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CINEPHILE

The University of British Columbia's Film Journal

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Carlen Lavigne

Daniel Sacco

Catalina Alvarez

Sarah Stang

Kevin Kvas

WROTE ABOUT
FLEAS

GOT SOME



I Don't Always

GOOD?

Accidentally Confess to 3

Murders After 30 years



But when I do, it's

because I talk out loud

in the bathroom.

Vol. 11 No. 3: Adaptation, Translation, Permutation



CINEPHILE

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Columbia's Film Journal

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Preface

Dr. Carlen Lavigne

The current glut of remakes, reboots, and adaptations in contemporary Western media is—perhaps ironically—opening exciting new avenues for media scholarship. Remakes are a complex issue. The field is wide and fluctuating; indeed, it seems as though the greatest challenge facing remake studies today is the need to answer two basic questions: first, how do we determine exactly what a remake is? Second, what analytical approaches to remakes yield the richest discussion?

Remakes are not an exclusively twenty-first-century phenomenon; film and television have been reaching for and recycling popular culture since their invention (Klein and Palmer 8-10). But remakes also show no signs of fading in popularity or as an ongoing area of study, and it seems that recently, there is an exceptional multitude of media from which to choose. 2016 film remakes have included *Ghostbusters*, *Ben Hur*, *The Magnificent Seven*, and *Pete's Dragon*, and recent entertainment news has announced upcoming revisitations for *Aladdin*, *Clue*, *Ocean's 11* ... there are 111 upcoming film remake projects currently listed on Den of Geek (Brew). The fall 2016 television landscape has included relaunches of *MacGyver* and *Lethal Weapon*, as well as ongoing remade series like *Hawaii Five-0*, *The Odd Couple*, and *Jane the Virgin*. We revisited *The X-Files* in 2016 (and appear likely to do so again). Upcoming television projects include *Enemy of the State*, *Heathers*, and *Magnum, P.I.*, as well as *Star Trek: Discovery* and a miniseries sequel to *Prison Break*.

Even from this highly incomplete list, it should already be clear that the boundaries defining “remakes” are not well marked. We could be discussing sequels, prequels, “re-imaginings,” trans-cultural productions, franchise spinoffs, or the links between any number of texts. Other avenues are provided by adaptation studies and film versions of novels or comic books (recently, *Captain America: Civil War* or *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*), comic book versions of television series (the ongoing *Buffy* season 10) or television series distilled from film, novel, or comic

(we could talk exclusively about comic books on television, if desired—we could even limit the examples to The CW and mention *iZombie*, *The Flash*, *Arrow*, and *Supergirl*). A transmedia series like *The Walking Dead* is an empire unto itself—not only a televised adaptation (of Robert Kirkman's successful graphic series, with its additional nods to George Romero and other foundational zombie horror), but one which has already spawned a spinoff (*Fear the Walking Dead*), a video game, a board game, Halloween costumes, shirts, and its own convention, not to mention the 11,000-plus fan stories currently on Archive of Our Own. Merely defining “remake” is a herculean task. We are dealing not with easily isolated media products but rather with a continuous, interrelated flow of textual “multiplicities” (Klein and Palmer 1).

This malleability of definition is not a weakness of the field; rather, it denotes rich possibility and broad opportunities for theoretical approach. We might call to Jameson's postmodern pastiche and Baudrillard's “desert of the real,” questioning our mediated notions of identity, nostalgia and society; we must also examine these texts through lenses such as feminism, queer theory, and race and disability studies. My own approaches are inevitably inflected by gender concerns. Recently, however, when I consider remakes, I've also been looking at the abandoned television series revived by Netflix (*Gilmore Girls*, *Full House*, *Arrested Development*, *The Killing*, *Longmire*) and thinking of Marshall McLuhan's pronouncements on new media: “When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future” (74-75). If we accept McLuhan's assertions that we judge new media based on the standards of the old—or if old media inevitably form the first content of new communications technologies—then online content providers rescuing former broadcast and cable properties take on a new light. This is certainly one of many signs of continued media convergence, in which old media are “forced to coexist” with new technologies (Jenkins 14); however, it also seems that in using the internet to watch (and recreate) television, we may be adjusting to the poten-

Preface

tial of a medium that we're still figuring out, applying our knowledge and expectations of television as a necessary but transitory starting point.

Even confining my musings to Netflix, these thoughts are distinctly narrow. Industry tensions demand acknowledgment: Netflix has revived these series and invested in other adaptations (*Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones*, *Luke Cage*), and also more “original” content, in part to compete with the same television networks and cable companies whose products it otherwise re-streams. The war for viewers is not only over the millennials who are cutting cable in droves (Ferrerás), but also over the older members of Generation X attracted to *Fuller House* and *Gilmore Girls*. Debates surrounding originality, technological determinism, and media convergence would be incomplete without analyses of corporate concerns regarding transmedia texts. Further, we must interrogate how shifts in our media texts illustrate sociocultural changes over decades or across national borders—and such examinations inevitably invite questions of content, which include questions about casting, aesthetics, and translation.

Academics examining remakes, reincarnations, and re-imaginings are grappling with an abundance of possibilities. This is not to bemoan the lack of definition in remake studies, but rather to celebrate its potential. Today's media scholars have the intimidating—but rewarding—task of sorting through mountains of recycled texts. I am delighted to read more of their thoughts here.

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Contributors

Catalina (Jordan) Alvarez is an MFA candidate in Film and Media Arts at Temple University in Philadelphia. She grew up in rural Tennessee with a Colombian mother and US American father and studied in New York City and Berlin. She incorporates her transnational and experimental theatre background into filmic narratives, playing irreverently with genres, and engaging non-professional actors in fantastical cross-cultural scenes, culminating in super-saturated choreographed utopias.

Kevin Kvas is a PhD worker in English & Film Studies at the University of Alberta. He has published or presented on Google Street View and psychogeography, Milton's Paradise Lost, eighteenth-century labour poetry, and Oulipo poetry. His current research approaches language from an economic perspective using digital methods.

Carlen Lavigne is the editor of *Remake Television: Reboot, Re-use, Recycle* (Lexington, 2014), the co-editor of *American Remakes of British Television: Transformations and Mistranslations* (Lexington, 2011), and the author of *Cyberpunk Women, Feminism, and Science Fiction* (McFarland, 2013). She holds a PhD in Communications Studies and teaches at Red Deer College in Alberta, Canada.

Daniel Sacco is a Doctoral Candidate in the Communication and Culture Program at York and Ryerson Universities. His research interests include Film Censorship, Spectatorship Theory, and Contemporary Crime Film. He has published on the cinema of Vincent Gallo and recently contributed to the forthcoming anthology *Screening Justice: Canadian Crimes Films, Culture and Society*.

Sarah Stang recently completed her Master's degree in Cinema and Media Studies at York University in Toronto, ON. She completed her B.A. in History at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, during which she focused on the history of American cinema. Although she is still passionate about cinema, as an avid gamer Sarah decided to study video games and gamer culture at the post-graduate level. She hopes to contribute to this emergent field, particularly in areas of player engagement, gender, and representation. She approaches her studies with a mix of player perspective, feminism, and methodologies learned from the study of film and literature. She recently entered the Communication & Culture joint PhD program at York and Ryerson Universities in September, 2016.



Letter from the Editors

Dear readers,

As with all art forms, cinema is a medium of adaptation. It adapts a certain perspective, a singular take on reality, into a recognizable medium: film. Cinema, however, has been perhaps more heavily criticized than other mediums for its acts of adaptation, its perceived crimes of recycling thematic material. Walking out of a cinema after seeing a filmic adaptation of a beloved novel, you often hear remarks that “the book was better”; cinematic renderings of lauded dramatic plays are “canned theatre.”

It seems like the cinema can't win.

Adaptation films are often held against their source materials, looked at as secondary to them, rather than as new, creative works with the potential for true aesthetic and dramatic innovation.

This is why, for *Cinephile* volume 11, issue 3, we've emphasized not only cinema's powers of adaptation, but its powers of translation and permutation; cinema has a remarkable ability to re-imbue source material with new life, and launch it into new audiences not *in spite* of its anchoring to source material, but *because* of it.

Cinema does not just adapt. It transforms.

Collected in this issue are essays exploring cinema's relationship to other media as diverse as television, theatre, and video games. In her essay, “Towards Another Cinema,” Catalina Alvarez takes up two works of Third Cinema and attempts to discover whether it is possible to translate the Third World experience onto the cinema screen without falling into strategies of exoticist exploitation. Looking at

Robert Durst as a public figure and subject of HBO's *The Jinx*, Daniel Sacco takes up the entangled issues of documentary authenticity and ethical re-tellings of true crime narratives. Sarah Stang, in another sharp change of direction, looks at the process of adapting the popular television series, *The Walking Dead*, into a video game: does this detract from the original, add to it, complicate it? Finally, Kevin Kvas, comparing film with yet another medium, contrasts the theatrical and cinematic adaptations of John Donne's poetry.

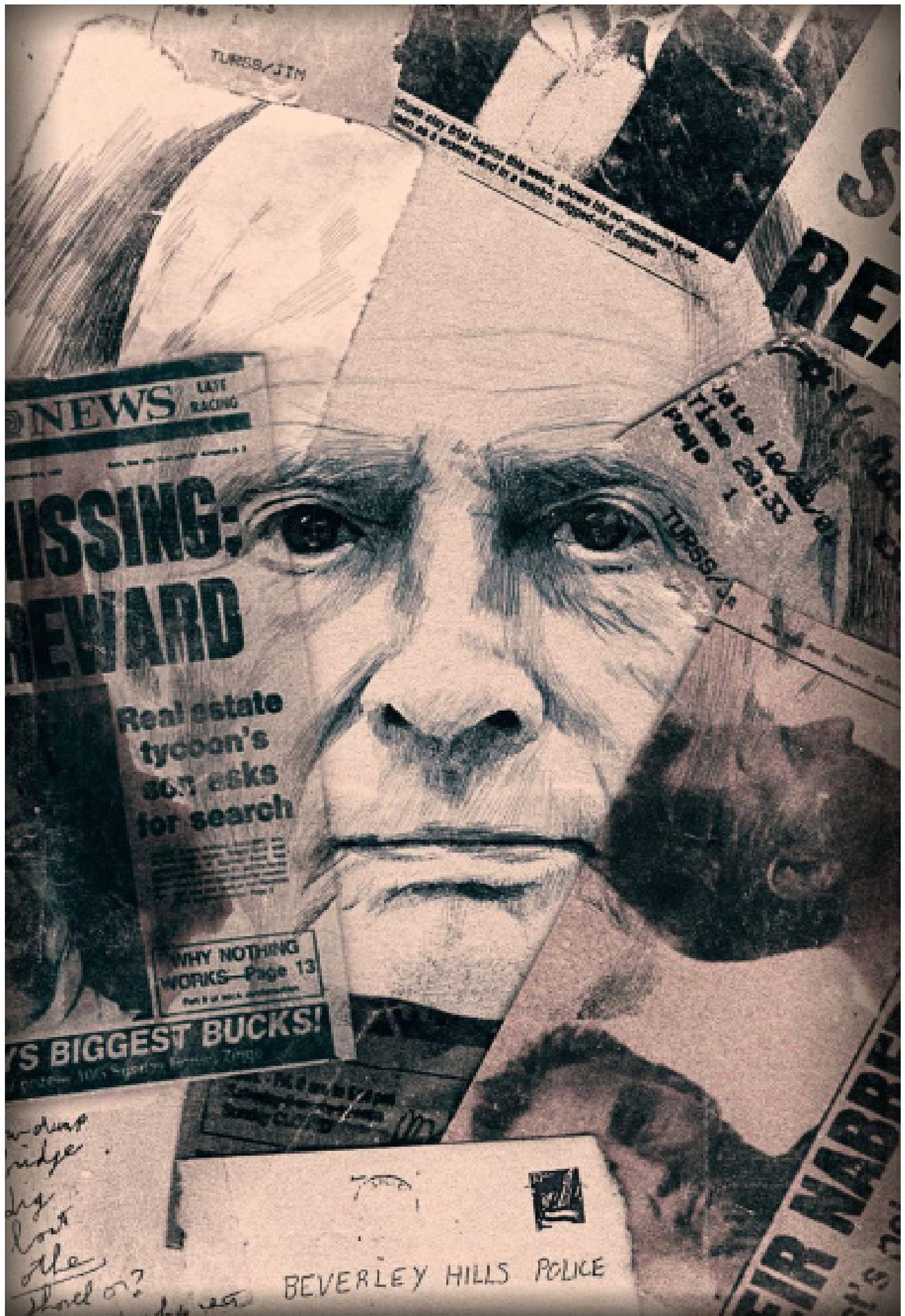
With the influx of information characteristic of our contemporary moment, it is impossible to isolate works within a single medium. Television shows are adapted into video games; poetry becomes theatre; public figures take on the sheen of fictional characters through narrative documentary. Everything is shaped by everything else. We hope this issue serves as a demonstration of the growing academic interest in cross- and trans-medial productions. Most of all, we hope it can incite your own interest.

Welcome to *Cinephile* 11.3.

