Chapter

2

Do You Speak Film?: Film Language and Adaptation

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When you get right down to it, the most
fantastic thing you could film is
people reading.
(Jean-Luc Godard)

One of the first things that one can say about language is that it can be spoken, written, learnt, and used for making ourselves understood, delivering or perceiving information. We can think of systems of communication other than ours (the barking of dogs, the dance of bees, etc.) as similar languages even if we cannot really learn or understand them. In the 1960s and 1970s, theorists of the cinema attempted to model a language that governs the system of film and describe what we should mean by the term *film language*.

Film language is a special kind of language, as it cannot be spoken and is an endlessly constructed and reconstructed system of medial communication. As Francesco Casetti argues, the phrase "film language" refers, on the one hand, to the theoretical tradition born before the Second World War that advocated cinema as a means of communication, "a device that allows man to express himself and to interact" (Casetti 54). On the other hand, it also refers to a completely new way of studying film, initiated in the mid-1960s by semiotics, whereby "the study of the *linguistic basis* of films [...] is replaced by the study of the *linguistic features*" (55) that cinema operates with. The difference between the two is that while in the first approach takes the linguistic analogue for granted and natural, the latter approach does away with this essentialist description of film, and investigates "specific components of a broader phenomenon" (ibid.). The analysis of film language, thus, looks at the ways the myriad of components are organized into a film, more precisely, into a filmic narrative.

According to Albert Laffay, the cinema is based on narrative because it is the only way to "make reality legible on the screen" (66). If cinema was to present reality as it is, the spectator would not be able to make sense out of the "vague outlines, confused distances" and the "open and dispersed" his or her universe (ibid). Narrative is the key: it is the tool that weaves separate components of reality together; it is the logic around which a story gets organized; and the frame that provides structure and perspective for the recorded world. In doing so, narrative is able to give meaning to the represented world, provides it with logic and vocabulary, by which it makes film into a language.

The way a film narrative is realized, however, is not without consequences. Once the film has a linguistic focus, and a cultural and artistic frame, it appears to have a "comprehensive design, a pervasive immanent logic," which is not to be confused with the director's claim on the "true message" of the film, i.e. what s/he wanted to "say" (67). This focus presupposes an abstract figure that "runs the game:" the *grand imagier*, "namely, the general instance that incarnates the very act by means of which the film allows itself to be seen and understood" (68). The grand imagier – which is also referred to as implied author or enunciator in narratology – is by no means the auteur or the narrator: it is a discursive mode that gives birth to both, and to the film narrative as such. While it may bear resemblance to the concept of the auteur-function of auteur-structuralism, the notion of the grand imagier pertains to particular films and not to the works of an author.

If we define *narrative* as "a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space" (Bordwell and Thompson 90), we can see why narrative aspects have become pillars of investigating fiction films. On a formal level, there is a distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet*. According to Victor Shklovsky, fabula (usually translated as "story") is the "pattern of relationships between characters and the pattern of actions as they unfold in chronological order" (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 71). Fabula can either be considered as the "raw material" which the filmmaker turns into the syuzhet, or as the imaginary construct of the spectator based on the syuzhet. The syuzhet (usually translated as "plot") is the actual presentation of the story: events are not necessarily chronologically organized, "*in medias res* construction, retardation, parallel plots, ellipsis" among others can be used by the filmmaker to refashion the fabula "into an aesthetically satisfying form" (ibid.).

One of the central concepts of film narratology is *point of view*, which can either be defined as "the optical perspective of a character whose gaze or look dominates a sequence," or as "the overall perspective of the narrator toward the characters and events of the fictional world" (83). In the first case, point of view can be discussed in terms of the issue of *focalization* – "the activity of the character from whose perspective events are perceived" (87); in the second, it can be related to the role of the *narrator* – "the agent, inscribed in the text, who relates or recounts the events of the fictional world" (83). While the narrator is the one who "speaks," the focalizer can be described as the one who "sees."

