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Adaptation and the Recycling of Texts and Images

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1. THE TENETS OF ADAPTATION THEORY. ADAPTATION AND THE RECYCLING OF TEXTS.

1.1. Adaptation and recycling.

I am very glad to be given an opportunity to go back to the origins of my work on adaptation, and to synthesize the basic principles of adaptation studies. The idea of recycling, which is the topic for the conference to come, is an ideal starting point to go back to the roots.

Indeed, adaptation is a form of recycling in at least two meanings of the term. First, the art of film has since the beginning recycled literary texts, tapping into their success and cultural legitimacy to ensure return on investment. The trend amplified in the heyday of the Hollywood studio system, and endures today, in the time of mass media corporations and subscription TV channels. Second, from a less financial perspective, the practice of adapting texts for the screen has always been a way of recycling the work in a different sense. In this sense, what comes out of the recycling bin can be used as raw material, after a number of processing operations, to be resurrected, or redeployed, in new form. In this case, the veneration of the source text which has been one of the governing principles of adaptation practices for decades, disappears to be replaced by a new consideration of the source work as raw material that should not be worshipped, but that one should feel free to reprocess, alter, revamp and modify – *reduce, reuse, recycle* – thereby giving it a new lease of life.

1.2. Adaptation and recycling: Darwinian approach, or the rekindling of meaning.

The apparent dichotomy between those two approaches raises the traditional question of fidelity, which has been one of the main conundrums for adaptation studies – I will return to it briefly in a moment. In the case of consumer-oriented recycling, indeed, adaptation is

considered to have to include enough fidelity to the source work for the adaptation to be identifiable as such, and therefore to profit from the aura of the adapted text. In the second case, however, it seems that fidelity to the origin of the adaptation is a non-issue, as processes of filiation between a number of works are erased for the benefit of the survival of the work, be it at the cost of its apparent metamorphosis, sometimes to the point of unrecognizability. From this second perspective, screen adaptation is not so different from Darwinian adaptation. One goes from the traditional view, in which content is adapted from a source work, to a new approach, where content needs to be adapted to a new set of circumstances.

From this angle, any work is made to evolve, lest it should disappear, under the pressure of these external circumstances. One such external circumstance has to do with the growing share of the visual in our culture, which puts great pressure to bear on literature, and perhaps also on literary studies. Another one has to do with the nature of our digital environments and forms of communication, populating our surroundings with screens that affect our perception of both the textual and visual, a perceptual evolution and perhaps even revolution described by Stéphane Vial as a “digital ontophany”.

This is just to say that this evolutionary conception of adaptation poses the problem, beyond the issue of the preservation of works, of our apprehension of reality altogether. I am introducing it briefly here before returning to it later, when I present what I mean by scopic adaptation.

But now that I have connected adaptation with your conference topic (I hope) let us take a look at the definitions and main issues of adaptation.

1.3. What is adaptation?

So what is adaptation? An initial definition would be: adaptation is the transposition of a literary work to the screen. This is just the restrictive definition of adaptation, as coined by the first scholars to have studied the passage from novel to film from closer up.

As ulterior developments included other art forms than the novel and the film, a more universal definition could be that adaptation is the transfer of content from one form of mediation to another.

Yet from the very beginning of adaptation studies, scholars identified some of the main problems that came with the process of transferring content. They soon concluded that it was

absurd to believe that a film could be faithful to a literary work. In the field of adaptation studies, this is known as the fidelity issue.

1.4. The fidelity issue.

In fact, the very suggestion that I should include the idea of recycling in this presentation of adaptation shows how far adaptation studies have traveled from the originally overwhelming belief according to which the screen adaptation must be faithful to its source. For those unfamiliar with adaptation studies, it comes as a natural response in front of adaptations to compare the source with the target, looking for points of resemblance, and especially for a necessary lack of similarity to declare the adaptation a failure. Early on, however, adaptation studies specialists have discarded fidelity as a non-issue, and perhaps even as an obstacle preventing the accurate study of adaptations.

Why and how?

Let us go back to the beginnings, and to George Bluestone's seminal work *Novels into Films*. In this work, Bluestone describes novel and film as two intersecting lines that meet at point then diverge. In spite of certain resemblances, he adds, the adapted novel will inevitably become a different artistic entity from the novel on which it is based.