Sincerely,

Matthew Gartner and Amanda Greer
Co-Editors-in-Chief, 2016-2017

CINEPHILE



Capturing Robert Durst: Fact, Fiction, and Format

Serialized examinations of true-crime murder cases have recently become a popular trend in podcasting and subscription television, as evident in the critical and commercial success of the podcast *Serial* (2014) and the Netflix series *Making a Murderer* (2015). If conventional feature-length crime documentaries, by allowing for the inclusion of a wider range of relevant material, provide an antidote to the television tabloid strategy of streamlining complex cases down to their most sensational elements, these long-form series go further by allotting hours on end for the presentation of vast amounts of evidence with nuanced attention to detail. In an age when “binge-watching” consumption habits increasingly drive television production, these programs encourage viewers to become part of the investigation by absorbing a significant amount of evidence, testimony, and subjective reflection in multiple one-hour installments. This strategy is perhaps best exemplified by HBO’s mini-series *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst* (2015). This roughly five-hour, six-part documentary is director Andrew Jarecki’s second attempt to tell the story of the wealthy real estate heir and multiple-murder suspect Robert Durst, following a narrative feature entitled *All Good Things* (2009). *The Jinx*’s massive viewership and generous critical acclaim stand in contrast to *All Good Things*’ lukewarm reception, highlighting the divergent success of their equally opposing goals. As a fiction feature “based on a true story,” *All Good Things* is narratively structured to humanize and even exculpate its Durst-inspired protagonist. By contrast, *The Jinx* presents an overwhelming case for Durst’s calculating and cold-blooded nature, climaxing with Jarecki’s coercion

of an apparently spontaneous and inadvertent confession of guilt. An analysis of *All Good Things* and *The Jinx* reveals not only the tension inherent in the process of transmuting true life accounts for fictionalized representation onscreen, but also the inevitable failure of documentary storytelling (regardless of length or format) to present evidence in any way worth calling ‘complete.’ This tension and failure are clearest in the ways in which Jarecki’s adaptation of his dramatic treatment of Durst’s story to long-form documentary fundamentally shifts the dramatic structure of this story in ways expressly facilitated by their respective formats.

The inter-textual connections between *All Good Things* and *The Jinx* are somewhat atypical of the discourses surrounding film adaptation. In his discussion of filmic adaptations of literary source material, André Bazin notes that the practice tends to be viewed as part of the processes by which modern technology “more and more offers up an extended culture reduced to the lowest common denominator of the masses” (22). Because Jarecki is the author of both texts, there is less immediate cause to consider *All Good Things* in terms of its “untouchability” as a source text, a notion that features prominently in adaptation scholarship. Moreover, the transmutation of Durst’s story from narrative feature to serialized documentary runs counter to the phenomenon Bazin notes with reference to Georges Lampin’s filmic adaptation *The Idiot* (1946), in which he states that “many potential readers of Dostoyevsky have found in the film’s oversimplified psychology and action a kind of preliminary trimming that has given them easier access to an otherwise difficult novel.” (22). It can be argued that, in accordance with HBO’s tendency

[...]The Jinx reveals not only the tension inherent in the process of transmuting true life accounts for fictionalized representation onscreen, but also the inevitable failure of documentary storytelling (regardless of length or format) to present evidence in any way worth calling 'complete.'

to ascribe greater patience and attentiveness to its audience than does Hollywood, *The Jinx* in fact reverses this trajectory by offering access to Durst's story with greater psychological and informational complexity than the more narratively conventional and succinct *All Good Things*. Nevertheless, the comparison inevitably raises what Suzanne Diamond considers among the most "provocative and generative" questions that one might pose regarding adaptation: "whether a differently told story is, in fact, the "same" story" (97). In this case, it demonstrably is not.

Throughout all of Jarecki's work, as with most filmmakers known mainly for tackling non-fiction subject matter, the relationship between reality and storytelling is complex and requires serious and scrupulous critical attention. Upon the release of his much-celebrated first documentary feature, *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003), Jarecki routinely faced criticism (from reviewers, researchers, and participants alike) for having 'left out' certain parts of the story (Binder 2012). Naturally, the time restraints demanded by feature narrative films make this an unavoidable outcome, but the question ultimately becomes not 'what was left out?' but 'why'? Was material excluded out of necessity to accommodate accepted feature film runtimes? Alternatively, to supply a narrative geared primarily toward entertaining the film's audience? (Or both?) Jarecki was also accused of presenting himself as entirely persuaded by the innocence of his subjects, a father and son accused of pedophilia, during production (thereby securing their full participation), only to then center the entire marketing of the film around the ambiguity of their guilt (Nathan 2003). *Capturing the Friedmans* did, nonetheless, renew interest in the appeal case of the apparently 'less guilty' Jesse

Friedman. This intervention secured the place of the film in the coveted category of documentaries with demonstrable real world impacts — alongside Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) and HBO's *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills* (1996). However, Jarecki's fluctuating positioning of presumed guilt or innocence toward his subjects is particularly significant in the context of accusations that these shifts are tied foremost to entertainment value.

Capturing the Friedmans can also be placed in the category of documentaries like *The Imposter* (2012) and *Dear Zachary* (2008), critically celebrated less for their scrupulous adherence to fact than for their emotionally engaging story arcs and plentiful plot twists (Horeck 152). These films increase the emotional impact of key narrative revelations by strategically postponing them until audience investment in the memorable players and high-stakes scenarios has been thoroughly established. For the spectator, in other words, these documentaries have a narrative impact comparable to that of fiction films. Occasionally this approach involves incorporating conventional dramatic tropes and archetypal roles, further solidifying a clearly recognizable dramatic structure. For example, it has been argued that *Capturing the Friedmans* emotionally engages the viewer by invoking a familiar scapegoat narrative in which the divided Friedman family must "sacrifice" the guilty Arnold Friedman to save his falsely accused son Jesse (Manzella 1228). Much of the material Jarecki is accused of omitting, however, pertains to the case made against Jesse's innocence (some of which can be viewed as DVD bonus features for particularly invested viewers). Whether or not the suggestion that Jarecki intentionally excludes material that fails to support a pre-concocted narrative is valid, the conventional runtime of the documentary feature provides him with convenient grounds to counter: relevancy is relative and something will always be left out.

If, however, Jarecki does approach his representation of real events primarily with an eye towards compelling storytelling, as opposed to factual accuracy, it seems natural that he would embrace the opportunity to tackle his next true-crime subject, Durst, via a dramatic feature film. *All Good Things* changes all the names of its true-life subjects and, with one significant exception, restricts its speculation surrounding mysterious gaps in the legal record. The format of a fiction

film “inspired by true events” is naturally more forgiving of artistic liberties than conventional documentary, a fact of which Jarecki is no doubt well aware. Yet, as a dramatic feature, *All Good Things* fails to resonate for some reasons. First, it spends an inordinate amount of its runtime on the early “happy” stages of “Marks” (Durst’s) relationship with his wife “Katie,” played by Kirsten Dunst. This section of the film conveys a strategy often employed in serial killer films such as *Henry: Portrait of Serial Killer* (1986), wherein the normalcy of the murderous protagonist’s day-to-day life is played up to contrast the outlandishness of his or her crimes (Newitz 46). In this case, the protracted treatment of the banality of Marks’ and Katie’s marriage is too jarring a contrast to the bizarre real-life details that eventually follow (e.g. the fugitive Durst passing for months in Galveston Texas as a mute woman). Secondly, the talented – but too conventionally attractive – Ryan Gosling as Marks fails to capture the icy quality and awkward eccentricity of the real Robert Durst, which is on full display in *The Jinx* (one instance in which truth is undeniably stranger than fiction). Most significantly, though, *All Good Things* emphasizes Marks’ victimization at the hands of his domineering father Sanford, played by Frank Langella. When, early in the film, Marks and Katie settle down to an idyllic life in Vermont, owning and operating a health food store, it is Sanford who arrives and shatters the fantasy, forcing Marks to return to a life he hates within the family business.

All Good Things seems geared precisely towards an attempt to understand how the young Robert Durst became who he was later in life, but the bullying father Sanford is too facile an explanation for bizarre quality of charges routinely leveled at Durst. Jarecki’s failure to effectively generate sympathy for the Durst character in *All Good Things* is, from an audience standpoint, the major failure of the film itself. Conventions of the narrative film suggest that audiences need not love a story’s protagonist, or approve of his or her actions, yet they must still somehow be engaged with his or her plight. It may, however, be erroneous to link Jarecki’s intentions with *All Good Things* solely to satisfying the cultural appetites of the general public. When promoting the film, quotes from Jarecki frequently read, “I wanted to make a film that the real Robert Durst could watch and have an emotional reaction to” (Jarecki 2010). In this respect, the film was an inarguable success. Jarecki

later confirmed that Durst was not only moved to tears by the film, but compelled to get in touch with its makers and offer himself as a subject for further interviews (Jarecki 2010). While the more emotionally manipulative strategies of *All Good Things* failed to move critics and viewers, they did have the desired effect on the film’s true target audience. It would seem Durst wholly bought into the narrative of his victimization, even to the point of eagerly participating in *The Jinx* against the vehement insistence of his lawyers (Jarecki 2010).



Robert Durst, star and subject of HBO’s *The Jinx*

With respect to dramatic storytelling, *The Jinx* is far more compelling than *All Good Things*, due partly to its innovative incorporation of a number of techniques drawn from televised drama. The series utilizes tropes popularized by dramatic series such as ‘teaser’ episode openers and a stylish title sequence, which features fragments of stylized reenactment footage accompanied by sinister-sounding rock music, recalling the title sequences of *The Wire* and other popular HBO dramas (Bednarek 134). *The Jinx* also borrows its episodic structure from the conventions of the televised drama. Each chapter, though carefully arranged in relation to the overall mini-series arc, contains a dramatic structure complete with twists, cliffhangers, and comic relief. Though mainly comprised of talking heads, reenactments, and archival footage, *The Jinx*’s inventive presentation of these documentary staples has clearly influenced the conception of recent nonfiction series like *Making a Murderer* and *O.J.: Made in America* (2016). The series is comprised of six hour-long “chapters” which examine different aspects of Durst’s life in non-chronological fashion. Chapters one, two and three investigate the deaths (or disappearances) of Morris Black, Kathleen Durst, and Susan Berman respectively. The fourth chapter focuses on the failed prosecution of Durst for the death

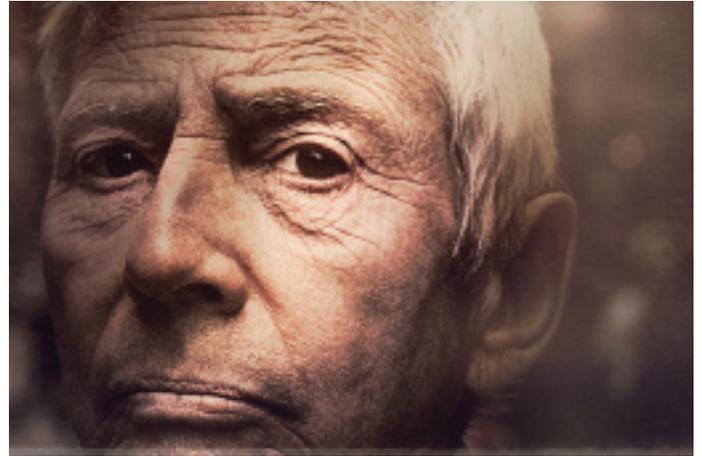
of Morris Black. The fifth explores Durst's relationship to the Durst Organization, echoing most closely the themes considered in *All Good Things*. The final and most compelling episode relates the filmmakers' discovery of a damning piece of evidence in the case of Susan Berman's murder. This episode employs a candidly reflexive style popularized in part by *Catfish* (2010), on which Jarecki served as producer, in which the filmmakers constantly intrude on the documentary reality, placing themselves as unassuming observers at the center of the unfolding drama. Jarecki and his crew ultimately become the protagonists of *The Jinx*, deciding how best to confront Durst with this latest revelation. Accordingly, the image of a sympathetic Durst from *All Good Things* dissolves alongside Jarecki's ambivalence about his subject's potential guilt.

The divergent critical responses to Jarecki's two attempts to render Durst's story highlight their contrasting dramatic impact. *The Jinx* has been praised as groundbreaking television and currently holds a score of 94% on RottenTomatoes.com, a stark difference from *All Good Things*' score of 33%. The fact that the two works fared so differently with critics despite sharing the same storyteller and subject suggests that Jarecki is simply more adept at documentary filmmaking and/or that Durst's story was too complicated or bizarre to be made palatable in a dramatic feature easily. Indeed, the attempt in *All Good Things* to "understand" Durst consists mainly of dramatic clichés that inadvertently banalize its genuinely

One could be forgiven for wondering if Jarecki is manipulating both the onscreen presentation of his subjects and the off-screen subjects themselves.

peculiar subject matter. Unlike this precedent, *The Jinx* plays out with chilling immediacy due to its meticulous exploration of detail and the awkward candidness of its unscripted moments. However, one notable discrepancy between the two narratives once again raises the question of Jarecki's credibility and speaks to obstacles and demands inherent in these formats themselves. In *All Good Things*, "Malvern Bump" (Morris Black) is seen murdering "Deborah Lehrman" (Susan Berman), presumably at the unseen request of Marks (Durst). If this was based on any theory put forward by the prosecution against Durst, it is notably absent from *The Jinx*. The cynical reasoning for this omission is glaring: Jarecki introduced this explanation when it served a purpose of making his semi-fictional protagonist more sympathetic, but not when it

undermined *The Jinx*'s dramatic hook of the real Durst's ultimately undeniable guilt.