The filmic narrative is usually referred to as *diegesis:* a term that originates from Plato, who distinguished between two types of narratives. One is the *mimetic narrative,* which is the representation of a story through imitation, the other is the *diegetic narrative,* which is a "simple narrative," in which "the poet himself is the speaker" (Bordwell 16) – that is in which there is a narrator who relates the story. In the case of fiction film, the second category applies because these films are considered to be "told" from a specific perspective by a storyteller. A narrator can be either within a narrative or outside. If the narration is performed by a character in the film, it is then a *character-narrator,* or *intradiegetic narrator* (intradiegetic literally means "within

the narrative"). When the narrator appears in the story s/he recounts, we call him/her a *homodiegetic narrator;* when s/he does not appear in the story s/he tells, s/he is a *heterodiegetic narrator.* It is important, though, that in both cases an identifiable character is the agent of narration. However, if the narrator is outside the narrative, it is an *extradiegetic narrator* (extra-diegetic literally means "external to the narrative"), and the spectator does not directly see or hear the narration (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 97).

Laffay's work was not so far from other attempts to define film as a language: the 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of the so-called "filmolinguist" project, the aim of which was to study film with the help of linguistics and structuralist semiotics. Instead of asking "What is the cinema?," which would point toward the specificity thesis, the issue of the essence of the cinema, filmolinguists turned to questions of discipline and method. Cristian Metz in *Film Language* developed a new vocabulary for the study of fiction films: a combination of the technical vocabulary of linguistics and narratology. In a sense, it was the continuation or rather building upon some ideas of the Russian Formalists. One of the prominent theorists of Russian Formalism, Boris Eikhenbaum argued, for example, that "cinema is a particular system of figurative language," (Stam 50) which means that the filmic narrative is made up of a complex syntax consisting of phrases and sentences.

In the final scene of *Stigmata* (1999, dir. Rupert Wainwright) we can see doves flying out of purgatory fire that engulfs a room in which the clerical investigator (Gabriel Byrne) and Frankie (Patricia Arquette) meet. It is clear that a dove could not be able to fly out of any fire without getting burnt; however, the narrative syntax that operates the film makes it obvious how it is still possible in the given context. Doves appear in certain emphatic scenes from the beginning of the film to signify and foreshadow the painful moments of some stigma being inflicted on the body of the unsuspecting Frankie. Images of doves and feathers act, therefore, as figures of speech do in literature: in this case doves are visual metonymies of the appearance of stigmas. In the final scene of *Stigmata,* no one gets upset by the ridiculous suggestion of the scene because the figurative "language" employed from the very beginning of *Stigmata* prepares the spectator for the seemingly impossible event.

Apart from the approach towards film language through narrative, there is a path through the subversion of narrativity, which was initiated by Soviet montage theorists. Interestingly, theory was something Sergei Michailovich Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Dziga Vertov, among others, did not think to be relevant to filmmaking, and rather opted for experimentation in cinematic style and technique. Eisenstein and most of his colleagues were originally trained in practical fields (engineering, architecture, etc.), so it was no surprise that the emphasis of their cinematic experimentation was on the film technique, on construction, and on experiment.

The emphasis on construction actually paved the way for the introduction of the quintessence of the Soviet cinema as such: *montage.* Montage in the Romance languages means

"assembling," "editing", but usually even Anglo-Saxon literature on film keeps this word when referring to the Soviet cinema, as it became its trademark. For the Soviet montage theorists, montage had "become the indisputable axiom on which the worldwide culture of the cinema has been built" (Stam 38). According to them, "the alchemy of montage [...] brought life and luster to the inert base materials of the single shot" (ibid.). It means that well before the import of structuralism into film theory, the Soviet filmmaking school insisted on the idea that the filmic shot, as the basic element of the film, had no "intrinsic meaning prior to its placement within a montage structure" (ibid.). A shot's meaning arose only in its relation to other shots in the same sequence. According to Kuleshov, what distinguishes the cinema from other arts, therefore, is the capacity of the montage to organize disjointed fragments into meaningful, rhythmical sequence.

To account for this claim, Kuleshov set up an experiment, which is commonly referred to today as the *Kuleshov-effect.* His aim was to show that editing could engender emotions and associations that went far beyond the content of individual shots. Kuleshov's principle was that if each shot is like a building block and derives its meaning from its context (i.e. the shots placed around it), then, if the context of a shot is changed by placing it in a different sequence, the whole meaning of the shot and the sequence changes. In the experiment Kuleshov juxtaposed several shots taken from different pieces of a film which then he edited into a sequence. He also used one close-up still shot of the actor Ivan Mosjoukine and juxtaposed it to three other, completely different shots (a plate of soup, a dead woman in her coffin and a child playing). The effect of this juxtaposition for the spectator is that the actor's face changes expression, which in essence is impossible because it is a still shot. Consequently, it was film technique rather than "reality" that generated spectatorial emotion.