Indeed, as many more colleagues have noted since, fidelity is a false debate since as the phrase goes, "the book is always better at being itself". From this perspective, the point of studying adaptations is less to look for resemblance between the source and the target than to show how the source text shows through the film, and to study the back-and-forth movement between the source text and the new version.

Based on the observation that fidelity was impossible, Brian MacFarlane, in *Novel to Film*, makes a clear distinction between what is transferable from novel to film, and what needs to be adapted because it cannot be kept unchanged. MacFarlane relies on the dichotomy between narrative and narration, which he in fact adapts from Russian formalism.

What adaptation is and does is far clearer from this perspective, and so is what it can do or cannot do. Bearing in mind the dichotomy used by Russian formalists, between the plot and the fabula, it becomes easier to understand that when the plot of a work of fiction cannot be kept in the film version, the fabula, to be understood as the story world and sequence of events as imagined in the receiver's mind, may still be preserved, be it at the cost of a few

alterations, adjustments, in a word, adaptations. From this angle, a different form of fidelity to the source work becomes possible than the mere preservation of the plot, its elements, its order, and so on so forth.

Thanks to this view of adaptation, it becomes clearer how adaptation studies have managed to move beyond the fidelity problem. As Linda Hutcheon said, adaptation is repetition without replication. Studying adaptation should then be based on the acknowledgement that any film will necessarily be perceived as different from, and in most cases inferior to, the book from which it comes.

Adaptation now being considered as the process of making the necessary alterations to preserve some aspects of the source text, the emphasis shifted from assessing the level of fidelity to making sense of the strategy employed to preserve some aspect of the text, and of course, to identifying and describing which aspects of the source have been kept, and at which cost, as opposed to what has not.

In similar vein, scholars such as Julie Sanders, in *Adaptation and Appropriation*, later suggested a new idiom should be used. She claimed, among other pioneering remarks, that “it is usually at the very point of infidelity that the most creative acts of adaptation and appropriation take place”, that the “process of adaptation is constant and ongoing”, and that “adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts relevant or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating”.

As this latter book exemplifies, adaptation studies soon started categorizing modes of adaptation. Two of the most basic techniques of adaptation, condensation and expansion, were soon identified. Some scholars created labels such as “literal adaptation”, to refer to those films that sought to remain as close to the original as possible. In other cases, some adaptations were seen as attempts to remain as close as possible to the spirit of the adapted text. In yet another category, radical adaptations were considered to differ dramatically from the source text.

1.5. The will to taxonomize.

The categories soon went forth and multiplied, as a result of what Thomas Leitch, has exposed as a “will to taxonomize, which is symptomatic of how the field has sought to map out its own territory “.

Ironically, Leitch himself fell prey to the desire to create new categories. In *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, he lists no less than 10 modes of adaptation: celebration, adjustment, neoclassic imitation, revision, colonization, deconstruction, analogy, parody, imitation, and allusion.

To be fair to Leitch, he indulges in a different kind of labeling by focusing on adaptation processes rather than listing types of adaptations. One of the key readings to understand why this shift of perspective is important is Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*, where the author identifies several modes of engagement with the source text, namely telling, showing, and interacting with stories. She also extended the scope of the focus on the modalities of adaptation by taking account of 'the contexts of creation and reception' of both source text and adaptation, suggesting that they are 'material, public and economic as much they are cultural, personal and aesthetic.'

After going back to the origins of the concept, I will now take a few minutes to summarize where adaptation studies are at, by listing the main undebated points in the field, before saying a few words about my own tentative contributions to the research domain.

1.6. The state of adaptation studies today.

Most scholars in the field of adaptation studies now agree that the study of adaptation should focus on the process of making all the necessary alterations for some source content to be transferable. These alterations are necessary because the whole of the original content cannot be transposed.

Looking for an updated and comprehensive definition of adaptation studies for the purposes of this seminar, I came across a brilliant one in a French work, simply titled "L'adaptation cinématographique et littéraire", by Jeanne-Marie Claire and Monique Carcaud Macaire.

