictorial genre of landscape painting is admittedly surprising and spectacular, and this is true not only in Kiefer's case. His works propose a spread of material magma on large pictorial surfaces – a clear legacy of the modernist tradition. However, his paintings are also a form of adequacy to the real, to the immediate material reality, and, at the same time, a revisiting of the Dutch landscape painting of the 17th century. Thus, Kiefer proposes an excellent illustration of the way in which landscape painting might be reinvented today while conjugating both the materialist experience of the late Modernism and the creative mechanisms of Postmodernism (through quotation and insertion of real objects on the canvas). Indeed, in Kiefer's case, by affirming the *productive dimension* of the imagination, we are dealing with an actualized form of landscape painting which rewrites and revitalizes natural forms or cultural items of old cultures. In short, it is a refreshing and convincing affirmation of the grand landscape painting, beyond any modernist or postmodernist argumentations. His work represents the meeting place between an "unfinished" pictorial modernism and the nostalgia for forms that are already established in cultural history.

Fig. 1. Anselm Kiefer, *Lilith*, 1997. Emulsion, shellac, acrylic, lead, hair and ashes on canvas, two parts, 330 x 560 cm. Fondation Beyeler. Photo: Robert Bayer, Basel.

This act of revisiting the great artistic models, forms, attitudes and established poetics stemming from the complex repository of past "isms" is what I call *the nostalgic paradigm* of contemporary art. It presupposes the need for reconciliation with the forms of the more or less distant past; it is an attitude which both embraces and rejects the "tabula rasa"-type modernist attitude – i.e. the typical historical avant-garde strategy of rejecting the predecessors – along with the postmodern solutions that opt for a relativization of values and which impose a historical amnesia summed up as fragile "living in the past" (Eagleton, 17). In this way, we can speak of the nostalgic paradigm of contemporary art as of a delicate but noticeable mutation in the artistic production and reception, towards an area which can be defined as post-postmodern.

However, it is important to highlight that the post-postmodern nostalgic paradigm does not equate with the "existential swoon" of the romantic self-abandonment in front of the past (values). Nor does it equate quotation with a simple exercise of reference, of ironic recourse to the already made. The nostalgia of post-postmodern painting is doubled, paradoxically or not, by an evident vitality and orientation towards the future. One sometimes gets the sensation that the painting wishes to restore and/or complete an apparently exhausted formula. It is true that, throughout the history of culture, forms that appear to be at their twilight can produce true masterpieces of poetic expressiveness. Yet, beyond the malaise of the *fin de siècle* characterized by the loss of unity and spontaneity, we can glimpse the signs of a new beginning. As Baudrillard has written, "there is, however, an after-ending". He notes that all that has existed starting with the second decade of the 20th Century is reborn under the postmodernist banner, "based on a definitive fulfillment…" Reconversion, return, deglutition, rehabilitation, repentance, recurrence and recycling… "All that once vanished now reappears" (Baudrillard, 87). And, we might add, reappears again…

Is this reappearance of forms a sort of realization and a justification of a teleological destiny of art? Evidently not, from a Baudrillardian perspective. This recurrence occurs in the "absence of a programmatic availability of progress, but also of an absence of aesthetic 'necessity'", writes the philosopher. Yet, while we are not dealing with an "aesthetic necessity" in a Kantian sense, we *are* faced with a certain "endless fetishism" (Baudrillard, 87). What had been conceived by modernism as a progressive movement is now reshaped into a recessive maneuver. In a Hegelian dialectic transmutation, the life of the artistic object is prolonged into its death, writes Baudrillard, by placing the artistic object in museums, institutions that he names, ironically and ruthlessly, "funeral homes" (Ibid.). Of course, Baudrillard's discourse is a pessimistic one, but it must not always be taken in its literal sense. Within the postmodern dispute, i.e. within its conflicting matrix, there is a more optimistic attitude, motivated by the Hegelian dialectical logic concerning ideas, life and history. An "end of history", an "end of art" are already contradicted by reality. What remains after all these "endings", after all these "posts", is the artistic practice of "recycling", namely that which is tailored to the Post-Postmodern nostalgic paradigm.

It is true that contemporary painting no longer forms a coherent, united flux, but it is rather part of a phenomenon dominated by indetermination, fragmentation, heterogeneity, multiplicity and irony, and where recycling and quotation occupy a central role. Contemporary painting is part of what Michael Woods hall called the "plurality and diversity" paradigm (323). Contemporary painting deconstructs and parasites old forms, while simultaneously possessing the ability to provide new recipes and formulas, surprising ingredients worthy of a „*nouvelle cuisine*", as per Ihab Hassan (508). Indeed, contemporary painting has the technical means and conceptual dimensions to propose new strategies of visuality that transform the artistic object into a sophisticated product. A different syntax, novel and exploratory, a formidable capacity for "manipulation" of forms and meanings: all of these confirm the legitimacy of a post-postmodern *art* and refute, at the same time, the postmodern model of mass culture, of the philosophy of "anything goes", the cultural kitsch, the artistic surrogate. This is the type of painting which – while complex and difficult to define – refutes and rejects both the modern prejudices and the postmodern relativism. The discourse proposed by the post-postmodern landscape painting is multifaceted and eclectic, heterogeneous and ecstatic. When it's not set on imitating, on making pastiches, the contemporary landscape painting overturns the (modernist) formal order, disarticulates the (postmodern) forms and clichés, fragmenting and disseminating them. Following but also transcending the postmodern poetics, the current praxis of landscape art utilizes already established forms and formulas, while trying to reconfigure them into a new visual paradigm.