Eisenstein's view of montage was far more radical than Kuleshov's. While Kuleshov believed in shots making links and thus making up a sequence, Eisenstein believed not in juxtaposing, but in conflict. He was not interested in linear cause-effect plot construction, but rather in a disrupted, disjunctive, fractured diegesis. The Eisensteinian conflict is not only *between* shots, but *within* individual shots as well. In interaction shots must collide, creating a shock for the spectator, which was the basis for the so-called *intellectual montage.* In Eiseinstein's view, the shot is the raw material which filmmakers and the spectators use to construct meaning. He thought that the conflict arising in montage creates a *third meaning* whose relevance bears directly on the revolutionary history and the social reality of the Soviet Union. An example of the process of intellectual montage is provided by Eisenstein himself: the first set of shots depicts a poor woman and her undernourished child seated at a table upon which there is an empty bowl. Then there is a cut to the second set of shots, which depicts an overweight man with a golden watch and chain stretched over his fat belly. He is seated at a table groaning with food. The rapid juxtaposition of these two sets of images through quick editing creates a collision that, in turn, creates a third set of images in the spectator's mind:

that of the oppression of the poor by the rich, which is further translated into political terms in the oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Eisenstein's principle of editing is then a rapid alternation between sets of shots whose signification occurs at the point of their very collision.

Similarly to Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov refused to work along the logic of the classical Hollywood narratives. He declared in a manifesto-like tone that "the old films, based on the romance, theatrical films and the like, to be leprous" (Vertov qtd. in Stam 44). Instead of the false and dangerous pleasures classical narrative genres could offer, Vertov introduced the idea of the *kino-eye* ("kino glas" in Russian), the cinematic eye, which is an anthropomorphic version of the film camera. Its aim was to explore the world down to its tiniest detail – but with a political edge, of course: the ultimate aim was to "aid each oppressed individual and the proletariat as a whole in their effort to understand the phenomena of life around them" (ibid). Vertov describes the kino-eye as superior to the human eye:

> I am kino-eye. I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it.
> Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility. I am in constant motion. I draw near, then away, from objects. I crawl under, I climb onto them. I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse. I plunge full speed into a crowd. (ibid.)

While Vertov's work is thus highly ideologized, the kino-eye employed, for example, in *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) set the agenda for documentary filmmaking, entirely devoid of fictional elements. Cinema was, for him, a mechanically perfected look at reality composed of shots as building blocks for the truthful representation of the world.

Against all this theoretical precedent, the aim of the filmolinguist project was to integrate Saussurean linguistics in order to achieve in film what Ferdinand de Saussure achieved in linguistics: to disengage the abstract signifying system of language *(langue)* from the chaotic plurality of speech *(parole),* which means to boil down the uses of language, and the utterances, to the key units and rules of combination in the system of language. According to Metz, the object of film semiotics was "to disengage from the heterogeneity or plurality of meanings of the cinema its basic signifying procedures, its combinatory rules, in order to see to what extent these rules resembled" the system of natural languages (Stam 109).

The pursuit of such an analogy, however, poses serious problems. Metz recounts many of the hindrances that a systematic study of film language entails:

> (1) Shots are infinite in number, contrary to words, but like statements, which can be formulated in verbal language.
> (2) Shots are the creations of the film-maker, unlike words (which pre-exist in lexicons), but similar to statements (which are in principal the invention of the speaker).
> (3) The shot presents the receiver with a quantity of undefined information,

contrary to the word. From this point of view, the shot is not even equivalent to the sentence. Rather, it is like the complex statement of undefined length (how is one to describe a film shot completely by means of natural language?).

(4) The shot is an actualized unit, a unit of discourse, an assertion, unlike the word (which is a purely virtual lexical unit), but like statement, which always refers to reality or a reality (even when it is interrogative or jussive). The image of a house does not signify "house," but "Here is a house"; the image contains a sort of index of actualization, by the mere fact that it occurs in a film.