For them, adaptation always presupposes deferred restitution to a different partner. The source text presents itself in a new form, through which its rewriting process becomes readable. The rewriting process depends upon a reading of the adaptation as determined by the specific appropriation mode of a given individual, who is himself or herself located in a different time and space. The act of reading the adaptation reveals a whole society that expresses itself through what is kept from the original text, but also through what is not. As a result, studying adaptations points to the existence of receiving voices, while historicizing the place of works in and across cultures.

In the case of the filmic adaptation of literature, modifications are quantitative and qualitative. The initial work generally undergoes condensation or dilution. In all cases, it is subjected to a process of reorganization and recombination. To simplify, adaptations can be considered as variations on a specific model or pattern. In some cases, these variations can be understood based on the acknowledgement that they result from differences of worldviews between the context of production of the source work and that of the adaptation. Historicizing adaptation in that way turns adaptation studies into a key instrument in the field of cultural history.

More directly in keeping with the preparation of your conference, now. With adaptation studies, any occurrence of the work is placed along a continuum. Each text, be it literary, cinematographic, theatrical, televisual, or other, is to be perceived as a moment, a specific state of a fictional system that aims to produce meaning. The appearance of a new version of the system has a mechanical effect on the whole continuum. This effect sometimes materializes as a retroactive impact on the reading and perception of the source work. In any case, each new addition to the continuum acts as a supplement to the source text. Supplement is to be understood here in the sense Jacques Derrida gave the term. The adaptation is a supplement because it comes in addition to the original text while forming a henceforth essential part of it at the same time.

Crucially, Clerc and Carcaud-Macaire present their own methodology for studying adaptation. Their key innovation is the introduction of the 'tiers interprétant', the interpreting third-party. After postulating that the filmic discourse involves a sort of adjustment mechanism, which alters meaning under the over-determining impulse of the circumstances specific to the context of its production and reception, they indeed propose to call it the third-party interpreting mechanism.

Resorting to the comprehensive notion of an interpreting third party makes it possible to integrate the collective dimension, which is affirmed through the mediation of the filmmaker, the generic context of the film and its modeling by the screen medium. This approach allows the authors to conclude that adaptation, far from being reduced to 'the simple reproduction of [...] content, [...] is, in itself, an operation of cultural creation' (Clerc and Carcaud-Macaire 2004, 94) and that it proposes 'the production of a specific meaning', (Clerc and Carcaud-Macaire 2004, 94) which loosely matches my own idea of adaptation as the re-production of meaning.

1.7. Adaptation as the re-production of meaning.

So, my own contributions now, and you will see that the topic for your conference is surfacing again. It is now accepted that the adapted work does not just seek to reproduce, let alone keep intact, the source text, its meaning, or its message, if any. Which leads me to state that the aim of the adaptation is to seek to rekindle the source work by leading it to re-produce meaning, to produce meaning again. Rather than just recycling raw material, in that case, adaptation is itself the recycling machine, which turns old works into new meaning making systems, in a process that ensures the sustainability of culture. In this second case, the source work's content, meaning, or plot, are not just transposed: they are updated in keeping with the new cultural, ontological, political or aesthetic context in which the adaptation is embedded. This way of finding insertion in a new context is the very condition for the adaptation's existence.

To find an ideal model of communication between the original work and its adaptation, then, we must include a third party. My idea is that increasingly, this interfering element is visual in nature, and conditions the understanding of the source work as well as the coherence of the target work. This is the observation that drove me to coin the concept of scopic adaptation. This modality does not just adapt a work to the scopic regime of cinema. More generally, it seeks to preserve the meaning of a work according to the characteristics of the scopic culture of the source work, and the scopic culture of the target. This view makes it possible, among other assets, to take into account the fact that our culture is shaped by an overabundance of cameras and screens.

1.8. Scopic adaptation.

The definition of the concept. Besides adapting a text to the scopic regime of film, a scopic adaptation translates the scopic regime of the source work into that of the target, taking account of the contemporary state of visual culture.

By the way, the expression "scopic regime" describes dominant and structuring relations between observer, image and object. The scopic regime of the cinema, for example, is defined by the absence of the seen object (which simply means when we see something on the silver screen, we really only see its projected image, not the thing itself). The scopic regime of drama is defined by the presence of the seen object, in most cases. And so on and so forth for each medium.