The landscape and "postproduction"

Despite Baudrillard's dark conclusions that condemned art to disappearance, art continues quietly its path, even if it becomes more and more commercial. If the existence of a "life of forms" (Focillon) is almost a truism, we must recognize the fact that if anything died in art it was the pure, self-sufficient forms, devoid of content. Contemporary art is no longer a cluster of forms that reflect a theme, but rather a diverse, generative compost. In order to decipher the meaning and the path of contemporary artistic production, we must be aware of its *procedural* and pragmatic aspect. A decoding of the new relations between art and society is necessary, namely of the way in which art's forms and functions evolve in an increasingly complex social context. If the ideas of originality, newness and authenticity were rejected by postmodernism, they return today in the form of social connectivity, in the form of the realization of a unique moment of interaction between individual, collective, art object and the previous forms of art. Indeed, this type of "new" is no longer the modernist "new at any cost". It no longer constitutes the sole criterion for artistic valuation, as theorized by Clement Greenberg. For him, art had to be perfectly autonomous and self-sufficient in order to show its true measure:

> [T]he unique and proper idea of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to elim-

> inate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered "pure," and in its "purity" find the guarantee of its standard of quality as well as of its independence. "Purity" meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance. (5)

If for Greenberg the criteria to evaluate the artistic object was its aesthetic autonomy, postmodernism and what was called *altermodernism* (Nicolas Bourriaud 2009), have proposed more efficient, more pragmatic analytic-conceptual instruments. To this end, Bourriaud transfers the term "postproduction" into the artistic sphere, borrowing it from the cinematic and television industry.

Postproduction, writes Bourriaud, is the working strategy for „an ever increasing number of artworks [which] have been created on the basis of preexisting works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products" (2002, 13). Whether the work of these artists is the sign of the proliferation of a global chaos or not is something yet to be determined. What is sure, however, is that what these artists do and make cannot be described with the traditional term „creation" (in the sense Greenberg via Kant have proposed), but it is rather built on a strategy that is programmatically different:

> These artists who insert their own work into that of others contribute to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work. The material they manipulate is no longer primary. It is no longer a matter of elaborating a form on the basis of a raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects already informed by other objects. (Bourriaud, 2002, 13).

Painting itself cannot escape this tendency: the signal had been given by Andy Warhol. His *Campbell's Soup Cans* and the *Brillo Boxes* link the works back to the original product, blurring the line between original and reproduction, between the ordinary object and the art object. Moreover, his portrait series of *Marylin Monroe*, *Elvis Presley* and other celebrities are manipulations of images already in circulation. They are „mass produced" much like their „original" models in the entertainment market. Other painters – most of them having a Pop Art background – appealed as well to this kind of methods. Frequently relying on already produced forms, David Hockney's landscapes, for example, overtake or "parasite" the landscape vision of the "metaphysical painting" of the Italian interwar era. An excellent example in this sense is *Le Parc des Sources, Vichy*, 1970, a park view whose odd and eerie atmosphere brings to mind the almost haunted urban landscapes of Giorgio de Chirico. In his other famous work, Hockney turns to direct quotation via photographic collage, all the while admitting to being an adept of „handmade pictures" (see his *Pearblossom Highway*, 1986). What should be emphasized here in relationship with the idea of postproduction is

that Hockney gives in this work also a pragmatic sense to the term: he calls his photo collages, "drawing with a camera", a description that points precisely to the aspects discussed by Bourriaud about contemporary art's capacity to blur the limits between creation and copy, readymade and original work.

Fig. 2. David Hockney. *Pearblossom Highway*, 1986. Photographic collage, 198 x 282 cm. Collection of the artist.

As Bourriaud has pointed out, „All these artistic practices, although formally heterogeneous, have in common the recourse to already produced forms. They testify to a willingness to inscribe the work of art within a network of signs and significations, instead of considering it an autonomous or original form" (2002, 16). What makes them unique (or perhaps *original*, if one would insist to employ the term), is their propensity to remix, to make use of existing *data*. Take as another example the works of Neo Rauch. The playful association between different cultural reference points makes room for a narrative strategy which dexterously manipulates various painting conventions. Thus, we find traces of contemporary neo-realism, in which we can detect aspirations or nostalgic moments stemming from romanticism, metaphysical painting or Magritte-type onirism. The staged pictorial space, a fictional and narrative projection with multiple openings towards visual and psycho-affective perception, induce the idea – reserved only for connoisseurs – of something known, but leaving space for the unpredictable. In the same spirit, the figurative works of Daniel Richter stage his landscapes, his narrative scenes in a mysterious, dusky vision, or charged with theatricality and vespertine violence. One can recognize scenarios from the classical imagery, from pictorial romanticism, along with allusions to Goya. Interesting is the association, in an exhibition from 2002-2003, between the pictorial works and an installation that refers to oriental models and that includes stylistically diverse items of furniture.