(5) Only to a small extent does a shot assume its meaning in paradigmatic contrast to the other shots that might have occurred at the same point along the filmic chain (since the other possible shots are infinite in number), whereas a word is always a part of at least one more or less organized semantic field. The important linguistic phenomenon of the clarification of present units by absent units hardly comes into play in the cinema. (Metz 1974, 115–116)

On the basis of the list of the hindrances above Metz argues that "to 'speak' a language is to use it, but to 'speak' cinematographic language is to a certain extent to invent it" (101). Therefore, cinema is not a language system *(langue)* but a language *(langage):* film texts are not generated by an underlying language system; nonetheless they seem to manifest a language-like system (105). Film produces signifying procedures by organizing itself as narrative. Thus, the object of the semiotic study of film became the diegesis: narration itself, but also the fictional space; the time dimensions implied in and by the narrative; the characters, the landscapes, the events, and other narrative elements, in so far as they are considered in their denoted aspect. *Denotation* is, of course, more complicated when talking of film: in photography, denotation is a simple visual transfer that is not codified, and has no inherent organization because human intervention affects only the level of connotation (for example, by lighting, camera angles, and special effects). In film, partial views make up the diegetic denoted object (for example, a house is composed of the successive shots of a staircase, the walls, a window, an establishing shot of the building). Denotation is constructed and thus codified, and this procedure of construction relies on a certain number of dominant habits, without absolute rules (118–19).

To isolate the principal syntagmatic features or spatial-temporal orderings of narrative cinema, Metz to set up the *Grand Syntagmatique.* The eight syntagmas that Metz defined are: (1) the *autonomous shot;* (2) the *parallel syntagma* (a contrasting device: two sets of images in contrast, such as "war and peace," "love and hate"); (3) *bracket syntagma* (such as routine-like activity that introduces us into the diegesis); (4) *descriptive syntagma* (a successive display of objects so as to suggest spatial coexistence); (5) *alternating syntagma* (previously known as "narrative cross-cutting:" chaser and chased, for example); (6) *scene* (the depicted event is continuous, while the presentation of it can be fragmented into shots); (7) *episodic sequence* (brings together a series of episodes, optical devices connect and disconnect, for example dissolves, fade-ins and fade-outs, often bridged by music); and finally (8) *ordinary sequence* (one

event is shown in separate parts, in which temporal ellipsis is employed to pass unimportant details and dead time) (124–133).

While the concept and the list that comprised the Grand Syntagmatique was criticized for a couple of reasons (such as its privileging of mainstream narrative cinema), and favors the image over sound while it uses sound in many cases as a support for a category, it undeniably was the first (and probably the last) attempt to frame the creative rules of narrative cinema. The study of diegesis, however, should be extended to include elements of film that are not part of the narrative in the strict sense, yet no narrative could be formed without them. While narration and focalization play crucial roles in the formation of narrative reality, film does not work without also being related to mimesis, according to André Gaudreault's theorisation of *monstration*. Monstration works in the realm of mimesis, as opposed to – or as a corollary to – narration, which is characteristically a feature of the diegesis. According to Gaudreault, monstration precedes narration, that is, the image comes before editing. As he explains, film operates on two separate, yet interwoven levels: one is the showing of an image (mimesis), which is then refigured through the process of editing (diegesis). It is the editing process that determines, and finally shapes, the point of view of the film's narrator (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 115). Then, film is constructed by the superimposition of two layers, a mimetic and a non-mimetic, that is the "lamination of *monstration* and narration" (ibid.). In other words, Chaplin's figure, for example, captured by the camera precedes the formation of the Chaplin character as a narrative construct. The monstrative part of the character spectators know as Chaplin needs to be infused with narrative functionality to become the iconic figure as we know him through the films he appears in.

The consideration of complex structural components in film sheds light on the relevance of the discussion of *adaptation* because the process of adapting a literary narrative, for example, is far from being a simple transposition. Furthermore, if we accept Gaudreault's thesis according to which monstration precedes narration, the issue gets even more complicated: how do we account for this when we learn that before the shots there had been yet another narrative (the novel)? A discussion of film language, thus, sooner or later turns towards the issue of *translatability:* if sentences in a language can be translated to another language, is it possible to translate literature to film? What if we go further and include other forms of artistic expression used as basis for "filmic translations"? The topic we circumscribe this way is adaptation. Virtually everyone feels capable of commenting on a film adaptation he or she has just seen, and the comment is often a simplified value judgment based on the spectator's expectation: the cinema-goer would like to see on the screen exactly what he or she read in the book. Alfred Hitchcock once expressed his opinion on the activity of his critics, who notoriously condemned his adaptations as unfaithful to their sources or violating the message of the original. His answer came in the form of a joke in which two "junkyard goats are chewing on old film canisters: You know, one goat says to the other, the book was better than the picture"

(Leff 2002). Apart from its humor, Hitchcock's anecdote testifies of a vicious and thorough criticism of the century-old method of analyzing film adaptations.