Robert Durst's gaze has become known for its cold emptiness.

The Jinx made international headlines when, following the airing of its sixth and final episode, the FBI immediately apprehended Durst. Unaware that the filmmakers were recording him, Durst appears in the show's final moments to cryptically confess to the murder of his wife, Kathleen Durst, his neighbor, Morris Black, and his closest friend, Susan Berman. The suspicious timing of his apprehension invites questioning of whether Andrew Jarecki had maintained an ethically appropriate distance from the ongoing investigation of Durst by law enforcement. Perhaps more troubling, though, is the repeated suggestion that Durst's experience of *All Good Things* as a spectator prompted his participation as an interview subject in *The Jinx*. As previously mentioned, discussions of ethical representation surrounding *Capturing the Friedmans* tend to center on Jarecki's misleading of subjects by an alleged feigning of naïveté. This theme was later echoed in reactions to *Catfish*, in which the filmmaker-protagonists pursue an unseen Facebook "friend" who turns out, much to their masterfully performed surprise, to be an eccentric older woman. In both cases, a particular brand of ambiguous credulity resulted in startling access to remarkably compelling but equally elusive or mediawary subjects. One could be forgiven for wondering if Jarecki is manipulating both the onscreen presentation of his subjects and the off-screen subjects themselves. His gradual intrusion on the documentary "reality" of *The Jinx* is arguably part of a larger extra-textual project in which he continually plays the role of an unassuming observer finding himself in the right place at the right time. In this sense, *All Good Things* can be even read as an elaborate

performance of Jarecki's objectivity: a coded signaling of his open-mindedness about the Durst case that, however dubious, succeeded in securing *The Jinx* rare and damning access to the most fascinating and unlikely of documentary participants.

The unusual circumstances that led to *The Jinx* afforded Jarecki a created opportunity to respond to his critics. Regarding transparency, *All Good Things* had made his non-committal position towards Durst's guilt a matter of public record. HBO's willingness to experiment with the documentary format would mean far less pressure to excise relevant material for the sake of runtime. Thus, particular ethical dilemmas surrounding the production and release of *Capturing the Friedmans* could be alleviated. With Durst currently in custody awaiting trial for the murder of Susan Berman, Jarecki can boast of the series' beneficial real-world impact: the potential correction of a long-standing miscarriage of justice. Especially when considered in relation to the critical and commercial failure of *All Good Things*, the success of *The Jinx* suggests a particular evolution in audience sensibilities. It seems fictional narrative conventions were unnecessary to, and in some cases even hindered, audience interest in these complex real-life crime events. By adapting his interpretation of Durst's story to a more suitable media format, Jarecki finally succeeds in coaxing audiences to share in his obsession with Robert Durst. Despite *The Jinx*'s innovativeness, both it and *All Good Things* are ultimately subsumed by the tropes of their respective formats, and the crucial variable of Morris Black's possible involvement in Susan Berman's murder remains a problematic discrepancy between the works. Its inclusion in *All Good Things* seeks to bring audience and subject closer together, while its omission from *The Jinx* delivers precisely the sensational access to a cold-blooded subject that true-crime audiences crave. While superficially attributable to real-life evidence emerging in the interim between projects, this discrepancy is more likely subordinate to narrative conventions inherent in their respective formats. Jarecki's true intentions in this regard will likely remain a mystery. As Durst himself memorably remarks in *The Jinx*, "No one tells the whole truth..."

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Towards Another Cinema (After Kidlat Tahimik & Ulrike Ottinger)

What did “Third Cinema” say? According to Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their seminal text, “Towards a Third Cinema,” it proposed “the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point;” in short, decolonizing culture (Solanas and Getino n.p). It proposed “... making films that the System cannot assimilate and which are foreign to its needs, or making films that directly and explicitly set out to fight the System” (Solanas and Getino n.p.). However, some of “Third Cinema’s” precepts might read archaically to today’s avant-garde filmmaker: they seem to essentialize cultures and nationalities, ignoring the fruits of cross-cultural pollination. Many other scholars have acknowledged certain limitations in the original precepts of Third Cinema: Teshome Gabriel maintains that anyone anywhere can make “Third Cinema” if it “stands opposed to imperialism and class oppression” (Gabriel); Fredric Jameson has put forth an alternative argument for a “geopolitical aesthetic” (Jameson n.p.); Coco Fusco has similarly asserted that “[t]here is no entirely non-Western place left” (Fusco n.p.) . On the other hand, Deborah Dixon and Leo Zonn argue for a more nuanced and non-essentializing reading of “Third Cinema’s” goals.

Kidlat Tahimik’s 1976 film, *Perfumed Nightmare*, is widely regarded as a “Third Cinema” film. Meanwhile, Ulrike Ottinger’s 1989 film, *Joan of Arc of Mongolia*, has been criticized by certain film theorists for reproducing the colonialist paradigm (and praised by others for subverting it). Notwithstanding their differences, both films are—to varying degrees—fake orientalist ethnologies. Both depict journeys through a spectrum of urban first world and rural third world landscapes using an unorthodox filmic language of spectacular convergence. I am interested in assessing the respective qualities of these films for a global influx aesthetic; I shall analyze

the creative solutions which each offers for portraying “the other” to a Western spectator and fulfilling Third Cinema’s goals.

Joan of Arc of Mongolia chronicles the voyage of a diverse array of mostly Caucasian, mostly female Westerners who travel east on the trans-Siberian express and are “abducted” by a group of female Mongolian horsewomen. Their aggressions are short-lived: soon both parties are teaching one another their customs and enjoying idyllic festivities together. However, the customs of both are varyingly fantastical performances: Ottinger employs archetypes present in the theatre or cabaret to portray the Westerners and wild elaborations of dress and custom to depict the Mongolians. The film overlaps with and oscillates between seemingly fictional and seemingly ethnographic modes.

On the other hand, Kidlat Tahimik presents *Perfumed Nightmare* as a sort of self-ethnology for the Western spectator. He introduces his hometown of Balian Philippines (“This is the bridge to our village. It is the only way into Balian and it is the only way out”) and tells the story of his coming of age (“I am Kidlat Tahimik. I choose my vehicle and I can cross any bridge”) as a tall tale in the context of the village’s postcolonial past and present. In the shadow of the technological achievement of former colonizing countries, he forms a Werner von Braun club and listens to “Voice of America” on his radio. An American executive brings him to Paris, where Tahimik eventually comes to realize that he rejects the encroachment of technology (both abroad and in the Philippines) and longs for his original home. The film’s rough qualities—it is shot on super 8mm film—undergird the pretense that this a “primitive man” (Tahimik) making his own movie; however, the film’s wit, postmodern deconstructions, and camouflaged critiques of capitalism betray his

sophistication.

One of the most significant differences between the two films stems from the fact that the creator of *Joan of Arc of Mongolia* is from a colonialist country (Germany) while the creator of *Perfumed Nightmare* is from a colonized country (the Philippines). *Joan of Arc of Mongolia* is presented primarily as a drama and does not (directly) thematize the violent history of colonial encounters or Western imperialism. Where *Joan of Arc of Mongolia* seems to celebrate cross-cultural flux with a touch of pastiche eye-winking, *Perfumed Nightmare* stages a “quiet lighting” (“Kidlat Tahimik” means “quiet lightning” in Tagalog) of resistance, subliminally (yet directly) referencing the brutal history of colonialism.

However, the films also have many things in common: both are partial fabrications performed for the Western viewer. Ottinger fabricates the culture of the Mongols just as Kidlat Tahimik fabricates his innocent persona in *Perfumed Nightmare*. Both *Joan of Arc of Mongolia* and *Perfumed Nightmare* contain autobiographical elements, and both subvert their genre by creating a layering of viewing modes. Nora Alter describes how *Joan of Arc of Mongolia* tightly interweaves fact and fiction “to produce an almost seamless—yet chiasmic—postgenre,” and “overcodes transgression (of heterosexual norms) with an ethnographic element” (11). *Perfumed Nightmare* has been described as a “magical reverse ethnography” and “a sui generis mixture

Where Joan of Arc of Mongolia seems to celebrate cross-cultural flux with a touch of pastiche eye-winking, Perfumed Nightmare stages a “quiet lighting” [...] of resistance, subliminally (yet directly) referencing the brutal history of colonialism.

of documentary, diary film, fictionalized autobiography, cinematic essay, and ethnography (“Perfumed Nightmare Trailer”).

Significantly, both films employ non-naturalistic acting. As the filmmakers were not trained in filmmaking, pastiche and stilted acting might be the inadvertently avant-garde by-products of that lack. Whether avant-garde or amateur, a self-reflexive effect ensues, as characters—by being caricatures—subliminally poke fun at their fictional constructs. This performativity

is both counter-balanced and expanded in the extensive diegetic performances throughout both films. These include musical and cabaret numbers, festival and ritual performances, and even sung messages in the case of *Joan of Arc of Mongolia*, and parades, school dance performances, a wedding, a funeral, and even flagellant men in the case of *Perfumed Nightmare* (not to mention Kidlat’s extradiegetic narration and semi-diegetic re-enactments). All reference a (faux) ethnographic documentary genre despite non-naturalistic acting.

Both filmmakers have extensive relationships with the non-native culture depicted in the films: the real Kidlat completed his master’s degree at the Wharton School of Business at UPenn and is married to a Bavarian woman, Katrin de Guia. Ulrike Ottinger spent many years on site and learned Mongolian. She made an eight-hour documentary, *Taiga* (1992), soon after filming *Johanna d’Arc*, and had her collaborators welcome her back into their homes. In an interview with Patricia Wiedenhöft, Ottinger says, “I laid the groundwork by studying Mongolian culture and literature, the orally transmitted epics and fairy tales [and] the old text on the ‘Secret History of the Mongols’” (“Interview with Ulrike Ottinger”). In a well-known essay of his, “Cups-of-Gas Filmmaking vs. Full Tank-cum-Credit Card Fillmaking”, Kidlat Tahimik writes that he makes up for lack of funding with a relatively free time-frame, which opens him up to cosmic inspiration. Ulrike Ottinger also describes how long she was preparing for the encounter performed in *Joan of Arc of Mongolia*:

China. The Arts - The People, a cinematic travel account which I shot in various Chinese provinces in 1985, is a preliminary study in the sense that it gave me experience filming in China, which was instructive in several respects. Not only was I able to experience and observe other cultural forms and another way of life, living there also helped me revise and enrich my own extensive theoretical preparation. Many personal experiences have affected the scenario for *Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia*, which already stood in rough form before my trip. To be sure, one film is documentary and the other fictional, but for me, taking into account the different production methods, both genres underwent a far-reaching transformation. Perhaps one could say that China ... is the encounter with the foreign, whereas *Johanna ...* is the performance of that encounter. But to the extent that both encounters actually take place, a “new realism” arises, which has not been arbitrarily invented, but rather rests on extensive groundwork - on research, experiences, preliminary studies, all those procedures which the preparation of such a project entails. What I mean is: the freeing of enough spaces so that the encounter really can take place (Wiedenhöft).

As she frees spaces for a meeting to take place in front of the camera, Ottinger frees (or demands) time

for the spectator to encounter her subjects: *Joan of Arc of Mongolia* is almost three hours long and her subsequent documentary, *Taiga* (1992), is eight hours long. The spectator cannot quickly consume this spectacle. She must chew on it a long time—the fiber is not thrown out; the work is wholesome.

Just as Kidlat's film subverts a Western perspective, Ottinger's film subverts a heteronormative patriarchal perspective, shifting the paradigmatic encounter between the "enlightened West" and the "exotic East:" the young Mongol princess leading a band of horsewomen and the young French traveler among the Westerners. On the train towards Europe, a Mongolian woman (some critics think it is the Princess) wearing Western attire reveals that she takes a break every summer from her modern job to return to the steppes to keep the culture alive. The representation of the Mongolian nomads is thus further complicated, and women, for once, play warriors and wanderers (Caryn).

Ottinger's experimental work as "Second Cinema." Neither they, nor Teshome Gabriel, the Ethiopian Third World cinema scholar and filmmaker, nor Fredric Jameson, seem to have commented on Ottinger's work, perhaps because she is from a colonialist country.

Perfumed Nightmare is widely considered to be a "Third Cinema" film. Several goals of Third Cinema which it fulfills, and which *Joan of Arc of Mongolia* also achieves, include:

- Long, uninterrupted shots counter quick Hollywood-style editing.
- Frequent wide shots that place characters in the context of their community, fulfilling the Third Cinema goal of de-emphasizing psychological realism.
- Portrays Indigenous cultural events and symbols.
- Non-actors act out dynamic equivalents of their true-to-life roles, for more authentic characterization [although inauthentic characterization also occurs in both films] (Sison)



Ottinger's *Joan of Arc of Mongolia* (1989): Third or Second Cinema?