The association is apparently random, as the eclecticism of the pictorial images, subtly elaborated, corresponds with the installation's concoction. However, the associations are full of significance, as they empower each other on the principle of favoring tensions between objects and forms from different registers. This association unveils the exhibition space as the integrating and anti-entropic locus for the classic elitist system (painting), as well as for the subculture of utilitarian artifacts. This space can become not only a presentation area, but also a post-production place where to elaborate playful associations, in the spirit of a collective sensibility that favors "the recourse to already produced forms" (Bourriaud, 2002, 16).

Landscape (re)visited

The elaboration of the landscape in terms of post-production is an effort reduced not only to the exhibition and to spectatorship within the gallery space. The public space, expanded to its physical, cultural and social dimensions, represents – for numerous artists – the ideal matrix in which the landscape is reinvented. The landscape as post-production means "producing" it within the landscape. It is a sort of landscaping intervention within the landscape itself, a way to render in a tautological manner the very definition of the landscape; landscape as a matrix, landscape as a discourse, as a process.

In this sense, one of the most significant – and one of the most famous, nevertheless – examples are Christo's landscape interventions. Working together with his partner, Jeanne-Claude, their work consists in mainly large-scale outdoor interventions that are visually impressive and often controversial as a result of their scale. Their works

Fig. 3. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Reichstag*, Berlin, 1971-95. Photo: Wolfgang Volz. © 1995 Christo.

include the wrapping of the Reichstag in Berlin and the Pont-Neuf Bridge in Paris, the 39 km-long *Running Fence* in California, and *The Gates* in New York City's Central Park. As they often affirmed, the purpose of their art is simply to create joy and beauty and to create new ways of seeing familiar landscapes. Nonetheless, their interventions are more than that...

In Christo's installations, forms are revealed through concealment (Bourdon). Forms and objects upon which they intervene are equally constructed and deconstructed, equally affirmed and negated. In the examples of painting given above we are dealing with the direct quote, with the re-contextualization of the model or of the object within the actual matrix of the work; in this way, a sort of glide from one point of reference to another is realized, in a permanent dynamic process of mutual-reference. However, in the case of Christo, the recourse to established points of reference is concretely realized, *in situ*. In his case, the objects, buildings, fragments of landscape which he parasites become objects of the „drift" or the „détournement". In this context, the derived forms are diversely justified – from situationism to devaluation or "post-productive" pragmatism. As Guy Debord, the inventor of the notion of détournement, has suggested,

> „Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can serve in making new combinations. Anything can be used. It goes without saying that one is not limited to correcting a work or to integrating diverse fragments of out-of-date works into a new one; one can also alter the meaning of these fragments in any appropriate way, leaving the imbeciles to their slavish preservation of ‚citations'" (Debord, 9).

This is exactly what Christo is doing: he alters the meaning of the fragments of reality he wraps, quoting them and detouring them from their initial (normal) meaning. The site, the altered site, becomes a medium in and of itself; a place of production like any other (Bourriaud, 2002, 71).

The end of (post)modernism and the current reevaluation of forms as post-production opens a novel space for reflection: the stakes are now revolving around the positive value of the remake, the articulation of utilization, the establishing of relationships between forms and modes of production rather than the heroic search for the never-before-seen and for the sublime, both characteristic of modernism, or the appropriation of models as the ultimate gesture of simulation, so typical for postmodernism.

The place of the post-postmodern poetics is, indeed, within the framework of the nostalgic paradigm, but this works as a form of knowledge configuration, a form of seizing the codes of culture, not only of their surface forms. The landscape art of the postproduction makes the artwork not an end in itself, but a „temporary terminal of a network of interconnected elements, like a narrative that extends and reinterprets preceding narratives (Bourriaud, 2002, 19). In fact, in this type of intervention, we are very close to what Rosalind Krauss named „sculpture in the expanded field" (1985). In this context, the concept of sculpture was stretched to define extremely heterogeneous manifestations, up to the point where the term itself begun to be somehow ob-

scured. The expanded field would include categories such as sculpture, site-construction, axiomatic structures and marked sites, all of them reflected in the artistic practice of a number of artists beginning with the end of 1960s. A work in the expanded field – like Christo's landscape interventions are – is after all a work of art that "does not position itself as the termination point of the 'creative process' (a 'finished product' to be contemplated) but as a site of navigation, a portal, a generator of activities." (Bourriaud, 2002, 19). Expanding the field of art production means after all working under the auspices of postproduction...

Conclusion

Contemporary artists are more *programmers* of forms than creators; rather than transfiguring a raw material, they use that which is already *given*. In a universe of consumer goods, pre-existing forms, already emitted signals, already constructed buildings, paths already traveled by predecessors, artists no longer consider the artistic field as a museum filled with works which must be cited or "surpassed" – as the modernist ideology of the new would dictate – but rather as a multitude of storage rooms filled with tools that must be used, piles of data ready to be manipulated, directed and re-exposed. Moreover, to recourse to pre-existing materials, to reclaim reference points does not equate with their relativization or the neutralization of the resulting byproducts, as postmodernist theorists maintained. The multiplication of access to the production and the consumption of the artistic object, as well as the multiplication of the *modes* of referencing reality (be it landscape or otherwise) are the premises of fades the distinction between production and consumption, between creation and perception, between conception and „spectacle". Not only art in itself becomes a raw material for the new cultural productions, but also reality itself, with all of those who inhabit it.