But what are the reasons that brought film adaptation to the forefront of film production quite early? And even if we assume it must have had some role in the establishment of the cinema as a cultural, artistic, and economic institution, why is adaptation still dominant in filmmaking? Why do we still talk about it and why does the film industry still turn to literary materials instead of making their own, absolutely or purely filmic one?

One glance at the history of film reveals that adapting literary works to film is by no means a new invention: even the Lumière brothers did it (their thirteen-scene production of *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ* – an adaptation based on biblical stories – was presented in 1897). It means that film adaptation as a way of making films is as old as the cinema itself. By the 1910s, film adaptations had become marketing tools which helped to bring to the movie palaces middle classes, since these adaptations of canonized literary works legitimized the cinema as a "venue of taste" (Hayward 3). In other words, the adaptations of "high" literature, partly at least, established the cinema as a culturally respected form of entertainment (entertainment-as-art), at the same time providing it with an economic support. Furthermore, a certain extent of pedagogical value had also been attributed to films, since they were thought to be able to "teach" a nation about its classics, its literary and cultural heritage – in a way, to teach a nation about itself, which immediately takes the institution of the cinema to the forefront, turning it into a means of identity-maker (consider the role of BBC productions of classics in British cultural heritage).

"A literary adaptation creates a new story, it is not the same as the original, it takes on a whole new life, as indeed do the characters" (Hayward 4). This statement by Susan Hayward may seem to be common-sense or trivial, but is immediately overwritten when one is carried away by his or her opinion about a particular adaptation – so it needs to be reinstituted from time to time. To illustrate her claim, Hayward offers the example of the reappearance of characters developed in one fictional universe in another one – with the same or somewhat different characteristics – like Austen's Mr. Darcy (*Pride and Prejudice,* 1995, dir. Simon Langton) transferred into the twentieth century, as a wealthy, grumpy lawyer in *Bridget Jones's Diary* (played by Colin Firth who, in fact, plays the same role in the BBC rendition of the Austen novel). As Metz remarks in his pioneering work on cinema, *The Imaginary Signifier,* what the reader/viewer "has before him in the actual film is [...] someone else's phantasy" (112). Therefore, it should be regarded as such, and nothing more: an adaptation is a way of reading and seeing a particular text. Furthermore, according to DeWitt Bodeen, "Adapting literary works to film is, without a doubt, a creative undertaking [...] the task requires a kind of selective interpretation, along with the ability to recreate and sustain an established mood" (McFarlane 7).

While everyone seems to be trained enough to comment on the issue of film adaptation, the critical literature on the topic is surprisingly thin – not in terms of volumes, of course, but in development and scope. The majority of criticism – even today – tends to base its arguments on what is called "fidelity criticism," the agenda of which is to contrast and compare the "source text" or "original" and the adapted or "copy," and judge the quality of the latter on the degree of its fidelity to the former in terms of letter-to-letter semblance or essence as a measure or correspondence. The two approaches are often denoted by the terms *fidelity to the letter* and *fidelity to the spirit* and, as the hegemonic discourse surrounding the terms may already reveal, they present a rather biased view, inherently putting forth a verdict before the actual study of the film. Sadly, it is often true for academic approaches: even when an analysis is not directly concerned with a given film's artistic adequacy or fidelity to a beloved source in any way, the tackling of the material tends to be narrow in range, the rhetoric is "respectful" of the original text and nurtures a set of ideologically loaded binary oppositions like literature versus cinema, high versus mass culture, or original versus copy. While film criticism, as such, is not necessarily part of the academic agenda of film theories, it thus still has resonances, and is therefore worth studying it in a bit more detail.