The interest in choosing the concept of scopic regime as a core term for adaptation studies is threefold. First, it has the advantage of being a concept common to the study of theater,

cinema, and film adaptation. Secondly, it allows for the inclusion of a key problem of post-modernism, the tension between realism and reflexivity, in the field of adaptation studies. Thirdly, it makes it necessary to study the various forms of cross-breeding between literature, drama, film, television, and other media, from a diachronic perspective. – the intermedial dimension, then, is naturally included.

Another asset of the approach is that it enables me to add an extra item to the usual diptych made of scopic regime of the source work/scopic regime of the target work. This third term is the scopic regime of the real, which determines the level of adequacy between the thing as it is perceived and what one thinks it to be. In fact, I mean real in the definition given by Clément Rosset, for whom the real is that which is without a double.

Consequently, scopic adaptation makes it possible to apprehend the transformations of a work by going beyond simple economic or stylistic considerations, to attribute them to an irremediable entropy of their meaning under changing visual and perceptual circumstances.

To emphasize the evolutions in our perceptual patterns, I sometimes use a simple analogy. All works of art are like the 8mm home movies in which people my age had their childhood recorded. The traces of a bygone past, these films are dated: the grain of their image and the dress codes that were trendy at the time, among other things, prevent them from being seen today as we would have seen them 30 years ago. Viewing must therefore be done in the second degree, from a distanced standpoint that is necessary, in order to place the films in their original context again, and to ignore the first stage of amusement.

It appears, then, that, if the work remains unchanged, our way of seeing it, for its part, undeniably evolves. In the example studied here, it is obvious that the progress of the cinematographic device, at the level of the capture of reality as at the level of its projection, means that an effort of recontextualization is a necessary preliminary to viewing the film – and that adaptation can operate such scopic recontextualisation for the viewer.

For reasons of consistency with both of the seminars in which this lecture is featured, I have chosen to tackle here the adaptation subgenre of Shakespearian film. For the purposes of the following case study, I will use the following sub-definition of scopic adaptation (as applied to the adaptation of drama).

In the field of the cinematic adaptation of plays, a scopic adaptation adapts a dramatic work, considered on the page *and* on the stage, to a specific scopic context.

But before, and as I promised I would do, a follow-up on the previous session, which, as you will see, will lead me to connect scopic adaptation with the question of structuring the visible. Now, about halfway through, is the time to **go back to the construction of the visible seminar**.

2. RECYCLING OF IMAGES VS RECYCLING OF TEXTS

2.1. Follow up from previous structuring the visible session.

During the latest session of the seminar on the construction of the visible, stage producer GS explained that he considers stage production as interpretive thinking — clarifying, in so doing, the radical difference between a reading and a full-fledged performance of the dramatic text. (See Anne Ubersfeld). As the phrase goes, the play exists on the stage, not on the page.

Hence the importance of the interpreting third-party, since the stage production is already, in a way, the adaptation of a text. To make sense of film adaptations of plays, as we will see, it is crucial to consider the possibility for a midway term, the performed play, to lay the groundwork for the making of the film, whether that specific performance exists or not.

To go a bit further. The same as a theatrical performance, each new adaptation of a famous play comes in addition to all the previous versions. In the case of Shakespeare's plays, and, someone like Linda Hutcheon would say, of all stories that have been adapted to different media, adaptation is always necessarily re-adaptation (all of Shakespeare's plays except for one being already adapted from stories that existed before). In which case, understanding an adaptation, the same as interpreting a specific performance, is to identify the specific location of each new occurrence on a continuum, the life of the work, which is extended at the cost of transformations. When these transformations include resorting to a new type of mediation, the migration can be understood as a consequence of the impossibility for the work to exist in its previous state (because its perception, in this form, had changed).

GS's perspective on text to stage adaptation also echoes my own conception of adaptation as a process that seeks to rekindle the thought process of any given work. Indeed, GS introduced the notion of performance as a perspective on the play, by which he meant an anamorphic construction of the play. In his productions, the image is the alternative origin for the gaze from which the spectator can perceive the performance anew — Shakespeare would say, awry. The same as the distorted skull shape featured in the foreground of Holbein's *Ambassadors*, an image included in the production is recycled but also recycles our perception of the production by imposing the use of a new viewing angle. As with the famous painting

technique, no less famously recycled by Lacan, the performance that includes a specific image needs, as a consequence of the inclusion, to be viewed from two complementary and sometimes opposite perspectives, one of which renews or even contradicts the first one. Similarly, in the case of stage to screen adaptations, the filmmaker's gaze complements a potential stage producer's perspective on the play in performance, to show that in our visual culture, an original performance of the play might mean something different. More on this in a minute.