Does Ottinger's work decolonize culture? In an interview with *Cineaste*, Ulrike Ottinger states:

There is no pornography in art, there are no taboos. Art works in relation to everything, including ethnic representation. These questions, issues of ethnic misrepresentation, always already imply a reduction to or an acceptance of a system that I have never accepted, but which is nonetheless there (Shulevitz and Grundmann).

Ottinger implies that her work employs traditional narrative structures—(traditional) drama and (traditional) ethnographic documentary—as a way of speaking back to them. However, her experimental feminist and queer subversions might not suffice for the Third Cinema movement; Solanas and Getino might rather classify

The last two goals refer to an authenticity which neither of the films in this essay leaves deconstructed. In his now-classic reading of *Perfumed Nightmare*, Fredric Jameson discusses "how a film produced within the 'Third World' does not simply 'represent' that context in particular ways, but is constituted in large part through its deployment of symbols, allegories and techniques that invoke a sense of the global." In other words, cinema in the Third World, rather than aspire to nationalistic myth, can embrace a "geopolitical aesthetic" of the influence and influx of the global on the local. Jameson argues that "*Perfumed Nightmare* is very much a self-conscious exercise that seeks to make a connection

between the localised experience of the individual and the globalised totality that is late capitalism” (Dixon and Zonn 297).

Joan of Arc of Mongolia and *Perfumed Nightmare* do just that: *Joan of Arc* produces colorful cross-cultural fabricated ritual performances to recreate the utopian myth of the crossing of cultures. *Perfumed Nightmare* presents cross-cultural symbols, in a fable of an innocent and primitive young man traveling to industrialized lands. One found symbol, that of the jeepney, makes a case for turning “vehicles of war” into “vehicles of life.” Scholars Dixon and Zonn describe Fredric Jameson’s analysis:

Because the hand-crafting of the jeepneys involves the continuous recycling of parts, there is no destruction or waste. And, because the jeepney partakes of Filipino, American and Spanish legacies, there is no ‘authentic’ culture to be commodified and sold. For Jameson, this is an instance wherein a utopian workplace is actually realised, at least on film (Dixon and Zonn 301).

However, they add that Filipino scholars have claimed that Jameson’s comment betrays his lack of familiarity with his subject of study: the factories that manufacture these jeepneys in the Philippines are very oppressive workplaces. It is no wonder though that Jameson interpreted the jeepneys as he did: Tahimik—an “authentic” non-Western native—portrayed the jeepney factory as a utopia in his film. At the factory, Kidlat narrates, “where do these jeepneys come from? These are vehicles of war, which we made into vehicles of life.” Over footage of a jeepney being hand-painted, he further explains: “an old jeepney never dies, it finds its way into a hundred new jeepneys.”

Both Perfumed Nightmare and Joan of Arc of Mongolia are grounded in a positivist outlook, blowing away the ghosts of colonization or orientalism with humour, magic, or idealized reenactment.

Kidlat Tahimik’s utopian fantasy of the US becomes a nightmare over the course of the film. Ulrike Ottinger’s utopian fantasy of Mongolia, however, remains mythologized. Katie Trumpener and Kristen Whissel have argued that Ottinger’s ironic tone does not trump the naïve restaging of yet another Western point of view of the “Orient.” Trumpener writes:

It was thus Japan which Admiral Perry “opened” to America, not America which opened itself to Japan, Christianity which was imported into China and India by missionaries, not Taoism or Hinduism into Italy and Spain, England or Scotland. In the light of this history, Ottinger’s assertion of cultural reciprocity can at moments seem disingenuous (94).

She argues that Ottinger ignores - and thereby reproduces - an asymmetrical relationship. However, just as Ottinger creates a utopian myth ignoring an imperialist residue, Tahimik creates a myth of the magical powers of the individual to confront it. In the story of his father before American soldiers killed him, his friend narrates:

Your father took a deep breath, he blew with a fury that knocked the guard down, stronger than the winds of Amock Mountain Kidlat. More Americans fell before they finally stabbed your father. Kidlat, when the typhoon blows up, its cocoon, the butterfly embraces the sun. The sleeping typhoon must learn to blow again.

At the end of the film, Kidlat is simply able to blow away the perfumed horror of his American dream:

When Kidlat’s eyes are opened to the perfumed horror of his American dream, he irrevocably ‘resigns’ as president of the Werner von Braun club and eventually blows away the masked Western guests of the mock farewell party, exactly as his father did to the Spaniards (Sison 12).

Kidlat invokes his imagination to rewrite history, or to reconcile identities just as Ottinger does. At the beginning of *Joan of Arc of Mongolia*, Lady Windemere asks:

Was it a confrontation with reality or with the imagination... must imagination shun the encounter with reality? Or are they enamoured of each other? Can they form an alliance?

The utopian qualities of these two films provide the basis for their subversion. Both *Perfumed Nightmare* and *Joan of Arc of Mongolia* are grounded in a positivist outlook, blowing away the ghosts of colonization or orientalism with humour, magic, or idealized reenactment. On the IMDB website, there is only one review of *Joan of Arc of Mongolia*, which concludes as follows:

As a counter to that age old question, “Can’t we all just get along?”, *Joan of Arc of Mongolia* provides its two cents: “Sure, why not?”

Not all happy endings are made in Hollywood.

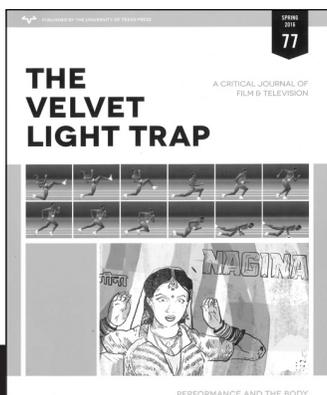
How could a new generation of filmmakers portray “the other” to a Western spectator? Following Tahimik and Ottinger, they might fabricate ethnographies, cultural dress, and rituals, cross genres and genders, paradigms and patriarchies, perform the past: queer it and query it, give and demand (much) time. Moreover, they might unabashedly portray peace. As cash and cameras are more widely distributed, these methods may become mainstream.

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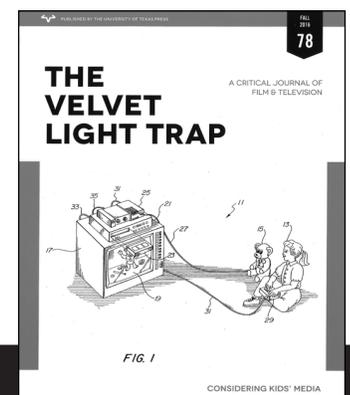
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Player Agency in Telltale Games' Transmedia and Cross-Genre Adaptations

Though severely understudied, video game adaptations have become a highly popular and lucrative transmedia business. Film-to-game adaptations are now standard for many big-budget Hollywood productions, and video game developers have also turned to other media for inspiration: from comics to television series, game adaptations of popular franchises are proving to be productive areas for both profit and creativity. Founded in 2004, Telltale Games is an American independent video game developer and publisher best known for its adaptations of popular licensed products. Telltale focuses on digital publications which are released episodically, and most of its productions are point-and-click adventure-style games which centralize narrative, character development, and player choice. Telltale has adapted from various media, including comic books (*Sam & Max*, *The Walking Dead*), a web cartoon (*Homestar Runner*), multiple film series (*Wallace and Gromit*, *Back to the Future*), a television series (*Game of Thrones*), and other video game franchises (*Borderlands*, *Minecraft*). In this article, I will discuss Telltale's most successful adaptations and explore how their artistic approach and particular source material have determined their level of popularity and acclaim. Most of my discussion will focus on *The Walking Dead* (2012), Telltale's most successful adaptation. I will argue that because its main characters are unique to the game, rather than adapted from the source material, *The Walking Dead* fosters an incredibly realistic illusion of player agency, which sets it apart from other Telltale adaptations and most video games in general.

In her book, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda

Hutcheon describes adaptation as “thematic and narrative persistence [combined] with material change” (4). Telltale follows this persistence in their adaptations while also centralizing player choice, an element unique to interactive media. Within *The Walking Dead* and its sequel, *The Walking Dead: Season Two* (2013-2014), player choice is the basis for most of the gameplay. The unique selling point of these games is that “the story is tailored by how you play.” After the player makes a choice, the games often remind them that “this action will have consequences.” Despite these looming repercussions, players only have a matter of seconds to make morally-heavy or completely ambiguous decisions. Other characters will certainly voice their opinions, but the games offer little moral guidance and no reward for playing the games as selfish and antagonistic or as kind and heroic. Rather than the game superimposing an evaluative system, players make their decisions based on the limited information available to them; the opinions of other characters, who are written to be flawed or even untrustworthy; and their gut reactions to each situation.

By allowing the player to make morally-heavy decisions and making it seem that those decisions shape the narrative outcome, Telltale's games foster an incredibly realistic illusion of player agency.

Beyond providing a compelling initial experience, offering multiple choices and multiple endings to the player is also a wise marketing tactic, as it encourages players to play the game multiple times. Telltale's games follow a branching decision tree format in which the narrative splits based on player choice and then converges again at specific points in the game. This format cleverly facilitates giving the player the feeling that every decision they make matters significantly while not expending excessive resources on narrative content that the players might not encounter. As such, while the sensation of agency is cogent in these games, many of the decisions offered to the player are false choices because the different options eventually lead to (mostly) the same outcome. Toby Smethurst and Stef Craps point this out during their analysis of *The Walking Dead*:

The narrative branches that the player does not travel down but perceives as possibilities are just as important to their understanding of the story as the events that actually play out on the screen. One could reasonably field the argument that this overarching antinarrative or phantom narrative is even more powerful than the narrative itself, since it colludes with the player's imagination to create might-have-beens that the game's developers could not possibly have anticipated or included in the game (15).

This kind of trick is only possible in an interactive medium like video games, in which the player believes that the narrative is responding to his or her actions. By allowing the player to make morally-heavy decisions and making it seem that those decisions shape the narrative outcome, Telltale's games foster an incredibly realistic illusion of player agency.

The discussion surrounding agency and video game play can be traced back to Janet Murray, when she defined video game agency as "the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices," and pointed out that players desire this subjective experience of authority and control (126). The feeling of being in control of the game world can also foster the illusion that the experience is unmediated: players often refer to their characters in the first person and identify with their actions (Jenkins 31-32). The appeal of video game adaptations, then, is in the pleasures associated with entering into the familiar world of the film,

comic, book, show, etc., and exercising control over the characters and events therein.

Player Agency in a Transmedia Adaptation

Although branching narrative trees are a popular design technique for games, they are not enough to satisfy the player if they do not feel that the choices offered are meaningful. While players are aware developers have pre-determined the game's possible choices and subsequent outcomes, if the choices offered seem significant within the game world, that awareness can fade and the player can maintain a feeling of control and agency. However, when that game world is part of a larger franchise, with its own lore and existence outside of the video game, the concept of player control and agency is complicated.

The events in *Game of Thrones* take place concurrently with the fourth season of the television series. While the player controls characters who do not exist in the show, they often interact with the show's main characters. Because the show's characters exist outside of the game world, the player's control over the in-game events is necessarily limited. While the game tells the player that his or her actions have consequences, the player knows that no matter what choices he or she makes, the game cannot go against the show's canon. Similarly, another Telltale adaptation, *The Wolf Among Us*, based on Bill Willingham's *Fables* comic book series, is set as a prequel to the series and, more importantly, is canon with the comics. As such, the player knows that his or her choices, no matter how seemingly relevant, cannot contradict anything within the established series. From the beginning of each of these games, players familiar with the source material know which characters will survive and which will not, as well as much of what will happen within the story. While this does not necessarily make the player's experience less enjoyable, it does make his or her choices feel less meaningful, and therefore weakens the sense of agency he or she experiences.

Tales from the Borderlands, a rare example of a game-to-game adaptation, is a narrative sequel to the *Borderlands* first-person shooter series. A cross-genre adaptation, Telltale turned a fast-paced game with a shooter mechanic and limited character interaction into a point-and-click adventure heavily centralizing character interaction and

development. The character-heavy aspect of Telltale productions is central to their appeal, because, as Telltale Games' Steven Allison observed, "[w]hen properties become a franchise, people fall in love with the characters" (Corriea para. 6). Since this is a sequel, rather than a prequel or concurrent event, *Tales from the Borderlands* gives its players the sense that anything could happen, that his or her choices could have consequences on established characters. While this feeling of control is also an illusion, since the game's system of false choices and periodic convergences limit narrative flexibility, players are not already aware of what will happen and so the sensation of control is powerful. Additionally, the main series' developers have announced a future title and it is possible that they could base particular elements of that new installment on Telltale's statistical data about its players' choices. After completing each episode of the Telltale games discussed, players are shown the statistics of other players' decisions at major moments in the game. Although it is common for players to go back and replay certain situations to change events and consequences, the data of what players choose to do is a gold mine of information for developers. Due to their prioritization of this information, developers grant players a degree of agency over the future development of the series as a whole. Telltale has created one other cross-genre game-to-game adaptation, entitled *Minecraft: Story Mode* (2015-2016). Although similar in its choice-based episodic style, audiences met *Minecraft: Story Mode* with lukewarm reception whereas *Tales* received critical acclaim. This differentiation is perhaps because *Tales'* source text is a franchise with characters and a clear, if minimal, narrative. *Minecraft*, however, is a sandbox-style game, with no story or characters, in which players can construct nearly anything with virtual building blocks. Designing a character-based, narrative-heavy adventure game based on such a franchise proved far less successful than designing one adapted from established narratives with fleshed-out characters. This difficulty inherent in crossing genres, combined with strict copyright laws, might explain why companies prefer to produce sequels and to "port" existing games to other consoles, rather than attempt game-to-game adaptations.