Usually, there are three categories, which are deployed in classifying film adaptations, according to Dudley Andrew. The first type is *borrowing* which is thought to be the most often utilized approach by filmmakers, whereby an idea or material is employed in a new form "borrowed" from an earlier, usually successful work of art. Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (1995), for example, is loosely based on Jane Austen's *Emma,* presenting the life and search for love of Cher Horowitz (Alicia Silverstone) in a twentieth-century West Coast urban setting. The second category is *intersecting,* which respects and "preserves" the "uniqueness" of the original text (whatever that means), in such a way that it is recognizably remains a feature or part of the adaptation. The most often cited example for this is Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1954), where the spectator is, in fact, shown the writing process of the diary of the title. Championing this approach, André Bazin claims that it is the prime example for the film (adaptation) being "the novel as seen by the cinema" (Andrew 98–100). "Unquestionably the most frequent and most tiresome discussion of adaptation [...] concerns *fidelity and transformation,*" says Andrew (31), saying that most think that the prime task of a filmmaker is to reproduce in the adaptation something essential about the original text. A long line of faithful BBC adaptations of classical texts by William Shakespeare or Jane Austen, or the James Ivory and Ismail Merchant productions of E. M. Forster's novels are notable examples of this trend in filmmaking. Without having recourse to the issue of the essence of the cinema, as opposed to the essence of all other art forms, this approach to adaptations favors two possible routes for analysis: examining the adapted work's fidelity to the letter and fidelity to the spirit of the original.

These three approaches can be spotted in basically all the critical surveys on the nature of adaptation starting with Geoffrey Wagner. He defined the first category as *transposition* (it is analogy in Andrew's list), where the literary work "is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference;" the second as *commentary* (i.e. intersecting in Andrew), "where an original is taken either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect [...] when there has been a different intention on the part of the filmmaker, rather than infidelity or outright violation;" and the third category as *analogy* (i.e. borrowing in Andrew), "which must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art" (McFarlane 9). Both critics, along with Michael Klein and Gillian Parker who have basically the same typology (McFarlane 11), claim the third category to be the creative one, in which a new work of art is produced. What is striking is that even though some authors note that the classification is "tiresome" and that the fidelity approach fails to tackle important issues, they still somehow stick to the ideologically predestined ways of seeing adaptations.

While fidelity criticism aims to disclose the places where an adaptation diverges or departs from the original, or "sacred text" (the highly established, possibly canonized literary predecessor), it may be more useful to look at novel and film simultaneously, using the potential differences between them to open up a space for intertextual dialogue. One consequence of this approach is that it does away with temporal hierarchy, which means that the question of "origin" and its "impure later use" loses its relevance. Instead, the two texts start to reveal thereto hidden aspects of themselves for each other (and for the interpreter): so that not only does the film adaptation point at specific interpretative possibilities in the novel, but vice versa, the novel also "talks about" the film. The theoretical basis for such an unusual claim can be found in Mihail Bakhtin's concept of *dialogism* (the idea that each expression is potentially related to all other expressions), and its recent adaptation to the field of film theory by Robert Stam.

According to Stam, "the notion of 'fidelity' is essentialist in relation to both media involved. First, it assumes that a novel 'contains' an extractable 'essence' hidden 'underneath' the surface details of style" (Stam "Beyond Fidelity," 57.) In other words, this approach takes the literary work as a closed entity the task of which is to transmit a concrete and coherent message to the reader. However, it is a theoretical commonplace today that a text is far from being "closed:" it is an open structure, an endless play of signification, and the act of reading is not a "cracking of the shell" to reach the meaningful kernel, but rather a volatile moment of contextualization.

Another question arises here: to what should a film be faithful then? "Is the filmmaker to be faithful to the plot in its every detail?," asks Stam. If so, it can easily lead to "a thirty-hour version of *War and Peace*" (ibid.). Or should the filmmaker conform to the "intentions" of the author? According to Stam, this path would cause further problems, as

> [a]uthors often mask their intentions for personal or psychoanalytic reasons or for external or censorious ones. An author's expressed intentions are not necessarily relevant, since literary critics warn us away from the "intentional fallacy," urging us to "trust the tale not the teller." The author, Proust taught us, is not necessarily a purposeful, self-present individual, but rather "un autre moi [another me]." Authors are sometimes not even aware of their own deepest intentions. How, then, can filmmakers be faithful to them? (ibid.)