2.2. How the introduction of pictures of stage structures the audience's perception of what is visibly performed.

Another point in common has to do with what GS said about the readability of Elizabethan drama that stage performances needed to provide — which required, he said, the inclusion of images on screen. Explaining the process by which staged images reflected on the performance, he described an adaptation process from text to visual work that can be considered to recycle pictures for the sake of making meaning more accessible to contemporary audiences.

In this case, the difficulty of the matter is not that the scopic regime of drama is different from that of film. Most directors operate the translation from one to the other without the slightest sign of unease. The complexity of the issue, rather, results from the continuous evolution of “watching cultures”. In a word, the images added to the stage productions may reveal the lost aspects of some plays, such as the medieval theory of the King's two bodies, the body natural and the body politic, as theorized by Kantorowicz. The images, therefore, help compensate for the loss of some aspects that characterized the reception of the play in its time by including visual shortcuts that prompt and reconstruct similar readings.

2.3. The scopic adaptation of drama case study. *Macbeth* on Screen, ghost scene

2.3.1. Case studies: why *Macbeth*?

This last remark is exactly why I chose the scene of Banquo's ghost from *Macbeth* as a case study. The problem has to do with the change in the perception of a stage ghost. At the time of the play, the belief in ghosts and spirits was high, and sometimes substantiated

scientifically, or at least rationally. James I, to pander to whose tastes the play seems to have been written, famously wrote a treatise on demonology.

Consequently, the problem of the ghost is directly connected to the problem of its changing level of realism. Indeed, as Alan Ackerman has asked,

What *can* be seen? A play, like a painting, declares its subject by marking its spatial limits. Shakespeare thematizes the problem of such visual markers in the theatre [...] by having [a] ghost appear.

So our angle for the analysis of the clips adapting the ghost scene is based on the observation that some things that cannot be seen onstage can be seen on screen.

One clear example of this is brought by the invention of photography, which carried with it the belief that the camera would reveal the invisible, for instance by exposing the ghosts around the photographed subjects. Based on this premise, it is easy to understand why cinematic ghosts are likely to seem more realistic than dramatic ones. It all has to do with the use of an apparatus supposedly endowed with revealing power from the start, which therefore requires a smaller amount of suspension of disbelief (and I am not even talking about the possibility of using special effects for heightened realism, be it onstage or on screen).

This is what is illustrated in the first clip. In this home-made production of the ghost scene, directed by kids in their kitchen. Indeed, it is a natural reflex inherited from cartoons to show the ghost by using an iconic shortcut: the white sheet thrown over a body.

Yet as we will see, this spontaneous strategy is far from constituting the zero degree of theatrical adaptation. Here, indeed, the film may be an amateur production, but it still does not qualify as filmed theatre for all that, be it only for the absence of a stage. Besides, the analysis of this apparently worthless example barely needs to be taken much further for the meta-adaptation label to be applied.

Indeed here, the ironic choice of the white sheet ghost (no ball and chains in sight, though) points to all the other possibilities for representing the ghost amateur filmmakers did not have access to. It therefore triggers an implicit reflection on all the other ways of performing the ghost onstage, and in addition, to all the improved representation possibilities film or television offer.

Other examples and categories, now.

In her study of the connection between drama and film, Béatrice Picon-Vallin lists different categories characterized by degrees of distance between the visual regime of the adaptation and that of the play found at its source. At one end of the spectrum is filmed theatre: a static camera captures a specific performance on film. At the other end is theatre to film adaptation, characterized by the prevalence of the filmic apparatus in the near absence of any traces of its theatrical origin in the adapted work. More interestingly, Picon-Vallin introduces an intermediate category, the “theatrical film”, that reflexively highlights the difficulties and complexities created by the encounter of film and drama, rather than seeking to erase the differences between the two artforms.