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Rodica MOCAN

Klaus Obermaier – "My work is not simply visualization. It's a totally different thing!"

Interview with Klaus Obermaier,
March 2013

Rodica Mocan: Klaus, what are we actually talking about when we talk about your work?

Klaus Obermaier: You know, my work is very wide… It ranges from music, to video, to real-time generated content, performing arts, installation art, so it's quite a wide field which is not really easy to explain because there are a lot of things in between. That's why I usually call what I do "intermedia."

RM: There is multimedia, there is transmedia, there is intermedia, there is … a wide range of media. How would you define intermedia? How would you narrow it down, and how did you get to that concept?

KO: I would not even narrow it down. I would open it up because I also understand performance as one of the media, so live performance for me is just one of the media I am using, not just a person or a body. So, in that way, for me, intermedia means using the many existing possibilities or even exploring new possibilities. It means to define them, to create them, to develop them, and then use them in a wider context. This is my idea of intermedia. I know, there are so many other definitions that I can't even count them and I do not know them all. I think I am a practical man, I want to do things; talking about them is nice too, but I let the others define the idea of intermedia.

RM: Let me try to narrow it down further. Is it visual arts? Is it performing arts? Is it installation or is it video art?

KO: It's all of them. Especially in pieces such as *Oedipus Reloaded*, the boundaries are disappearing. You can see some parts of theater performance as an installation, and they really work as an instal-

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Fig. 1. Klaus Obermaier.

lation; it is like if you go into a dark room and you see an installation. Some parts are really theatrical, drama theatrical, other parts use video heavily. But, of course, most of the time, all these are becoming one.

RM: It gets more and more complicated, the way you put it. Because, if I am a spectator and I come to see *Oedipus Reloaded*, what should I expect to see? Do I see a theater performance? What is the clue, the convention that helps me decode what I see? Is it the venue? If it's presented in a theater, should I read it as theater, or if it's presented in museum should I see it differently? Or is it something else?

KO: You put it right. One would still have to think it in traditional terms; we call it a "box", where you have to put everything. So you still have to sell productions, in these "boxes". When I did the *Oedipus Reloaded* it was sold as a "theater performance," with new media. But people were there to see a theater piece. At the end, they see something they never saw before, and that's the interesting point. But still, the same is true for most of my dance works. They are sometimes presented at dance festivals, and thus I have to describe them mostly as a dance show, because the public is expecting a dance. Yet, the digital system is also part of such performances. If I'm doing it on a new media festival, then people come to see my visuals and electronic music, but they realize that it's also a dance performance. I like this. It's getting a big crowd. I am invited to so many festivals, some of them I don't even know: Open Film Festival, new media festivals, puppet theater festivals, music festivals, and many more. I don't even remember all of them! And that's very nice because I can reach a much bigger audience than I would reach if I do only one type of art.

RM: What are the roots of this kind of art? Where did it start? And when did it start?

KO: It was really a flow from my previous education. I studied painting, visual arts, I had an experience as a graphic designer, and I studied music as well. Music is on stage, so I was interested, as an interpreter, how the stage looked like (I was not

that kind of classical musician who performs on the stage and always wears the same clothes.) Of course, it was alsos my visual arts side; so it really came nicely together. But, when I start doing my art, there were no computers around. So, these two parts, visual arts and music, were rather separate things. But, when computers became available, I immediately start to mix. So, I started to work with video and cameras and I started to integrate them into action. It happened, like so many times, by accident. I met people who worked with these equipments, we got together and we put up a project that was highly interactive. I start to do programming a little bit, and in the end it was like a natural process, if I look back now. I was more and more into it, and I realized that this is what I really love: to put different media together.

RM: If we go back to the beginnings: did you start with video art, (that is, using video and combining it with music at different projections, and then it evolved), or did you start directly with digital?

KO: It was in parallel. Digital video was something I could do by myself. I could cut it on the computer, borrow some cameras... so it was possible. The use of other things, such as interactive laser (a very sophisticated thing that connects videos, music, lasers and body movement),happend more or less at the same time. This drove me totally into it. I had the possibility to work more with interactive media, again, with different people. By learning programming, I found out that I can also do many real-time digital images all by myself. Then I started to work with high-level programmers, C++, so it was going on like this. It still is like this now. When I make installations like the recent *Dancing House*, I work alone using tools like Kinect to make it interactive.

Fig. 2. Klaus Obermaier, *Dancing House* (2012-2013). Interactive projection mapping and sound installation.

RM: But if you go back to you as an artist, when you started to work with this kind of art, were you aware that you are doing something new or that you are part of a new genre? Or the things just evolved in time?

KO: I was not aware, I was extremely interested to explore things, and I realized only later that we are really doing new things that nobody was doing. There were very few people in the field. However, many people were interested in the new things, in making an interesting show with a good content. We had many good critical responses saying that this is ground breaking, that this is absolutely new, internationally. But I was not searching for the new. It was more about exploring things and realizing later that, Whoa! this is amazing!

