Performing Adaptations

Performing Adaptations: Essays and Conversations on the Theory and Practice of Adaptation

Edited by

Michelle MacArthur, Lydia Wilkinson
and Keren Zaiontz

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To Judy, Sophia and Stuart

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PREFACE

CREATORS AND CRITICS ON ADAPTING: LEARNING ABOUT CRITICAL ADAPTATION

LINDA HUTCHEON

Like the conference that gave birth to it, this book shows what happens when people are encouraged to think outside the box—or, more appropriately, outside the page. The theory and practice of adaptation has indeed become a "hot" topic today, but these essays move both the creative and the scholarly discussions of it in new directions. They do this in two ways: first, by focusing on a wide range of live performance adaptations (from plays to dance pieces to operas and beyond), and second, by bringing together those who do the adaptations (solo or in collaboration) and those who theorize about them. Creators and critics speak to and with each other on these pages, sometimes about the same works. Whether it's Tony Perucci recounting and theorizing his multimedia stage adaptation of a film noir (itself adapted from a novella based on a real-life story) or Tom Stroud describing his intentions in adapting *Hamlet* to dance and visual imagery, we learn much about what adapters are thinking about as they engage in their dual acts of interpretation and creation.

Obviously, they think seriously and at great length about the work they are about to adapt and its context—be it an historical account of the Rape of Nanking, as in Marjorie Chan's dramatization, or the dramatic and musical performance of oral and written stories from African myths, folktales, and both colonial and contemporary histories by the collective AfriCan Theatre Ensemble. From adapters' accounts (here, especially those of Marjorie Chan, George Elliott Clarke, and Beth Watkins), we learn that their work will often be an adaptation, in fact, of a number of different works, not just one "source." Some of these adapters talk about the process of adapting in terms of intuition, others in terms of theory, but either way, their engagement is as total as their motivations are diverse. John Greyson tells us that his film *Zero Patience* was his attempt to "mess

with" Randy Shilt's nonfiction, *And the Band Played On*, with its naming of AIDS' "patient zero." In other adaptations, however, he recounts that he wants to "violate" the adapted text with "fond and loving" violence through his "willful interpretation." Clearly adaptation is driven by passion—personal, political, or (most often) both. This is why adaptation can be a critical act.

Adapters also think about their audiences—as do their critics: how much do we in the audience have to know to appreciate an adaptation AS an adaptation? What if the adapted work is not well known, or is even unpublished, as were the prison letters used by Beth Watkins to craft *Chick Joint*? Adapters are canny folks, and they know that audiences need assistance, especially with adaptations that are complex "indigenizations" to a new culture, a new language, or a new era. George Elliott Clarke brings together a nineteenth-century English play about sixteenth-century Italy with American slave narratives and accounts of Canada's often forgotten history of slavery, to create *Beatrice Chancy*—the play and the opera. In his subsequent novel, *George and Rue*, he adapts trial transcripts, oral histories, and the historical record of his own two cousins; in his third opera, *Trudeau*, it is Pierre Elliott's own writings and memoirs that form the adapted texts—along with Shakespeare's *Pericles* and *Coriolanus*. But he tells us this openly, and we experience his adaptations differently when we know: we oscillate between the work we are watching and the work we are remembering. Creators of performance adaptations, in particular, have to imagine how we, their audiences, will make sense of their adaptations.

Critics too focus on the audience. In these pages, we learn about remediation and the reciprocal impact of video gaming and the theatricality of live performance. We are led to explore audiences' resistance yet attraction to adaptation—the mixed appeal of familiarity and novelty. Sometimes the adaptations themselves are shown to pre-empt any potential dismissal of their adapting as unfaithful or as culturally inferior or purely derivative. We learn how paratexts—titles, program notes, reviews, websites—can play a critical role in shaping our reception of an adaptation. In short, the critics teach us as much as do the creators, though often about different dimensions of the process and product of adaptation.

What all these essays, in their different ways, suggest is that an adaptation may come second, but that doesn't make it secondary. The shared sense of the validity of adaptation as a central mode of the creative, dramatizing imagination is not the only positive message here, however. Adaptations are repeatedly shown to have the critical power to change both our scholarly perspective and our lived lives. To take but one example, the many modern—and pacifist—adaptations of Sophocles'

Antigone reveal the kind of double action that revisiting classical texts can provoke: first, as multiple reinterpretations in new contexts, they have actually had the effect of changing the "interpretive stasis" that has plagued the reception of Sophoclean tragedy for centuries; second, and even more potently, they ask us to reconsider *our* positions as "audiences enervated by wars and state terrorism."