The most widespread strategy, though, consists of willingly disregarding the composite essence of drama, to focus on the text and use it as a script. The result is a filmic performance that may have little theatrical about it. This is why I have chosen to show you first an example of theatre to film adaptation.

This is Justin Kurzel’s 2015 adaptation with Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard. So as you remember, Macbeth has just had his friend Banquo murdered, and he feigns to be surprised that Banquo is not present for the banquet thrown in Macbeth’s honor as the new king.

Paradoxically perhaps, this version doesn’t seem to seek to exploit the visual assets of films over theatrical performances. The setting is medieval, and the ghost does not look like a supernatural entity at all. It might seem as though Banquo had not really died, and had finally turned up for the feast. In a way, the representation strategy that is used here is in keeping with the theatrical origin of the film. First, because as Christoph Clausen reminds us, the play’s stage directions “would seem to indicate that Banquo’s ghost is to be visible the audience as well as to Macbeth”. Second, because the ghost is not impersonated here: the character of Banquo just reappears. Banquo’s ghost, therefore, is an entity created by a logical construction of the visible on behalf of the audience. The spectators and viewers of the film have seen Banquo dead in the previous scene. And the murderer has just confirmed the assassination. So this character, although he looks exactly like Banquo, has to be the wandering soul of Macbeth’s friend, or a figment of the newly anointed King’s imagination. Here, the ghost is also produced by a construction of the invisible, as the guests look in front of them and do not seem to notice the presence of Banquo (but maybe they are too frightened by Macbeth to look to their sides). This discrepancy in the distribution of the visible is what

visually turns Banquo into a ghost: in the same diegetic space, some characters fail to see the ghost, when one obviously does, and so do we.

For the time we have left, we will now take a look at other types of visible constructions of the ghost as featured in various types of play to screen adaptations.

First, two different examples of filmed theatre; SHER and Branagh.

Branagh

The use of lighting on the ghost is to be noted here. The ghost's back is seen at first, which leads to an element of surprise when Macbeth's reaction is seen in the reverse shot. In this case, the ghost seems to exist, as we see him, as a theatrical audience would, before Macbeth himself does.

Sher

The strategy is similar here, without the work on the reverse shot. Also to be noted: Macbeth steps down to stand among the audience, occupying their viewpoint. He seems to find confirmation of the ghost's existence in their perspective, as audience members see the ghost too. It is the view from the extra diegetic space that structures the visible to convey the feeling that the ghost is really there.

Bogdanov ; not filmed theatre

The construction of subjectivity is different here. Obviously, the guests do not see the ghost, and viewers see the chair is empty. In this case, the ghost is only visible as a result of the rendering of Macbeth's perception (which is called secondary internal ocularization: the character is watching and in the very next shot, what is seen is what he or she sees). So that although we see it with Macbeth, the ghost is still constructed here as the production of Macbeth's mind's eye.

Trevor Nunn

A very interesting strategy, in a film usually considered to be just filmed theatre. The ghost is in the camera's place, which means, in other words, that it is not the result of Macbeth's hallucination, but that its existence is constructed thanks to Ian McKellen's acting. The ghost is in the eye of the beholder, but it is the actor's skills at extending and strengthening the reaction shot that gives the spirit its existence. An alternative construction could be that the ghost is the camera: the machine is a ghostly presence to which actors talk, as in the perpetual casting Walter Benjamin describes to be the product of filmic reproduction. Going further, one

might even say that the cinematic apparatus conveys the impression of an omnipresent, omniscient gaze, whose existence is felt, but not seen.

Welles.

Orson Welles's *Macbeth* is a good example of theatrical film. His 1948 adaptation is a filmic version of his own voodoo production of *Macbeth* for the Federal Theatre Project. The film, therefore, adapts a producer's reading of a play jointly with a playwright's work.

In the ghost scene, Welles introduces a different regime of invisibility. At first, the ghost is not seen, then, when Macbeth sees him, the guests disappear. The ghost is thus presented as a purely cinematic creation, the product of the filmic treatment of subjectivity: Macbeth sees him after a long reaction shot, and the shot that gives us access to what he sees is arbitrarily empty of other characters. The ghost, therefore, is a cinematic type of hallucination, prompted into existence by Welles's clever use of editing to render Macbeth's supernaturally subjective vision here.