Telltale's first attempt at this type of decision-based episodic adaptation, *The Walking Dead*, remains its most commercially successful and

critically acclaimed production. The adaptation won numerous Game of the Year awards from several gaming publications and is credited with revitalizing the point-and-click adventure game genre [1]. Critics praised the game for its morally-heavy emotional content, difficult decisions, and the realistic relationships between its characters. These characteristics are essential reasons behind *The Walking Dead's* success as an adaptation and are dependent upon the player's lack of pre-existing knowledge. Although the world is adapted from an existing comic book franchise, almost all the characters are entirely unique to the game. In this way, unlike *Game of Thrones* and *The Wolf Among Us*, the player does not already know what will happen to most characters and is not already aware of events which will occur in the game. Telltale worked closely with the creator of the comic series, Robert Kirkman, whose only stipulation was to avoid mention of the comic's main character, Rick Grimes, as Kirkman has long-term plans for the character [2]. According to Dan Connors, CEO of Telltale, Kirkman's guidance helped them to craft a unique story with new characters, allowing them to avoid working with those already established from the comic. As Connors stated, "[i]f it's something that's free and clear, like Lee and Clementine, who we've created, we can do whatever we want" (Grayson para. 5). By building a world adapted from the comic series, but mostly avoiding the implementation of pre-existing characters, Telltale kept creative freedom over those that populated its game.



Telltale has released two seasons at the time of writing this article, with each season divided into five episodes. Set in the same world as the comic book series, events in the first season take place in Georgia shortly after a widespread zombie outbreak. The player adopts the role of Lee Everett, an African-American university professor whom the state recently convicted for murdering a senator. The game opens with Lee being transported to prison though he quickly gains freedom due to the chaos brought about by the zombies. Shortly after, Lee encounters a young girl named Clementine and joins up with her to protect her and find her parents. The relationship between Lee and Clementine is one of surrogate father-daughter and the game makes it clear that Lee's primary motivation throughout the game is to protect Clementine at all costs. As Melissa Hutchison, the voice actor for Clementine, stated, "[t]he whole backbone of the story is the relationship between Lee and Clementine, and the choices Lee makes in order to protect Clementine" (Wallace para. 13).

The Walking Dead asks players to identify with an African-American man, an escaped convict, but Lee is not presented as a hyper-masculine or violent man – a refreshingly positive portrayal in a medium dominated by racist and sexist stereotypes. In fact, his relationship with Clementine, an African-American child, is compassionate and caring. The quality of the writing is such that the feelings of protectiveness and concern for Clementine, as well as the guilt felt for frightening her, are real sensations experienced by many players. Reports of "real-life" emotions in response to the

consequences of player choice in *The Walking Dead* have been explored in the microethnographic studies conducted by Nicholas Taylor, Chris Kampe, and Kristina Bell (2015a & 2015b). The authors observed the choices made by male and female players with different gaming experiences and backgrounds, and asked the participants why they made certain choices in sequences that were deemed challenging, stressful, or morally heavy. The authors observed that players entered into the role of protective, surrogate father-figure, stating that they were able to see an enactment of mature paternal identity in the play of their participants as they began to focus on Clementine and "express emotional openness, patience, compassion, and selflessness" (2015b, p. 15).

While violence is certainly ubiquitous in the game, it is never the central focus of gameplay. Rather, making difficult survival decisions, managing interpersonal relationships, and mediating conflicts are what this game is all about. This microcosmic focus follows the theming of the comic, as Kirkman observes of his creation, "[t]he only thing that's really special about *The Walking Dead* is the human characters and the narrative that they exist in" (Reeves, para. 3). This fits in well with the broader zombie apocalypse genre, as Smethurst and Craps point out:

In much of the best zombie-themed media [...] the undead are not necessarily the primary antagonists but can instead function as a catalyst for conflicts between the survivors, thus exposing the barbarism of human beings toward one another when they are put in life-threatening situations (11).

While some scholars have suggested that video games provide a safe space in which players can engage in deviant behaviour, delineated by a "magic circle" that keeps it separate from reality, statistics from The Walking Dead suggest that when available most players tend to prefer to take the moral high ground.

As Lee encounters other survivors and attempts to keep the group intact, the player is forced to make ambiguous or dilemmatic decisions about Lee's behaviour, which in turn influence how others behave, who survives and who does not, and what kind of a person Clementine becomes. The weight of the player's choices is especially heavy when the game informs the player that "Clementine witnessed what you did" and "Clementine will remember that." Clementine functions not only as a motivating factor but also as a moral compass, as she reacts negatively to anger and violence. The game grants the player the responsibility of deciding what kind of role-model he or she

wants Lee to be for Clementine, thereby placing culpability for Lee's actions solely on the player.

Smethurst and Craps discuss complicity in video games as “founded on a combination of interactivity and empathy,” meaning that “the game fosters the sense that players have a responsibility for what happens on-screen” (9). While some scholars have suggested that video games provide a safe space in which players can engage in deviant behaviour, delineated by a “magic circle” that keeps it separate from reality, statistics from *The Walking Dead* suggest that when available most players tend to prefer to take the moral high ground. As Telltale's marketing director Richard Iggo claims:

Some of the stats we've seen coming back from player decisions have created a perception that even in dire times — and when faced with no-win situations where each decision is morally grey — the majority of people will try to do the 'right' thing if they can, even if there's really no 'right' decision to be made. It's fascinating because even when we offer players a decision where the apparently darker option might make sense from a purely logical point of view, they'll often try to choose the 'higher' ground at personal cost even if that means being put in danger or having a relationship with another character suffer because of it (Keyes para. 4).

This data suggests that in *The Walking Dead*, players act as what Miguel Sicart would call moral agents because they react to dilemmas with a moral stance rather than with logic or strategy. The quality of the writing in *The Walking Dead* is such that the feelings of protectiveness and concern for Clementine, as well as the guilt felt for frightening her, are real sensations experienced by many players. Depending on how the player chooses to act, Clementine will learn to trust others, or to be wary of them. Choices do not matter on a grand scale in *The Walking Dead* – Lee will never save the world from its fate – however, the player's choices do influence what kind of person Clementine becomes.

In writing on video game adaptation, Moore claims that “[b]ecause video games are both modular and variable, each player creates her own adaptation as she plays through the game; individual agency supplants textual fidelity” (191). While this might be an ideal vision of video game

play, the agency that a player has in the game is minimal. Player input causes the game system to react in a specific, pre-coded way and, given our current lack of artificial intelligence that can adapt and generate content in reaction to unpredictable human behaviour, player choice is necessarily limited. While this is true, many players do feel that they are in control, and that they have agency in the game. This perception is important because, as Steven Jones points out, since play is a highly mediated, complicated, and social experience, “[p]layers make games meaningful, make their meanings, as they play them, talk about them, reconfigure them, and play them again” (9). Players, like readers and viewers, actively interpret the text and exercise agency over how it is received, discussed, and understood, though that agency is itself constrained by socio-cultural realities. This structuring is especially apparent in video game adaptations, as many players engage with the game text by connecting it to the original work. Players also exercise collective agency through participation in fan communities, which are generally much larger for transmedia products. *The Walking Dead* manages to engage players not only as fans of the comic or television show, but also by offering them a very convincing illusion of control. As I have demonstrated, this is primarily because *The Walking Dead* features a familiar setting but with entirely unique main characters whose behaviour is not constrained by the original work. Finally, player decisions not only shape the individual narrative, but since Telltale uses the decision statistics from each episode to determine future narratives, player choice also shapes the future direction of the series as a whole. This data collection, combined with the unique characters and emphasis on difficult choices, allows *The Walking Dead* to foster a much greater sense of player agency than other Telltale adaptations, and most other video games in general. Player agency, while understood to be illusory, is a popular concept within both the game industry and game scholarship. Telltale's approach demonstrates an effective way in which developers can entice players by offering them a sense of control over narratives with which they are already familiar.

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[1] For more on this, see Rob Manuel, "How adventure games came back from the dead," *PCWorld*, 5 Feb 2013 <http://www.pcworld.com/article/2026802/how-adventure-games-came-back-from-the-dead.html>

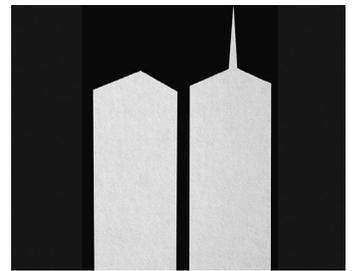
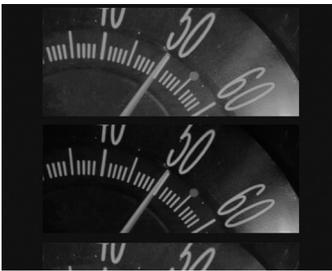
[2] For more on Kirkman's collaboration with Telltale, see Nathan Grayson, "Telltale On *Walking Dead* Season 2 And Beyond," *Rock Paper Shotgun* February 28th, 2013 <https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2013/02/28/telltale-on-walking-dead-season-2-and-beyond/> and Ben Reeves, "Lord Of The Dead: An Interview With Robert Kirkman," *GameInformer* November 26, 2012 <http://www.gameinformer.com/b/features/archive/2012/11/26/lord-of-the-dead-an-interview-with-robert-kirkman.aspx>

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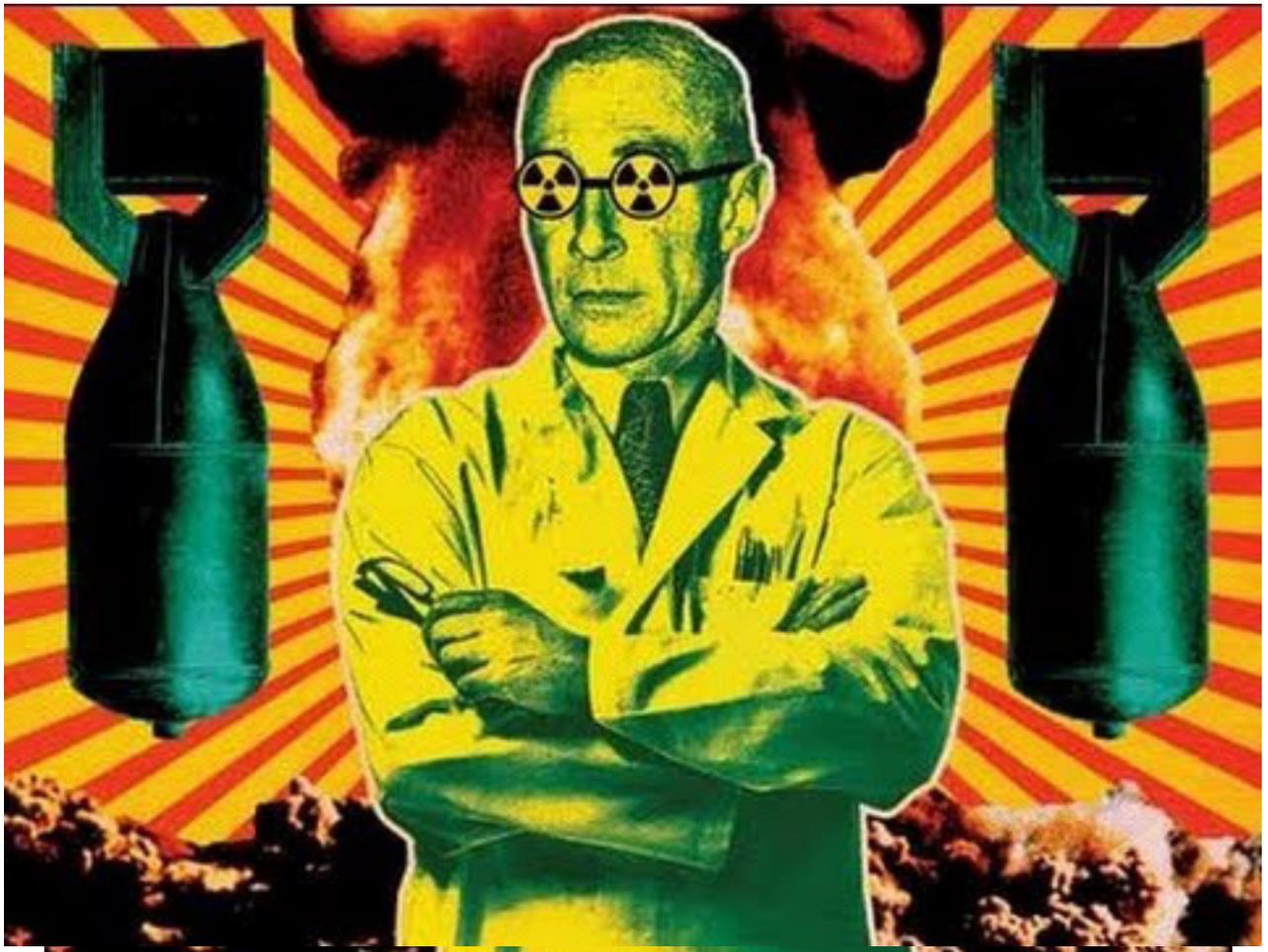
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“Batter His Art, Three-Personed Author-Gods”: Misreading John Donne’s “Holy Sonnet 14” for a Sympathetic Stage and Screen Adaptation of J. Robert Oppenheimer in John Adams’ and Peter Sellars’ *Doctor Atomic*

“GLORY BE TO THE BOMB; AND TO THE HOLY
FALLOUT: AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING, IS NOW AND
EVER SHALL BE. AMEN.”
(BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES)

At the end of Act I of *Doctor Atomic* (2005), John Adams’ opera on nuclear physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer and the first atomic bomb test, the protagonist, Oppie (baritone Gerald Finley), sings the signature aria, “Batter My Heart.” In Peter Sellars’ libretto, the aria is adapted from the seventeenth-century Anglican priest John Donne’s sonnet “[Holy Sonnet] 14” (1633). Informing Sellars’ use of this material was a 1962 letter from Oppenheimer to the General of the Manhattan Project, in which he cites the sonnet’s opening line—“Batter my heart, three-personed God...”—as an influence in his suggestion to name the test “Trinity” (Rhodes 571-2; The Metropolitan Opera International Radio Broadcast Information Centre 1).