In this volume, we watch creators and critics negotiate the relationships among things like camp parody (as ironic adaptation), appropriation (as unacknowledged or covert adaptation), and plagiarism, where the politics of copyright and free speech, in John Greyson's work, for instance, are made to echo the politics of sexuality and transgression. In other words, adapters (outside of Hollywood, perhaps) don't necessarily want to make money—but they do want to make a point, a point about the right to critique through recontextualized citation and adaptation, and about the potential power that such critique can wield. *Vive l'adaptation critique!*

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We would like to thank the authors and interview subjects of *Performing Adaptations* for their challenging and thoughtful contributions. The generosity and patience demonstrated by our contributors made this anthology possible. We also want to thank those students, speakers, and participants who lent their time and talents to the 2006 Festival of Original Theatre: Adaptation in Performance. Many of the papers and presentations in this volume were first presented at the festival and inspired the creation of this anthology. The keynote address at the conference was delivered by Linda Hutcheon and we are deeply appreciative of her counsel and participation in the anthology. We are grateful to Cambridge Scholars Publishing, including Carol Koulikourdi, Amanda Millar and Andy Nercessian for the interest they showed in the festival and their subsequent work and organizational efforts. The home of the festival is the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama at the University of Toronto. We are indebted to the professors and administrative staff at the Drama Centre who have been unfailing in their support throughout the conference and publication process. We are especially appreciative of the ongoing support of Luella Massey, as well as our colleagues, Natalie Corbett and J. Paul Halferty, for their edits, suggestions, and contributions to this volume. A special note of gratitude to John Astington, whose presence at the festival and guidance at the initial stages of publication proved invaluable, and to Stephen Johnson, who always made himself available to answer our concerns and dispense much needed advice.

All of the scholarly papers and artist reflections collected in this volume, with the exception of one paper, have been commissioned for this anthology. Lawrence Howe's essay, "The Epistemology of Adaptation in John Greyson's *Lilies*," was originally published in *The Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 15.2 (Fall 2006): 44-61. The essays by Natalie Corbett, Alison Forsyth, James McKinnon, Tom Stroud, Tony Perucci and Stephen Johnson were first presented as conference papers at the Festival of Original Theatre. Festival participants AfriCan Theatre Ensemble were commissioned to write a reflection based on their artistic presentation, *Market of Tales*; and presenter Beth Watkins was asked to submit her script and commentary for *Chick Joint*. The interviews with Linda

Hutcheon, Marjorie Chan, John Greyson and George Elliott Clarke were expressly commissioned for this volume.

The image in James McKinnon's paper, "'Look into Fengo's Hole … and Win!!': Paratextuality as a Strategy for Evading Anti-Adaptation Prejudices in Michael O'Brien's *Mad Boy Chronicle*," is published with the permission of 24th Street Theatre.

INTRODUCTION

PERFORMING ADAPTATIONS: THE ROLE OF PERFORMANCE IN ADAPTATION STUDIES

MICHELLE MACARTHUR, LYDIA WILKINSON AND KEREN ZAIONTZ

The idea for this volume began with a conference at the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, University of Toronto, in February 2006. The Festival of Original Theatre, an annual conference and performance showcase, has a long and distinguished history of attracting scholars, artists, and community members to engage with current issues relating to drama, theatre, and performance. Sparked by the proliferation of adaptations on the Canadian stage and what we saw as a dearth of corresponding scholarship, we, the festival's artistic directors, hoped to encourage the sharing of ideas through presentations on and of adaptation in performance.[1] Our participants and their work were diverse: we received contributions from scholars reflecting on adaptations they had recently seen in performance or read in script form, as well as performances and reflections by practitioners, including professional and amateur directors, choreographers and composers. Many of these participants have contributed an article to this volume. Other contributors were approached after the close of the conference and our undertaking of this text, as we came across additional adaptors whose works were unique, original and worthy, we feel, of continued discussion.

Adaptation discourse is by nature an interdisciplinary pursuit that ranges across genres. For example, those in auto/biography theory have long shared a lexicon with adaptation theorists, brushing up against the issues of truth and fidelity, as well as authorship, authority and subjectivity. As suggested in George Elliott Clarke's interview in this volume, narrativists, and specifically followers of Northrop Frye, have

always read texts as palimpsests, documents written and rewritten by multiple authors and interpreters. Film theorists too have developed their own theories of adaptation. Comparative studies helped to legitimize early film studies as a serious discipline, while comparisons between the film and its source continue to present an easy entry for those new to the discipline. Our aim in *Performing Adaptations* is to offer a set of essays, interviews, and artistic reflections that assesses adaptation from a different vantage point: live performance. The authors and interview subjects in this anthology simultaneously draw from and contribute to the above-mentioned expanding discourses, as they use live performance to historicize, theorize, and create adaptations.