RM: When we are looking at the artist as performer: in music, the artist is on stage, the spot light is there, the artist is seen, is heard... In visual arts, the artist is behind, no one usually sees him or her; you only see the work of art. Now, speaking about what you are doing, was there a moment when one or the other was true? Or they were both true? Are you seen [as a performer] or are you not seen?

KO: At the beginning, when I was doing my interactive pieces I was on stage, I was a performer. Later on, I realized that I want to work with dancers, and I really loved it, so I decided to remain backstage. I did works involving my body on stage until late '90s. But then, I decided that I don't have the time anymore to do what I do while also being on the stage... with all the writing, and creating and directing, doing so many other things, like composing the music and making the visuals.

RM: In real-time performances, being on stage it's usually not exclusively about being seen. It's mostly about seeing the public and interacting with the public; about drawing power from their reactions. Is this still true in your live performances, those in which you are actually backstage? Do you miss seeing the face of the public?

KO: Once you have been on stage, you will always miss it. Staying backstage is not so nice. On the other hand, you have to make some compromises, otherwise it is too much to do. My interests are so wide! I can count ten more things that I do already. I enjoy that the feedback is with somebody else and the audience. If it is working well, I am totally satisfied, and I feel it. When I am sitting on the director's desk, where all the computers are installed, taking care of the performance, or switching some scenes, it is a good feeling. Even if it is a performance you did for many years - which is often the case - it so much draws me into it, that sometimes I forget to switch to another scene. This proves that I am totally happy with it, because it means that the scene is still telling me something after 40 or 50 views... I totally enjoy that.

RM: There is obviously a difference between various kinds of artists. The fine-art practitioner, the performer, the dancer, the choreographer... They all have pluses and minuses concerning their jobs, and a certain status. Is there a specific place for the kind of artist you are? By the way, how would you call it? What type of artist are you? Intermedia artist, visual artist? Is there a name for it? Do you struggle with defining who you are?

KO: Evidently, I struggle with it. People always ask me this when I do interviews before, or after a performance... They want to know what I am. And I just describe: I do this, that, this, that.... but there is no name for it... Some people say, ok, he is the direc-

tor. And at the end, they put me as the director of the piece. But I am actually the creator, I am the choreographer, I am the composer, and also the media artist, stage designer, etc.... I do many things and there is no name for all these different things. But, speaking about one thing you mentioned before about how different kinds of artist do things differently... After I finished my studies in music and visual arts, I realised that I was interested in time-based art, something that is going over time in order to get you into something. This is what I love so much about music, this is why music is a very important part, even if it is not my music. I like the flow of music, how the music is composed, and I try to compose my performances with this in mind. It has to have a flow... If the flow is not there, I am very unsatisfied. In the visual arts, the process of doing art was the nicest thing. But then, to hang it somewhere was a little bit unsatisfying. People just go there, stand there, look and come again. Once I had the experience of being on stage and play my music and get public's attention for one hour or two hours, it was so much more enjoyable for me. So, the visual part came back in when I can do both on stage, not only on the computer, but in real life.

RM: Obviously, there are other artists who have a similar approach as you. Do you meet them? Where do you see their work?

KO: At festivals. This is always the nice thing. Usually, it is not so easy to see other things because you are working all day for your own set up until late in the evening, while other shows are going on and you would like to be able to see them. If everything runs well, I get a chance to see them. If I am lucky, some festivals invite you to stay longer. A nice and generous thing. Then, you have a chance to meet the artists, see other works, and this is wonderful. So, this is mainly how I see other's works.

(...)

RM: Are there other names, other artists who do the kind of work you do, and you would like to mention? Who is who in the world of intermedia?

KO: There are many extraordinary people, but it's hard to mention others that cover such a wide range that I do. (...)

RM: Since these kinds of media rely so much on [interactive] new technologies developed mostly in the last twenty years, how would you define spectatorship? Who is your audience? Is it mainly young people who attend your shows, or you are able to address all kinds of people?

KO: This is an interesting question. I was always thinking if what I am doing would address rather younger people. And especially with performances such as *Vivisector*, *Apparition*, or *Le Sacre du Printemps*, I was totally surprised that they are not seen only by younger people. All kind of ages loved them; it was funny that some critics wrote about a woman in her late 70's who was totally into these performances and loved them so much. Many of these people come to me after the show just to tell me that they always thought that a performance based on new technology is not really touching, and that it is only for young people, but in fact this was really touching and that they felt impressed. I was surprised that all ages loved it. I am satisfied with it, I am hap-

py since, of course, I always wanted to communicate something, with all kind of ages and all kind of people. Another type of interest comes from the experts. So, you go to a media, a dance or music festival, you have experts there who look at your work and who are there having your work in mind. And then you have a lot of amateurs in the public, who don't really care. To satisfy both of them is not always the same thing: experts would say about many performances that they were really unbelievable, but ordinary people wouldn't share the same opinion; or the other way around. But that's the nice thing: I have to admit, it really always worked well with my performances, for both types of audiences, and that was for me a good sign. I didn't plan it that way, but it worked…

Fig. 3. Klaus Obermaier, *Le Sacre du Printemps*. (2006–ongoing) Interactive real-time generated stereoscopic dance and music project. In collaboration with Julia Mach (dance) and Ars Electronica Futurelab (interactive design and technical development).