However, while Donne’s “three-personed God” obviously refers to the Trinity of Christian mythology, Oppenheimer’s letter does not suggest so unequivocal or simple a connection between “14” as a whole and his thoughts behind the name. He cites the poetry as part of what appears to have been a greater number of “thoughts...in my mind;”

moreover, it is not “14” but Donne’s “Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness” that Oppenheimer mentions first, introducing it explicitly and adding that he “know[s] and love[s]” it (Rhodes 571-2). He also cites from the latter poem three full lines, as opposed to the mere three-quarters of one line from “14.” Sellars thus already makes a large assumption in drawing from the test’s codename the entirety of “14” and presenting it as a map of Oppenheimer’s mind. Nonetheless, this is an assumption virtually all reviewers, interviewers, and critics accept at face value. This includes includes Robert Warren

Distracted by the minor connection between the “three-personed god” line and the name of the Trinity Test, and by the dramatic sounds of “14,” Sellars neglects to closely consider the sonnet’s content and context, leading to a misrepresentation echoed by Adams’ unvaryingly sympathetic musical setting.

Lintott's first scholarly study on the opera (the present article appears to be the second). Lintott's musical analysis focuses on how *Doctor Atomic* constructs different perceptions of time, yet is uncritical of the Donne adaptation (e.g., 31ff). It also ignores a crucial way in which the opera constructs time: by excluding the Japanese timeline, presenting only American scenes (and largely as embodied by one highly privileged white male American).

By contrast, a close reading of "14" reveals many contradictions to Adams' and Sellars' sympathetic adaptation. My reading also suggests that the subject of the other poem cited in Oppenheimer's letter, "Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness," is more relevant and less one-sided with regard to the atomic bomb and its consequences. Distracted by the minor connection between the "three-personed god" line and the name of the Trinity Test, and by the dramatic sounds of "14," Sellars neglects to closely consider the sonnet's content and context, leading to a misrepresentation echoed by Adams' unvaryingly sympathetic musical setting.

Adams' and Sellars' preoccupation with the first line of "14" is most immediately evident in their use of repetition. They set "14" verbatim, with the notable exception of repeating lines 1-4, in whole or part, enough times to form a new stanza, which itself is repeated twice before leading into the rest of the poem (lines 5-14). Thus, the first four lines of Donne's sonnet read:

*Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new*

But stanzas 1 and 2 from Sellars' libretto both read:

*Batter my heart, three person'd God; For, you
As yet but knock, breathe, knock, breathe, knock,
breathe
Shine, and seek to mend;
Batter my heart, three person'd God;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, break, blow, break, blow
burn and make me new* (Sellars 19)

Repeating the verbs of Donne's lines 2 and 4 in trinities of binaries (e.g., "knock, breathe" ×3) sonically enacts the exact "battering" the speaker is imploring God to inflict. This battering is

echoed by the characteristically minimalist Adams' orchestral interludes of layered repetitive phrases dominated by bursts of brass and timpani: "a frenetic, brass-heavy ritornello" (Lintott 44). Adams and Sellars exploit the forceful, bludgeoning sounds already inherent in Donne's accented, alliterative strings of plosive-laden, monosyllabic action verbs, to great sonic effect.

But this repetition elevates Donne's first four lines over and above the rest of the poem. Reduplicating these four lines into fourteen lines—the total length of the original sonnet—is in itself already enough to render them the locus of the aria, their ratio to the remaining content shifting from 4:10 to 14:10. However, the fact that the repetition also enacts the meaning of the words themselves also batters the subtlety of the remainder of the poem, as well as the meaning and function of the first four lines. In lines 1 and 2, Donne's speaker is beseeching God to batter—in the manner of a battering ram, as the "usurped town" conceit later suggests—his heart, rather than "but knock" on its gates politely, timidly, or coyly, or to "breathe" or "shine" upon it gently in hopes of "mend[ing]" him. Therefore "knock" and "breathe," despite both containing some bludgeoning, plosive sounds,[1] are semantically, within the binary contrastive structure established in the first four lines, as gentle, plaintive, or in general insufficiently violent as the non-plosive "shine" and the relatively non-plosive "mend." The speaker is setting these—God's gentle prods—up for contrast with the more violent or masochistic interventions that he desires, in a self-flagellating sense, and on which he elaborates in lines 3 and 4: "o'erthrow me, and bend / Your force to break, blow, burn...". Here, a real onslaught of plosives emerges, for now the speaker actually describes how he wishes the Lord should batter him—rather than merely "but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend." Nonetheless, in *Doctor Atomic*'s "Batter My Heart" aria, Donne's lines 2 and 4 are phrased, accentuated, and pitched almost identically. The first verb (e.g., "knock") of each verb pair in each respective trifold cycle receives a fierce accent, whereas the second verb (e.g., "breathe") does not, thereby significantly shifting the binary contrastive structure established by Donne. Likewise, the plosives of both lines, even terminal ones not typically pronounced in everyday speech (e.g., the [d] in line 2's "mend," which Finley renders "mend-DUH") are—even by the bombastic standards of opera—very distinctly enunciated and accentuated, thus again very

deliberately enacting that “battering” sound. As Lintott puts it, “Oppenheimer’s vocal line in ‘Batter My Heart’...is dominated by sixteenth/dotted-eighth figures, which lend a percussive aspect to the singing, as if Oppenheimer is spitting out the words rather than intoning them” (49). Likewise, the conflation of “knock” (gentle) and “break” (violent) is reflected by John Adams’ own description of the aria’s orchestration: “we hear the orchestra bending and breaking and banging and knocking. It’s really knocking like this [rapidly pounds fist on open palm]” (qtd. Lintott 43). Tellingly, the poem itself is renamed “Batter My Heart.”

Though Adams makes no significant contrast between Donne’s set of gentle verbs in line 2 and set of violent verbs in lines 4 and 3 (i.e. libretto lines 2-3/9-10 and 6-7/13-14 [Sellars]), he does so between pairs of verbs within each line. In the aria, for Donne’s line 2, every “knock” receives forceful emphasis whilst “breathe,” which is lower in register, gets pronounced more softly and smoothly. Likewise, for Donne’s line 4, every “break” receives forceful emphasis whilst “blow,” which is lower in register, does not. In other words, in the aria the “knock” is treated as though it were a violent, battering “knock,” whereas in the poem it is an inadequately gentle or even polite knock (“Batter my heart...For, you / As yet but knock,” *italics mine*). Likewise, the “blow” of line 4 is treated as gently as the “breathe” of line 2, when it is actually the “blow” of a raging wind as contrasted with the softness of a breath, and whose semantic strength as a bludgeoning and raging “blow” of wind or “blow” to the head—as opposed to the soft “blow” of, say, blowing out a candle—is therefore in large part dependent on that relative contrast (see TABLE).

TABLE: Patterns of Emphasis in Donne vs. Sellars/Adams/Finley

Metaphorical Vehicle	Line 2 (gentle manifestation)	Line 4 (violent manifestation)
Door/Gate	knock	break
Wind	breathe	blow
Sun	shine	burn
Healing/ Renewal	seek to mend [i.e., self maintenance]	make me new [i.e., self destruction]

Boldface indicates words that Sellars/Adams/Finley, in contrast to Donne, manifest as violent; plain-faced, gentle.

This pattern of articulation is especially prominent in the live and televised performances, and Finley’s physical gestures make it even more so (see Adams and Sellars [B] and especially [C]). At every forceful “knock” or “break,” Finley dramatically contracts himself into a cowering crouch, lowering his head and curling his right hand to his heart (presumably “battering” or “knocking” it) or even shielding his head with his hands defensively as though God were striking him; at every mellifluous “breathe” or “blow,” he raises himself back up airily—only to be “battered,” “knocked,” or “broken” down again. The televised production also has Finley staring up at the camera, which as a result symbolically occupies the position of God. This position perpetuates the illusion that there is some higher moral authority (“Big Other”) capable of justifying devastating human actions and places the audience in the flattering position of that authority, further encouraging spectators to authorize the spectacle as an authority on its subject matter. Whereas in the sonnet, Donne’s speaker was asking to have violence done to himself alone as a form of penance, here God becomes an authority figure capable of justifying violent “God-like” acts. The camera also zooms in and out to emphasize this effect, sometimes alternating in God-like accordance with the (misplaced) rhythm of Finley’s emphatic heart-battering gestures, illustrating how the process of adaptation leads to a proliferation of seemingly self-reinforcing misrepresentations across various media.



Such facets of Finley's and the camera's performance illuminate how what might seem a small decision of poetic emphasis, repetition, and vocal articulation carries over into an overarching articulation of Oppie's character. As the TABLE illustrates, Donne has carefully assigned each verb in line 2 its contrasting verb in line 4. The former verbs empower the latter through contrast, without which Donne's speaker's request to be battered is meaningless: the point is to be battered instead of knocked, etc. The speaker is neither a shameful boy dutifully submitting to reproof nor, like Oppie, a man in moral turmoil, but a spiritual masochist avidly despairing for a deeper connection and reconciliation with a God figure, manifesting as violence to his person. However, Adams' and Sellars' realignment of Donne's contrastive structure conveys the plight of a morally despairing man invoking God's mercy, or sympathy. The battering repetitions of both vocal lines and orchestral lines, coupled with the misplaced accentuation of words, the performer's consequently misplaced physical accentuation, and the repetition of the content itself (especially the trinity repetitions), convey the sense that the "three-personed God"—the Christian Trinity, "The Gadget" of the Trinity Test Site, and also perhaps Oppie himself—is battering Oppenheimer in a punitive sense, and has battered him before. The aria thus invokes pity and sympathy for Oppie/Oppenheimer and his conflict of conscience, the musical setting masking the sly complexity of Donne's seventeenth-century exploration of the painful and also somewhat blasphemous irony of a devout man's relationship with God which remains unrequited because such devoutness, no matter how extreme, whether violent or sexual, can never obtain the object of its affection. The *Doctor Atomic* aria conveys only Oppie's despair of being battered, and of seeking justification for his own violent "God-like" acts. As a result, if Adams' and Sellars' adaptation conveys a moral conflict, then it reduces the conflict of the American-Japanese war into one man. All sympathy centres around Oppie, the creator himself—his heart is the one being repeatedly battered by "God." Sympathy is not directed towards the source of his moral despair, namely what he and his colleagues, wielding seemingly God-like power themselves, will batter: hundreds of thousands of civilian Japanese hearts—and a battering which is not just figurative or emotional but literal and bodily.

Thus, not only does the musical setting

misrepresent the libretto, the libretto misrepresents the poem, the "knocking" performer misrepresents the libretto, and the camera (with its alternating zooms) echos the misrepresentations of that performance, but the recontextualized poem itself more generally misrepresents both the biographical and historical situation to which it has been assigned. Even if Adams and Sellars had preserved the meaning of Donne's first four lines and foregone hyperbolizing Donne's content with their abundant trinity repetitions, their choice of found content itself would still remain problematic. Like much of Donne's poetry, "[Holy Sonnet] 14" is deeply personal; no wonder, then, that Adams and Sellars' musical setting reflects a similarly personal level of moral interest in Oppie. But Adams and Sellars ignore the specific kind of moral misdeeds to be found in Donne's poems. Famously, Donne's misdeeds are almost always sexual, despite his theological language or devotional disposition; according to Abrams et al., "[t]heological language abounds in his love poetry, and daringly erotic images occur in his religious verse" (1262). This is explicit in "14," in which Donne's speaker describes his "relationship with God in terms of marriage and adultery" (1298n2). He compares himself to "an usurped town" of the Devil ("your enemy") (lines 5 and 10), inviting comparison between the sexually suggestive "heart" upon which he wishes God to "batter" and that bodily town's assumed gate—i.e., a sexual orifice, which "never shall be free, / [n]or ever chaste, except you ravish me" (13-14). By weaving theological and erotic imagery together, Donne conveys the irony that, as suggested by his paradoxes ("enthrall" to "be free"; "ravish" to be "chaste"; "rise and stand"—another sexual metaphor—to be "o'erthrown"; and, of course, his comparing himself to potentially female



sexuality with the gate metaphor [lines 13, 14, 3]), his very acts of repentance are charged with sexual transgressions. Genocide, on the other hand, Oppie's anticipated misdeed, is categorically more serious than recreational or extramarital un-Christian sex.