Polanski

In Polanski's version, all the guests freeze as the ghost appears. Banquo's spirit, then, is a kind of metacinematic ghost, superimposed on the frozen picture of the guests.

Joe Macbeth.

I merely included this clip to show you an example of generic adaptation, as *Macbeth* is adapted as a gangster movie here.

Geoffrey Wright.

In this Australian version, the characters are also gangsters. The treatment of the ghost is much more interesting than in the previous version, though. Banquo's spirit is a reflection in the mirror without an origin in the diegetic space. The mirror is placed in such a way that only Macbeth seems to be able to see the ghost in it. Interestingly, despite the absence of a real-life origin for the ghost, he has an impact on Macbeth, who squirms as Banquo tries to strangle him, almost literally pulling the strings of Macbeth's fate. With the reflected spirit in the mirror, Macbeth's narcissism backfires, returning to haunt him as the spirit of the friend he killed to fulfil his ambition.

An alternative interpretation can be based on the observation that if Banquo is a ghost, he is not supposed to have a reflection in the mirror. Since he has one, may be the suggestion is that all the other characters are ghosts, at least as well, which might be a way for this apparently straightforward film to point the spectral nature of film characters.

Throne of Blood.

In Kurosawa's version, the codes of Noh theatre include a specific scopic regime, which questions the occidental modes of representation that characterize the regime of Shakespeare's play. The adaptation, however, is not just transcultural, but also metacinematic. It is a way of presenting cinema as a universal language — forgive me for the cliché. Indeed, although the film seems dramatically different from the play because of the cultural appropriation by the Japanese director, the scene shows that film can create ghosts across cultural boundaries. The camera dollies in on the scared Macbeth, and dollies out to reveal the ghost, the origin of which is therefore very simple: he just came to sit on the set while the camera was not looking.

Goold

A brief reference to the brilliant version by Rupert Goold, with Patrick Stewart. Here, ghosts of a different type cast a specific light on the Macbeth character, before Banquo's ghost appears. The huge portrait in the background brings the presence of Stalin's ghost to bear on Macbeth and on the play, as the new King starts behaving in dictatorial manner. This adaptation presents a case of historical recontextualisation that is also a reference to the many instances of political appropriations of Shakespeare's plays, whether on stage or on screen (in Richard Loncraine's *Richard III*, released in 1995, Ian McKellen had already embodied a very Hitler like Richard Gloucester, in a context reminiscent of the Third Reich).

Mark Brozel adaptation, to conclude

Last instance, the TV adaptation by Mark Brozel, where the plot is transplanted to contemporary Scotland, for the excellent Shakespeare Retold series of films by the BBC. Here, in a typical case of scopic adaptation, Banquo's spirit seems to toy with the notion that digital photographs or video clips are largely considered as visual evidence (which recent news headlines have confirmed). Although freshly murdered, Banquo shows himself at the celebration breakfast in a video message sent from his mobile phone. It makes sense, therefore, that Macbeth should doubt whether his friend is dead or has returned as a digital ghost. Indeed, if Banquo appears, in apparently striking manner given Macbeth's reaction, in a video message, there's no way for Macbeth to know whether the message was sent before or after his death — and he certainly seems to take the second option into consideration.

This is a very interesting case of deferred subjectivity with many Derridean implications: only as an afterthought can Macbeth determine whether the video shows a ghost or his friend as he was still alive. The essence of Banquo's ghost in this version just shows the impact of visual culture, and on our perception and conception of images, on all types of spectral presence. On screen, this adaptation seems to remind us, there's no way of telling an already dead actor from one who is still alive, as diegetically exemplified in Macbeth's reaction. In other words, a spectral presence on screen is not enough, these days, for viewers to be convinced that such or such character is a ghost as opposed to just as alive as the character surrounding him. This adaptation, in other words, is scopic because it takes into account the spectral essence of film and TV images to show that it may be meaningless, in the contemporary context to which the play is transported, to construct the presence of a ghost by using the visiblizing strategies of Elizabethan drama, but also of classical Hollywood cinema. This adaptation reflects on a culture which is less literary than "of the image". The way it plays with the evolution of scopic regimes thus points to the level of confusion that characterizes our world, henceforth confused with its images, engaged in a process of constant recycling to which readers, spectators and viewers all have to adapt.