RM: I don't think anyone would expect that all arts, or any kind of art will satisfy everyone; this should not be a problem. The fact that you appeal also to more mature audiences beside the very new ones--the new generation that is into technology--could be owed also to the fact that you're using rather classical themes, such as *Le Sacre du Printemps* a theme based on Stravinsky, or the *Oedip* theme, which is a classical one. So, you went into deep stuff, not just the electronics....

KO: Of course, that is right, but let's see: in *Apparition*, *Vivisector*, or *D.A.V.E.* it was not just about big, old, classical themes; they are based on really new themes about how our bodies are changing due to biotechnology, about interventions to the body with surgery, with nanotechnology and things like this. *Vivisector* was really about the digital, how the body becomes more digitalized in our times; or *Apparition* which is much more about how human beings interact with the digital systems. So, there was nothing which is usually interesting for, let's say, common people, but, still, it worked. That was surprising. But, when we did *Oedipus Reloaded* and especially *Le Sacre du*

Printemps I said, oh my God!, this will be in big concert houses. We will draw a lot of old people in the audience, because this is usually the public who goes to big orchestra concerts to listen *Le Sacre du Printemps*. And this was a challenge thinking of what will they think, what will they think about new technology presented in front of their eyes. But it worked out really well. That's why we are still touring it...

RM: But, what you are mentioning now is actually the convention that makes spectators expecting a certain type of concert when they enter a certain type of hall or institution. Let's say, like in this case, since it was a live orchestra playing Stravinsky, they have specific expectations. How would you define the new conventions if, let's say, the public knew that there is something extra being done? One of the things that surprises is the fact that they get stereoscopic glasses. And all of a sudden they realize that this is a sort of an avatar, although I understand it was before [the film] *Avatar*…

KO: This was very surprising, indeed, because it was years before *Avatar*, so people were not aware that they will get stereoscopic glasses.

RM: So, is it a new type of convention? Should we educate the spectators to expect the unexpected?

KO: I think that when the whole performance is done well, when the whole show has this kind of flow that is getting you into it, that immerses you, then, I think people forget about technology. So, many people in the audience, as well as critics, always say: I want to see the show a second time, because I was too much drawn into it, and I want to see it again to find out how it is done. I always think it can be better. If you go to see a good traditional theater piece you don't care much how it is done; you just want to be into it. This is exactly what I want to do.

RM: To be honest, this is exactly what I was thinking about: can you define immersion and immersive environment as the "new" type of convention? Because, actually, this is exactly what is happening: you create an environment where the spectator is immersed more and more, where all the senses are much more drawn into this.

KO: Yes, exactly. One of the interesting things for me is to create an immersive environment. Because an immersive environment is the thing that engages you most. You have, to a greater extent, the feeling that you are part of it. You don't feel that you are just watching something, like watching television; it's something more, something that is getting all your senses and which is really drawing you in. And, what I like, what is really powerful is the immersion within stereoscopic images (like in *Sacre du Printemps*), a situation you are never in at the theater. Perhaps you can find it at home in front of a 3D TV or at cinema, but to have the same experience in reality, with a dancer, a sweating dancer performing live in front of you, so near that one can touch your nose, this is a totally different experience.

RM: Now, let's talk a bit about the venues of your shows. Because this is also something that influences you. As I understand, you perform in different kind of venues, from concert halls to, probably, museums and outdoor, large spaces. How do you prepare your performances for a specific place, how does the place influences you? There

is this theory about art that says that the definition of the artistic act, or of the art itself, is given by the institution that is hosting the performance. If it is in a museum, it has a certain definition, in a concert hall it has another definition. Do these aspects influence you?

KO: Not very much. However, the space itself and the setting do influence me. But not so much the institution; I don't care much. I usually don't do commissioned works, which is different from most of my colleagues, who usually do commissioned or subsidized works the whole year and have to do two works a year to spend their subsidized money. I'm working on the free market, so that's why I don't have to do a work when I have no desire for it. That's why I only do, let's say, two works in three years (besides composing a lot, all the time). The shows are regularly touring, perhaps for more than ten years, so this is an income for me; this is how I live on the free market. Fortunately, it works like this: I create something, then I go and tell people about it, and if I'm lucky they want to have it, which is most times the case. So, I decide if this goes rather as an installation, or if that goes into a theatre. It is me who chooses the institution rather than the other way around. This is a privilege, I have to say, because not every artist can do that. And I love that. I totally love that and I don't want to change it.

RM: If it were to make a comparison between this discussion regarding the institutions and the concepts of crossmedia or cross-platforms: probably the fact that you can move from one type of cultural establishment to another is a sign that this type of intermedia work that you do means crossing the borders and making borders irrelevant.

KO: Exactly! This is what I said before about the performances *D.A.V.E.* and *Vivisector*, which were played in so many different festivals. Film festivals have different expectations than a media festival, or a dance festival, a music festival, or a public theatre festival. Thus, this shows that the performances that I do can cross the borders of these worlds quite easily. There is also *The concept of … (here and now)* which I did with the students in Venice and in Rome and then taken on a tour. The interesting thing is that we did it initially in a theatre, then it was presented as a dance theater piece. But, after a while, I was asked to present it as a projection at the opening of a light festival (there are so many lights festivals out there). When they asked me if I can do a performance, I was thinking how a performance made for indoors would work as a light projection outdoor? I transformed it a little bit, and we did the opening for the festival. It worked so well that, immediately after this, I got another invitation for an outdoor show with the same performance in the MAGA Museum in Italy, where we had an unbelievably big projection; again, it worked amazingly good. So, the interesting thing is that some projects can have a different life even if I didn't plan it, or I didn't expect it. When it works out like that, it's great. If it would not work well, I wouldn't say yes to the invitation. It must really work, it really must fit me. This is what happens with some of my performances.