Consequently, the effect of the more literal meanings of lines 5-14, which take residence in the aria's third and final stanza, are even more egregious. Oppie likens his inner turmoil to a "usurped town", despite the fact that it is he who is about to usurp a "town"—namely, Hiroshima. Comparing his inner turmoil to a "usurped town" of the Devil reads like a way of avoiding admitting that he himself may be more Devil than usurped "town"—which also grossly understates Hiroshima and Nagasaki as not one but two massive cities. In the context of Donne's poem, Oppie's comparison becomes nonsensical, ridiculous, megalomaniacal, as though he is attempting to internalize all the pain he is about to cause, as though his own personal moral turmoil could possibly approach the reality of genocidal pain. In this way, the composer and librettist, from the vantage of hindsight, superimpose post-Hiroshima/Nagasaki guilt onto pre-Hiroshima/Nagasaki Oppenheimer, thereby heightening sympathy for him by making him seem repentant and hyper-empathetic before the fact. *Doctor Atomic* thus appropriates that pain as inherently his own—as though his unleashing pain onto Japan were only to relieve his own. In reality, according to one eye-witness account, "tremendous relief" of his "very heavy burden" was exactly Oppenheimer's emotion after Trinity went off successfully (Szasz 88).

Even the Amsterdam stage's set for the "Batter My Heart" aria—a curtain backlit with the silhouette of the bomb—conveys the message that there exists only the soliloquizing Doctor Atomic and his creation and no victims of his destruction

The focus on Japanese people's pain as Oppie's pain is further emphasized by the trajectory of the opera: its

climax is the successful and awesome explosion, not the devastating effects of that explosion. Tellingly, Adams describes his more recent symphonic adaptation of the opera this way: "it itself is kind of explosive as if it were Oppenheimer's plutonium sphere just about to go super-critical and explode" (Earbox - John Adams Composer). The opera's structure thus subordinates the ineffable massive pain of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to Oppenheimer's pains of deciding whether or not to create the pain of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Under a veneer of battering self-pity, the opera indulges in the isolated, immediate glory of the Trinity's exploding "progressive" scientific "success," while ignoring its devastating effects. Even the Amsterdam stage's set for the "Batter My Heart" aria—a curtain backlit with the silhouette of the bomb—conveys the message that there exists only the soliloquizing Doctor Atomic and his creation and no victims of his destruction. It is the American exceptionalist equivalent of a German making a film about the Holocaust by excluding the Jews or a film about the invasion of Poland by excluding the Poles and focusing instead on the inner turmoil of Hitler of whether or not to exterminate the Jews, whether or not to devastate the Poles. At the end of the opera, Adams' and Sellars' cutely nicknamed Oppie is even denied the line from the Bhagavad Gita for which he is most famous for uttering upon witnessing that first explosion: "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds." Absent, in other words, is an acknowledgement of what he has already destroyed and will destroy; by the final scene, with the exception of some "voices of Japanese people...heard in an eerie foreshadowing of the consequences of the test" (Lintott 24), there is only acknowledgement of what the Romantic author-god, the man of science, has "created."



This is especially ironic considering the other Donne poem, “Hymn,” of which Oppenheimer cited these lines in his letter: “[a]s West and East / [i]n all flat maps (and I am one) are one, / [s]o death doth touch the resurrection” (Donne, “Hymn” lines 13-15). These lines alone, with their striking conflation of West and East, as well as death and resurrection, already seems more relevant than “14” to Oppenheimer’s West-and-East, life-and-death concerns during the Manhattan Project. Everything considered—the weight placed on the first four lines, the misinterpretation of Donne’s binary contrasts, the gap between form and content—it appears that Adams and Sellars were misled by the tantalizing nominal connection between “three-person’d God” and the Trinity test site. Oppenheimer’s letter, and the vastly differing content of the two cited poems, strongly suggests that Oppenheimer intended “Trinity” neither in primarily the Christian sense, nor, consequently, in the sense of Donne’s “[Holy Sonnet] 14,” but in a more general sense: multiple things separate yet at the same time all inextricably connected—East and West, allies and axis, life and death. As Abrams et al. explain in reference to the cited passage from “Hymn,” “[i]f a flat map is pasted on a round globe, west and east meet” (1301n5). If Adams and Sellars had paid attention to this telling insight in Donne’s “Hymn,” then perhaps they would have melted away their cloying mask of battering sympathy in favour of a more nuanced and critical adaptation of Oppenheimer’s life. But what self-respecting opera-goer would want to endure the sound and fury of a Concerto for A-Bomb in Hiroshima-Flat Minor? Instead, one three-personed North American Author-God (Adams, Sellars, Finley) shakes hands and exchanges respects with another by singing his glories and follies above the racket of the sound barrier’s breaking to the tune of the atom’s splitting. Krzysztof Penderecki’s “Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima” must be reserved for another evening.[2]

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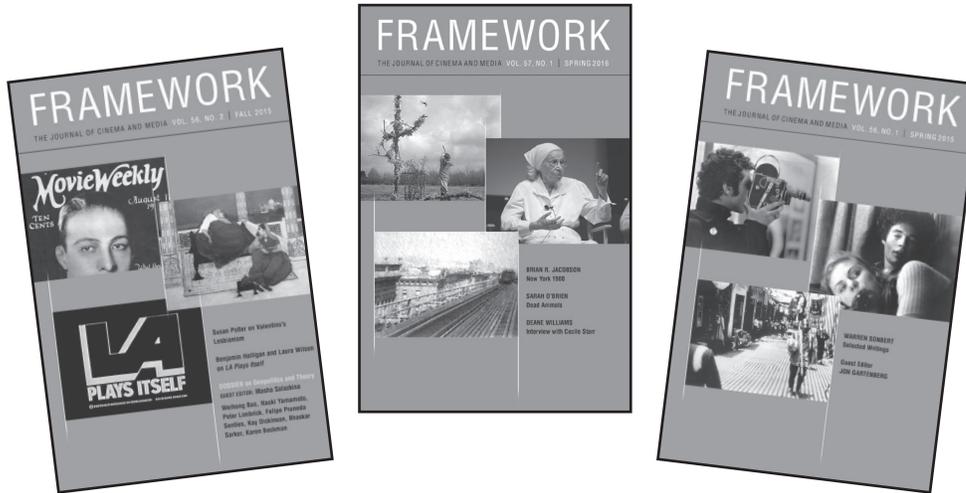
[1] “Knock” only ends with a plosive (the plosive of its initial graphemic “k” is literally silenced, in symbolic agreement with the verbal contrast Donne establishes), and the initial plosive of “breathe” is softened considerably by the subsequent liquid “r” (as opposed to, say, the vowel of “batter,” a word which is, moreover, disyllabically and thus doubly plosive). In addition, “breathe” itself terminates in a smooth (and also onomatopoeic) fricative.

[2] Postscript: the original Doctor Atomic libretto also misinterpreted physics (see Cockrell).

FRAMEWORK

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Interview

Dr. Jeremy Strong, University of West London

Dr. Strong is a leading scholar in the field of adaptation studies, publishing widely on adaptation and literature-on-screen. He is Professor of Literature and Film at the University of West London.

Are there any genres that are particularly productive for studies of adaptation? Assuming that there are identifiable strands of adaptation studies: Do works within a particular genre tend to come up consistently within certain classifiable types of adaptation discourse, or are particular avenues of study constructed without the influence of generic signifiers?

The intersection of genre and adaptation is, I think, a really interesting area. Whilst it is fair to say that adaptation ‘happens’ across the whole landscape of screen genres, there is also a tendency to more readily identify certain films and groupings of films (or TV for that matter) as adaptations. Screen versions of canonical literary texts, as well as of contemporary literary fiction, would tend to fall into such a category. What has been called ‘heritage film’ is often foregrounded by its makers, and received by audiences and critics, in terms of a relationship with a prior written text. Here, I would go so far as to say that a ‘bookish’ quality may be imputed to some heritage pictures that do not actually originate from any literary source. Conversely, films that may be based – however loosely – on real-life events, and for which the rights to a relevant biography or first-hand account (for example) might have been acquired, are rather less likely to be perceived as adaptations first and foremost. They may more likely be judged by their perceived adequacy to historical fact, and any anterior written account understood as another version rather than *the* version.

How can the location of a base text within a culture’s current conscious – time elapsed between release dates of the original and the reimagining, the degree of praise for the base text, or the intensity of fan connection to the story – alter how adaptation studies approach their investigations?

All of these different factors can be relevant to understanding an adaptation, and can afford (though hopefully not limit) a structure, or at least a starting point, for analysis. Time elapsed is, self-evidently, a bigger factor when there is a very long time span between original and adaptation. To talk of audiences, or readerships, or of common views about a range of issues within the worlds of the texts, becomes more slippery when they may be separated by centuries. (Whereas the readers and viewers of *Gone Girl* will likely be identical!) Equally, when a temporal chasm is the case, it is also often true that the original in question has been serially re-versioned, so that the newest text is not simply in dialogue with the earliest, but with a welter of intervening adaptations. Shakespeare on screen would be a relevant example of a raft of versions to compare between, ranging from the most recent screen renderings, through short silent films, and even incorporating fragmentary evidence about pre-film stagings and performances. It is also the case that some other stories, frequently re-visited in radically different ways, are so fertile, so ubiquitous, that it becomes increasingly useless to think of the phenomenon in terms of ‘originals’ at all. Versions of *Robinson Crusoe* or *Frankenstein* would fit this bill.

How the ‘base text’ is perceived is also potentially significant. When *Pirates of the Caribbean* is adapted from a theme park ride into a movie, questions of losses or gains in adaptation (or even, heaven forbid, of fidelity) are unlikely to spring to mind. However, when the base is *Moby Dick*, or even *Atonement*, popular responses, and not infrequently critical ones, will commonly involve the ‘spotting’ of alterations and even the automatic implication that they are to be regretted. Fortunately, adaptation studies’ methods and preoccupations are increasingly plural and sophisticated. A variety of critical lenses may be turned upon both individual case studies and wider considerations of the field. In particular, the notion that a literary original represents a benchmark or standard which subsequent versions can, at best, emulate, or at worst, traduce, is thankfully vanished. Far more common are approaches to adaptation that emphasise an inter-textual world and, increasingly, a culture of mixing/re-mixing, versioning, multi-platform franchising etc. Finally, the role of ‘fan connection’. This is both a key consideration for makers/adapters (i.e. disrespect or disregard fans at your peril!), and for scholars of adaptation

in that it represents rich territory for analysis. Securing the approbation and interest of fans of an 'original' is an important strategy for studios who do not want hashtag-happy social-medians panning their latest comic-book adaptation, sequel, prequel or re-boot. *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* is a good example of a film release that got this right. Likewise, the engagement with texts that fan culture creates and enables – the pleasures, participations, spoiling, following, fan-fic(ing) etc. – is fascinating. I would expect the coming years to see a dramatic growth in this area of research.

In "The 'Wandering Jew': History, Fiction, and Adaptation", you write that "Adaptation...is more than decanting a story from one medium to another. It can be a matter of much higher stakes". Could you offer a bit of a reflection on this?

In particular, I was interested in the way that they were interpreted, by some viewers, as representing Jewish characters. Somewhat wilfully, I compared two non-mainstream reviews drawn from the most radically divergent worldviews imaginable. One of these was a review of *The Way We Live Now* which came from a horrible white-supremacist website. (Not, one would think, a likely place to find a review of a BBC period drama based on a canonical nineteenth century novel, but then web searches do throw up some unlikely results!) Intriguingly, the reviewer found much to praise in the BBC's rendering, including, as he imagined, a heightened quotient of anti-semitic messages that had been developed (again - he imagined) in the page-to-screen process. Needless to say, any reasonable viewer would not have reached the same conclusion, especially given the absence of any supporting evidence in the text itself. I was interested in the overlaps between Melmotte, Maxwell and Rachman, which muddied fact and fiction, and in how casting – Suchet played both Melmotte and Maxwell in TV dramas – helped cement those connections.