Instead of the century-old question of fidelity to the source or to the mythical origin of a film adaptation, Stam proposes an alternative model for the analysis of adaptation. He introduces the notion of *intertextual dialogism* into the critical discourse, completely shifting the focus to the texts (literary and filmic) themselves. As he explains, intertext means that "every text forms an intersection of textual surfaces" as "all texts are tissues of anonymous formulae, variations of those formulae, conscious and unconscious quotations, and conflations and inversions of other texts" (64). Following Bakhtin, Stam asserts that one should restrain oneself from limiting the concept to solely one medium, as texts in general are products of "the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated," and which is subject to the process of dissemination (ibid.). According to Stam, as film adaptations are not only "a kind of multileveled negotiation of intertexts," but with the same token they are also "caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin" (66–67).

It seems that the filmmaking practice is ahead of adaptation theory because some films have already proved the feasibility of the dialogic approach. Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman's *Adaptation* (2002) best exemplifies this view providing a case study for the lamination of monstration and narration in an adaptive framework. The film is the adaptation of Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief* (2000), a non-fiction account that grew out of a *New Yorker* article on a self-proclaimed orchid-guru and orchid-poacher living and working in Hollywood, Florida. As Stam explains, the overtly "reflexive film focuses less on the poacher than on the book's adapter struggling to write a screenplay about adapter Charlie Kaufman struggling to write an adaptation" (Raengo and Stam 1). Things get complicated from the beginning: the real life Charlie Kaufman got a contract to write a screenplay from *The Orchid Thief*, but when he saw the difficulties of adapting a text that defies narrativity, he developed a severe case of writer's block. The reflexivity of the film lies in the release of the block: Kaufman decides to adapt the process of adaptation itself; he writes his struggles of adapting the book into the script, which subsequently becomes the movie *Adaptation*.

The greatest problem for the screenwriter in this case is "to translate fact into fiction, find new forms and equivalences" (2), among them the new form of reading, writing, and watching. The solution *Adaptation* offers is the dialogic rewriting of the book: the spectator sees

Charlie reading the Orlean book, through which the writing of *The Orchid Thief* becomes a spectacle, which takes the spectator back to the events that inspired the book, and even further to the historical events that served as the basis for Charles Darwin in writing *The Origin of the Species*. All texts, fictive and non-fictive are then caught up in a visual whirlwind and mixed into an endless intertextual product in the center of which the dialogue of texts gets its place in the figure of the adapter right in the midst of the adaptive process. Chaotic as it might seem, the film successfully renders the fictive mirror-image of Charlie Kaufman as his brother, Donald, and Donald's completely cliché-driven thriller script to work as a storyline for Charlie's extravagant screenplay idea. All the stereotypically Hollywood turns Charlie detests are crammed into the film, while it also retains the subjectivity of the adaptor in one. The source book is completely rewritten and thus cannot be regarded as a source any longer because the temporal boundaries of adaptive hierarchies are annihilated.

The film opens up a dialogic space for written, audio and visual texts on condition that these texts enter the dialogue simultaneously, giving themselves over to the play of intertextual recycling. The question is no longer whether the film is faithful to the original text because the status of "origin" is reinterpreted at the very beginning of the adaptive process. There is no text to be faithful to in the strict sense: the book Charlie could be faithful to is already the recreation of the film, which poses as the origin of the book by presenting the ontogenesis of the Orlean text, reaching well beyond the research part.

Film adaptations continue to flourish because of the financial potentials the merchandizing of books and films together promises. Moreover, an adaptation of a successful novel can also be used as a marketing ploy to lure readers to movie theaters. A look at the list of Academy Awards for Best Picture testifies that a large amount of Oscar-winning films are adaptations, starting with the first winner of 1927, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's *Sunrise,* adapted from a short story by Hermann Sudermann. While adaptation theory talks a lot about the ways literary narratives influenced the repertoire of expression of films, there is yet only a small bulk of scholarly studies investigating how cinematic forms of narration changed the ways of reading literature. It is also a matter of future interventions for adaptation theory to start analyzing different forms of source materials for films, such as painting, sculpture, or the new media formats including CD-ROMs, computer games, and online adventure games.

Keywords

film language, fabula, syuzhet, grand imagier, narrative, narration, narrator, character narrator or intradiegetic narrator, homodiegetic narrator, heterodiegetic narrator, extradiegetic narrator, diegesis, mimesis, mimetic narrative, diegetic narrative, point of view, focalizer, focalization, Kuleshov-effect, intellectual montage, kino-eye, denotation, Grand Syntagmatique, monstration, adaptation, translatability, fidelity criticism, fidelity to the letter, fidelity to the spirit, intersection, borrowing, fidelity and transformation, dialogism, intertext

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