RM: You are lucky that you can be an independent artist: you are able to choose what you want to do, what you think it's doable and keep the quality that you would expect. Working with all these media, and working with so many types of specialists, especially for the larger and more complex pieces that you did, must be very challenging. What is the biggest challenge? Where do you find yourself mostly challenged when you have to work with other people for your productions?

KO: It is difficult if you don't always find the best people. That's why I like to work with the same people for a longer period of time, if I find the right ones. It really makes sense. Unfortunately, not all the people are available all the time. I had once a super good programmer for operations with whom I would love to work for many other projects. Unfortunately for me, he founded a family, and went to full time job, and of course, he is not available anymore. So, things are always changing. But, this is always a challenge, because if somebody works with you, he also understands you very well afterwards. When you do a new project, you have to do half of the explanation. The same happens with someone new: it takes you a while to explain, and maybe you'll find out that it is not going so well… It's like a relationship: you find out that you maybe don't love that person so much [laughing]. And, you have to find ways how to still go on, because you cannot exchange people when you are already in the middle of the project. Luckily, most times I found good working partners with whom I like to work and with whom we have a great fun; so, we are a crowd of people and we really like to be together. It's really important to like it. But,, in my opinion, finding the right people is still the biggest challenge. Recently I had to find new dancers for the concert, because the two dancers started to fight each other. Before that, they were the best friends, but something happened and now was impossible to work with them anymore.

Fig. 4. Klaus Obermaier, *Apparition* (2004-ongoing) Interactive dance and media performance conceived and directed by Klaus Obermaier, in collaboration with the Ars Electronica Futurelab, featuring Desirée Kongerød and Rob Tannion.

RM: Speaking about how complicated the logistics are, can you give an example of your easiest piece in terms of logistics? What was the smallest crew, or the smallest logistic technology that you used, and which was the most complex one?

KO: The most simple was *Vivisector*: there are 4 dancers, and only one video projector on stage, with the video running from my video player. And, of course, there is the audio system, but the rest is just the black box. We had no light, nothing else. So, the setup was really easy. You go there, set the video projector, make some marks on the floor, make the sound checking and you are good to go. That was unbelievable. But still, a lot of people were asking how is this all made; they were looking around, taking pictures, touching the projector, looking around if there is other technological stuff. This is really the simplest piece to set up. Of course, the *doing* of the piece was the big thing. Because apart from the choreography, I did all the other things. I composed the music, shot the video, edit the video, and did all the special effects. It was quite a long process to do it, but once it was done, it was really simple. The technology was simple, too. I did it on my computer at home and with my camera. The most complex project was probably the *Le Sacre du printemps* or, perhaps, *Apparition*: a very complex piece, as well. But it is hard to say.

RM: Speaking about the live pieces, how many cameras, how many computers were used?

KO: The greatest number of cameras and computers I use in *Le Sacre du printemps*: we have a lot of cameras to give different perspectives and a couple of computers running the projection; all was stereoscopic. Speaking about difficulties, dealing with classical orchestras and conductors can also be a little bit difficult. Ironically, the most prominent ones are not difficult, they are easy going, as far as I know while working with them. Another difficulty is the set-up in the hall, since the concert halls are not made for presenting new media. However, in theaters or opera houses, there is no problem: you have the hanging points, devices, you have everything. But not in the concert halls. What is unbelievable for me is that they still build concert halls in which they don't try to accommodate new media. Can you imagine what will we do in twenty years with these concert halls?

RM: On the other hand, if we talk about the really large scale concerts performed by rock stars that are touring around, they usually have lots of new media installations set up in place, but somehow nobody thinks about transferring them to the other, "real" (traditional) concert halls.

KO: Exactly, this is something that I don't understand, especially when they build new concert halls, or when they refurbish old ones. You have to think now how it will serve in the future, not only what it is now. Some developers consider these aspects, but some others are not. We had a disaster in Hamburg with a concert hall that was never finished because there were many problems; the way they did this concert hall turned it into a building that is not versatile at all. They can do nothing else but concerts over there.

RM: Probably you are pioneering this thing with concerts. And actually, when you go to a concert, very often you close your eyes, then you visualize in one way or another. And that's the feeling that I had when I've seen your piece: that actually I'm seeing things that I would have seen if I was alone in my head. Are you thinking of expanding it and doing it in other concerts, or it was only one-time kind of thing?