So – to actually answer the question! – I'd say that the 'stakes' here, and in related instances, can be thought to become higher for at least a couple of reasons. Firstly, a 'hot' issue – around "race", sexuality etc. – always has potential to freight an adaptation with an assumed additional responsibility. Acknowledging this is not to subscribe to a retrograde presumption that cultivated readers can handle difficult stuff while mere audiences (massive, passive, and quite possibly illiterate to boot) need greater protection. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that greater 'reach' might suggest greater responsibility. Secondly, adaptations that address the life of a real person or event might also be thought to have a greater duty to 'tell the truth' or, at least, to do so if that's what they suggest to viewers

they are watching. Respectable counter-arguments to this perspective could readily be deployed (your readers might well be doing so right now!) but I'd point to the welter of semi-demi-hemi truth claims and disclaimers that accompany many such texts as partial evidence of story-tellers' intuition (or at least that of their legal representatives) that a certain duty might be operative here. 'Inspired by true events', 'based on a true story', 'characters and events have been altered for dramatic effect' and the like all seem to want to have their cake and eat it, to be simultaneously fact and fiction, to enjoy the structural freedoms afforded by fictive forms and the emotional resonance and heft associated with actuality. 'Power without responsibility' might be a shade too dramatic as a summary, but I do think there's a wish here to raid the toy box of History without the obligation to tidy up afterwards.

Of course, one might say that the only duty of any film or television programme is to be entertaining and profitable; that is, to work as a piece of television or film. However, this is patently inadequate, in that TV news nowadays and the cinema newsreels of yesteryear are and were assumed to have a duty to represent accurately (albeit that everyone can think of examples where this didn't and doesn't happen). So this eventuates in a discussion not so much of media broadly, but of specific types and kinds of text, how they address people, and how audiences are invited to regard what they see. Although the structure and duration of the full-length feature film, or the mini-series, cue audiences to feel and understand in terms of fiction, this will be complicated by opening sequences that reference historical reality (often intrinsically weakly themselves), by content that may well echo viewers' knowledge of history or recent events, and by concluding inter-titles that speak to subsequent events in a post/extra-filmic world. Because feature films occupy such a big place in the cultural landscape there is a tendency in the reception of certain adaptations (a tendency that is effectively the polar opposite of the source-cherishing of fidelity criticism) for the film account to be *the* account; the most widely-disseminated, the most generative of media attention, frequently the most lucrative. In many cases, the film will be the *only* account many viewers encounter. When adaptations adapt history and reality there is the possibility that they will shape perceptions, not merely of whether the film was good or bad, but of the actuality with which they intersect, to become the dominant history. This may not necessarily be a bad thing; forgotten or marginalised events and experiences may be properly recuperated, afforded the significance they deserve. But, as I commenced by saying, the stakes are higher when fact and fiction mingle.

Interview

Alan Franey, Vancouver International Film Festival

For this issue, the Cinephile editors had a chance to sit down with the head of the Vancouver International Film Festival's Director of International Programming, Alan Franey, and ask him a few questions about the shifting nature of cinema and the necessity of film festival communities.

Through VIFF, how would you say current filmmakers are pushing boundaries and testing the limits of cinema?

I think it's important to say (in these days of so much hype about change and boundary-pushing and cinema changing), that I think the main part of cinema is actually not changing that much. I think people still have expectations to see a film on a big screen, with good sound and picture, and that's been established for decades. So, one question is: how people are watching films on other devices? But that doesn't interest me particularly. We at the film festival are trying to preserve the big-screen experience, and from that point of view, I think that cinema has been a mix of things right from the beginning. There's been the experimental tendency and the conservative tradition, and that doesn't mean good film and bad film. So it really depends, at a festival as large as this, on many different types of cinema. So, if you look at the most popular and best attended films, year after year they're usually fairly straightforward dramas.

How do you think personal digital video technologies (i.e. smartphone cameras, video calling, etc.) have informed film and filmmaking techniques and aesthetics?

I think that as we've seen the means of production become democratized through technology, as people are capable of shooting amazing quality videos on their phones, that has had a lot of influence on how films are made. Again, we need to

remember the longer perspective: there were mobile cameras and people doing mobile-style filmmaking since the dawn of cinema. Some people take advantage of it, some people prefer more stable cameras, etc. The Hollywood model is to spend a lot of money on the gear. You don't need to do that anymore. Whether all films suit that more improvised aesthetic is another question. I'm quite happy to see hand-held and complicated mise-en-scene since the syntax of film can be quite complicated now and people can follow it. So, yes, it's been very freeing. One thing, though, is that people on the inside probably care more about what cameras are used to shoot films than fans. However, art transcends these things. Most people don't care if things are shot digitally [rather than on film]....I think only a very trained eye can tell the difference. So, personally, I think it's a time of great possibility and great change, though somehow, people return to the basics. They want to be able to see a stable image that's got some poetry and beauty and meaning to it. And films that are too busy trying to be digital or informed by more complicated aesthetics sometimes aren't appreciated as much. So it's a very paradoxical situation in a way...I don't think stories are the most interesting things in a film. Most films interest me for their formal elements. But I don't think most people think about those things that much...they're more concerned about an engaging story.

Recently, many critics have discussed the incorporation of cinematic elements into videogames, and of videogame imagery into cinema--what do you make of this growing relationship between videogame aesthetics and cinema? Do you see this trend at work in VIFF films?

Yeah, to tell you the truth, I think that's really old hat. I think Hollywood films over the past 30 years have definitely been influenced by video games. I personally don't like many of those...you could say the same things about Hong Kong films being based on Kung Fu. It just gets really tedious after a while. I don't think the gaming experience, basically, when it informs film is that new or interesting. The films that are playing with other media more effectively are fewer and far between. The interesting thing, too, for me, is that a lot of the gaming experience is great because it's interactive, whereas that's a problematic thing in cinema. The interactive films that I have seen are few and far between, and the ones that are worth watching are even rarer. So...I think there's a very intentional qualitative difference between cinema and other forms of moving images. Obviously there's a lot of influence between the two, but I would argue that it's not something that's brand new or that I see a huge amount of promise in. I like the stability and poetry that comes along with standard cinema.

The concept of a “Canadian identity” is an ambiguous one--no real definition exists. How does this translate into Canadian cinema, as in VIFF’s True North program?

I think it’s refreshing to see Canadian films become a bit more like how we think of other, more advanced cinema cultures, where French films don’t necessarily have to be telling French stories. A lot of American films are set in other places and at other times. So I’m glad to see that Canadian cinema is more and more reflective of global realities and a very mixed cultural population. So the fact that one of the most popular Canadian films this year was set in China...I think that’s healthy. Canadian films are better appreciated at the festival than they once were. It used to be hard to pull audiences into Canadian films, even though there was a lot of interesting work being done. In my opinion, there are still too many Canadian films being made that are too screenplay-based, so it’s nice to see films that transcend that. Screenplays are important, but you don’t want to have a film that feels like a televisual experience.

As an international film festival, VIFF screens productions from all over the world. Could you speak to the experience of community-building these festivals bring about? Why do we still need film festivals?

Well, I think that the operative word there is not just “film,” but “festival.” People love events, and they love the opportunity to share experiences. Why do filmmakers make films in the first place? They’re trying to communicate, they’re trying to share. The film’s not really completed until it’s observed, seen, and shared by people. If you’re doing that communally, at a movie theatre, there’s a powerful opportunity there. We all watch things at home...that’s fine. But the great thing about seeing a film at a festival is the collective nature of it. First of all, it’s an opportunity to see a film with other people, and that can be quite a different experience. Laughter can be quite contagious...horror, moral outrage. Human emotion can all be amplified by how other people in the room are responding. It can sometimes be an alienating experience, but more often than not, it’s interesting to feel part of a group. The other thing is that, at a festival, the filmmakers are often there. So that, to me, is a big, big plus. Occasionally, the Q&As are as memorable as the movie, and really open your eyes to parts of the film you didn’t see.

It has to be said, too, that a lot of these films aren’t available elsewhere. A lot of good films are made that don’t get an opportunity to find an audience. We’re able to provide a place for them here.



Film Reviews

2016 Vancouver International Film Festival



Moonlight (dir. Barry Jenkins, 2016, USA)

It's difficult to describe *Moonlight*. It has no straightforward plot, no superficial characterization, no easy message to digest. It resists categorization.

Perhaps it's more accurate to describe *Moonlight* as a work of restrained emotion, of meaningful gestures.

It is less a film than a visual poem.

Director Barry Jenkins's work follows the life of a black man, sometimes called Little, sometimes Chiron, sometimes Black, as he struggles with his sexuality from the time he's a young boy running from schoolyard bullies to a hardened man embedded in the drug trafficking world.

Director Barry Jenkins and his incredible ensemble cast never shy away from emotional vulnerability. *Moonlight* presents itself to you already flayed open, with Little/Chiron/Black's struggles to hide this vulnerability as its heart.

Stunning cinematography (those dreamy, melancholic beach shots), and a haunting, Romantic score add an art house sensibility to an already socially conscious and essential work.

Moonlight might just herald the re-fusing of art and cultural critique in American cinema.

-Amanda Greer.



American Honey (dir. Andrea Arnold, 2016, UK & USA)

American Honey -- the latest offering from art film powerhouse, Andrea Arnold -- follows a young woman, Star (Sasha Lane), as she travels with a band of "magazine salesmen" across the Southern United States after meeting the group's leader, the charming, ponytailed Jake (played by Shia LaBeouf in his most interesting role to date). These "salesmen" are made up of other Stars: young Americans certain they need to move, to go someplace else, but unsure of which direction to take.

Though the film is full of "nothing," (it lacks a tight causal plot), it is this meandering sensibility that creates Arnold's American dreamscape, and allows for one of the most sensitive portrayals of female sexuality on-screen. Star's sexuality, both as she asserts it and as it's forced out of her by others, has an Alice Munro-esque sensitivity to it; she blurs the line between pleasure and survival in an honest, breathtaking way.

Shot with a square aspect ratio and tight close-ups, Arnold does not show the audience the film, but embraces them with it. We watch as Star is loved, abused, and manipulated by the people around her. As a testament to Arnold's skill, this technique doesn't come off as voyeuristic, but as sympathetic and collaborative. It is, perhaps, the most important film for women of the last decade.

American Honey constructs a world that is at once unbearably cruel and as sweet as the film's title suggests. Arnold grabs her audience by their sensibilities and whisks them away into an America of run-down motels, flickering neon signs, and dusty country roads; shot with ferocious sensitivity, this seedy world is transformed into a dreamscape, a Beckettian realm of meandering journeys without end.

-Amanda Greer.



***Albüm* (dir. Mehmet Can Mertoğlu, 2016 Turkey)**

Albüm, the directorial debut of Mehmet Can Mertoğlu, follows married couple Cüneyt (Murat Kiliç) and Bahar (Şebnem Bozoklu) as they prepare for and secure the adoption of a baby boy. The pair stage a fake pregnancy – complete with a false belly and counterfeit “post-delivery” photos with a doctor and nurse – and look for options to leave the country upon learning that the local police have record of the adoption. A stigma against infertility in Turkey leads the couple to this apparently appropriate reaction, though the film never makes reference to the link between adoption and discredit, and will leave the unfamiliar viewer grasping at whispers of character motivation.

Fortunately, at a much louder volume, the film speaks with striking annunciations of finely constructed visual language: long tracking shots play out their own narrative arcs, arguments are heard over two shots of post-squabble tableau and lovingly shared physical separation. And throughout, a family building a false history through photo-shoots, calling attention to the performance that accompanies documentation of experience, and the largely untapped humour that sits behind this insincerity.

-Matthew Gartner.



***Manchester by the Sea* (dir. Kenneth Lonergan, 2016, USA)**

Manchester by the Sea mixes the faded imagery of a Massachusetts harbour town with muted performances of grief in a reflection on the death of single father Joe (Kyle Chandler), the place of this event in the life of his brother Lee (Casey Affleck), and Lee’s role as a guardian for Joe’s teenage son, Patrick (Lucas Hedges). The film makes use of some standard tools in fatherhood and brotherhood narratives: men burying emotions, using violence as a release of these emotions, while Lee accesses the role of father only after giving the volatile love and intimate distance that a brother provides. A notable departure prevents the film from completely committing to a familiar frame story. In a reversal, it is Joe’s wife Elise (Gretchen Mol) that is an unsuitable parent for Patrick, leaves Joe to (successfully) raise a child alone, and does not want to interact with Patrick after they are reunited.

Michelle Williams, as Lee’s ex-wife Randi, along with Hedges and Affleck, offer arrestingly strong performances that are uniquely befitting of grieving characters: they cycle through the failure of their coping mechanisms, they tolerate despair as something that has been permanently implanted within them, and go through spells when their only outward emotion can be passionate apathy. Heart-break is depicted, with aching veracity, as a process that involves harsh forgetting and reluctant pantomime.

-Matthew Gartner.

VIFF Vancouver International Film Festival

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GAME

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MOVIES

PERFUMED



NIGHTMARE

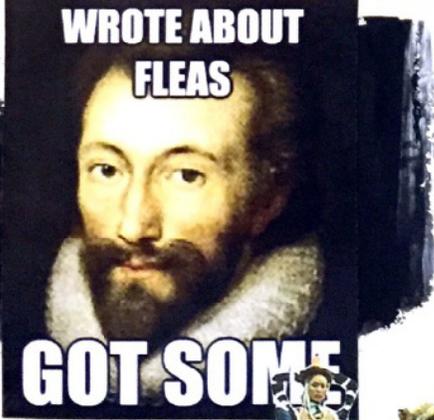
CINEPHILE

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I Don't Always

GOOD?

Accidentally Confess to 3 Murders After 30 years



But when I do, it's because I talk out loud

in the bathroom.