KO: I usually don't do commissioned works, although some people asked me to adapt my work and use other classical musical pieces than those it was originally conceived for. There are two reasons for not doing this. One is that most of the pieces proposed are not interesting for me (well, they could be interesting, but not for me!). Another reason is that the pieces proposed are not made for having a visual component. I don't want to do a Mahler symphony and just add some pictures on it. That's only VJ-ing. I'm not doing "visualizations". This is also a big misunderstanding about my work. Some people call it visualization. But it's not simply visualization. It's installation and staging. It's a total different thing! I'm not adding something. I want to make a complete, whole of it. *Le Sacre du Printemps* was composed as a ballet. So, the visual component was meant to be part of the piece. What I did was only to expand it with new technologies. At the same time, *Le Sacre du Printemps* was one of my favorite pieces when I studied music, when I was very young. I didn't listen to it for a long time after that, but this was one of the pieces that I was asked to work with by a theatre director. He said: Klaus, do you want to do something with *Le Sacre du Printemps*?, I said, I didn't listen to that piece in quite a long time. Firstly, I have to see if I still like it, and if I do, I will get back to you with some ideas. Nothing else was commissioned. I was simply asked: do you want to do something with that piece, whatever you like? So, I thought about it. Interestingly enough, during that period, I was invited to hold a lecture in Denmark, and the organizers presented me their space, with 3D devices and stereoscopic possibilities for developing installations. They asked if I want them to work for me in a new project, assuring me that they would love to do that. So, I accepted. My head was already spinning, and during the travel home to Austria I had already a complete set up in mind with all what I wanted to do. I didn't have a title for it, but I knew that I want to have live musicians, a performer and the orchestra. Making it, I realized that I love again *Le Sacre du Printemps*. And I said to myself: I had a piece for that, it's done! It was really like that; I knew exactly how the piece would look like, how it will go on, what theme I have and how the setting is: we have the orchestra here, the performer there, the cameras here and there, and there, and there, so we have to start. It was really amazing; this happens very often to me. When the things get well together, it is like: it's already there, we just have to see it.

RM: Let's move back a little bit now to define the area. You've touched on the word VJ and you've mentioned that what you do is not VJ-ing. Can you expand a little bit on that and explain what is VJ-ing in your vision? Leaving apart the obvious, the commercial, or the club setting of VJ-ing, but sticking to the technology and the real-time

image manipulation that you're doing, and they're doing, what would be the main difference between intermedia, as you prefer to call what you're doing, and VJ-ing?

KO: Most of the time club-type VJ-ing is like the MTV in the 90's: it's a lot of fast-cutting, it's going on all the time, and you're into this immersive environment of non-sense, to tell the truth. You know that MTV was also called EmptyV? Because it was just visuals, visuals, visuals; it was fascinating, but has nothing to transmit. This is what happens in VJ-ing. People don't know how to do it clever, although some VJs are already there, and they do good things. Why is this different from what I am doing? Well, I'm not so much into watching somebody behind a desk and moving some slides on a mixing console, or pushing buttons on a computer and telling others that I am really doing something there. This is something in which I personally don't believe, because for a VJ everything is already running there, so it's nothing to create.

RM: Ok, so the VJs are more in the middle of it, they also perform in the sense of being on the stage.

KO: Yes, but they are not really performing, they are not doing it live. This is something that I don't like very much. It's just boring to watch somebody sitting by the computer and moving some slides to make the things happen. So, what I do is to show the real process, to show how these things are working, how these interactions are. So these are real interactions, they are not fake interactions. If people are on stage, you can follow how these interactions happen. I also want to create that kind of flow that makes sense, and which is not just a load of effects and different pictures usually used in an evening with a DJ. Exceptions prove the rule!. That is a totally different thing. They make *a visualization of the music*. They try to visualize the music, to add something to the music. And, in my opinion, good music doesn't need visualization. If it's good music, as you said earlier, you can close your eyes and you will have so many visuals in your head that makes it amazing. So, when I work with music I don't want to add something to the music, it should create a big whole new experience. This is rather a way to create a partnership with the music than just playing the music and visualizing it.

RM: Translating the music into visuals versus creating a new product that has music as a support...

KO: Exactly! You said something that is very important. It's not about translating it into music, at all! So, I don't want to do with the visuals the same that the music does. I want to do something that is cleverly done, something that maybe stands in a complete contrast to the music, which creates a tension, and not just supporting it.

RM: But, in *Le Sacre du Printemps* you also tap into the music, and you pick up highlights of the music and make them triggers in your visuals.

KO: Right! But, it's not a visualization of it. It's an integration, if I may say so, or rather an interaction with it.

RM: Interaction is probably the word!

KO: And to interact between the visuals and the music that's the interesting point. That's also what VJs do, but usually it's a one way interaction. They have the music, and the music is influencing the pictures. It's never the other way around. This is something that I also have sometimes, but it's a more complex interactive circulation; visuals have their independent life there, they are not just following the music.

RM: I understand that, nowadays, some VJs are starting to use means of having their audience, obviously in a completely different way than in the concert hall, but to interact and to influence it either by the use of light, by using wide movements, loud voice and noise or mapping images and feeding them back into the system.

KO: Which makes sense in my opinion, because at least it integrates them much stronger. Now, clever people are doing much more clever things in VJ-ing than it was before. Some years before mapping was really bad, but in the last years some people found out that they can do better. And they are creating much more interesting things. They are also doing one important thing: they reduced the overkill of simple, stupid images, to create something clearer, something more precise and simpler, which means doing it better and much more clever.

(to be continued)