Live performance does not only offer a tool to analyze and explore types of adaptation but is essentially a type of adaptation itself. Scripts contain dialogue and stage directions that must be interpreted and embodied in performance. Dance notation and musical composition, too, must be interpreted by choreographers and dancers, conductors and musicians. These scripts, notations, and scores represent "texts" that are embodied by performing subjects, who draw upon language, movement, music, image, and so on to adapt a script or score into a performance. Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, confirms this viewpoint and observes that:

> In a very real sense, every live staging of a printed play could theoretically be considered an adaptation in its performance. The text of a play does not necessarily tell an actor about such matters as the gestures, expressions, and tones of voice to use in converting words on a page into a convincing performance; it is up to the director and actors to actualize the text and to interpret and then recreate it, thereby in a sense adapting it for the stage. (39)

These live adaptations are received by spectators who interpret what they see and hear—who dialogue with and co-create the performance before them. Indeed, the act of reception constitutes its own kind of adaptation. When watching, reading, or receiving any text (performance, literary, or visual) we are involved in a constant personal process of adaptation This reading of the work is mediated by the interpreters' identities (shaped by factors such as race, sex, and class). Many of the groundbreaking artists and critics featured in this anthology either place the audience at the centre of their art and analysis, or adapt and critique with a particular audience in mind. Moreover, they foreground the multiple factors of identity in their acts of interpretation and creation, providing alternative and unique approaches to adaptation, and new works within the field.

The authors in *Performing Adaptations* do not comprise a comprehensive view of adaptation studies, but represent a collection of "gutsy" voices that use adaptation to test and speak back to dominant models of creation, production, and analysis. Some of these perspectives include a group of artists from the African Diaspora, Europe, and Canada (the AfriCan Theatre Ensemble); the voice of Chinese-Canadian playwright, Marjorie Chan; the innovative storytelling of Beth Watkins, and her adaptation of letters written by transgendered student activist, Jesse Carr; the views of vanguard Canadian queer filmmaker, John Greyson; and African-Canadian poet, novelist, and critic, George Elliott Clarke. Their adaptation of sources to other genres, mediums, and cultural contexts represent the act of a radical, dialogical reading, writ large.

Dialogism, in the context of this anthology, tips over into the space of intertextuality. The hallmark of Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy, dialogism is widely employed by scholars to study adapted works. In its most general understanding, Bakhtin forwards a view of reading, or more widely, interpretation, as a fervent, open-ended dialogue with other works.[2] It follows that we can think of intertextuality—the citation, absorption, and presence of other texts in an existing work—as dialogism in practice. The adaptors in this anthology demonstrate the movement from a dialogical space where they engage a range of sources, to an intertextual space, where their various sources are synthesized and adapted for the stage, the screen, art gallery, or page. Other contributors illustrate how adaptation scholarship can approach the intertextual character of adapted works by examining materials, sources, and subjects that extend beyond specific art works.

The range of approaches to both creating and analyzing adaptations has challenged us to find an adequate organizational principal for this text. While it may seem convenient, within this volume, to separate those authors who analyze from those who create, it is our contention that these two worlds are not mutually exclusive. We might also organize our contributions according to those concerned with product and those concerned with process, but, once again, this too does not embrace those pieces that understand the adapted work, in part, through analyzing its method of creation. Finally, it is tempting to organize this text according to genre, as we undertook and encouraged three types of frameworks: artistic statements, interviews and scholarly papers. However, this organizational principle presupposes that which adaptation studies has so rigorously refuted: that form and content are separate concerns.[3] Consequently, we have rejected a disciplinary-, process/product-, or generic-based approach. Instead we have elected to place articles alongside one another in a way

that highlights novel connections and, we hope, generates dynamic discussion among adaptors, critics, and students of adaptation.

To spark this discussion, our anthology opens with "The Art of Repeating Stories: A Conversation with Linda Hutcheon." Hutcheon was the keynote speaker for the 2006 Festival of Original Theatre which coincided with the launch of her pioneering work, *A Theory of Adaptation*. In this interview, Hutcheon discusses her book, which advocates for a treatment of adaptations as both "a process and product." To account for both literary sources, as well as those texts that operate outside literary traditions, such as the visual and performance arts, Hutcheon anchors her theory in three modes of engagement: telling, showing, and interacting. These modes represent the ways in which we tell each other "the same stories over and over in different ways." Through these three modes Hutcheon provides us with a framework for understanding the movement of stories across genres, mediums, cultures, and contexts. The elements of a story that get "carried over," so to speak, are determined by what they get adapted into (i.e., an adaptation from novel to film), who adapts them (i.e., a filmmaker, a performance troupe, a software developer), and when they are adapted (i.e., historical context). The subjects that dialogue with these modes are categorized through the roles of audiences and readers, as well as the role of receiver (a term Hutcheon draws from semiotics). Receivers represent those subjects who, among other types of interaction, play video games. Gaming represents the newest entry into what Hutcheon calls the "storytelling imagination." She uses the term "heterocosm" or "other world" to describe how video games adapt "[t]he cosmos of the novel, play, or movie […] into the whole world of the video game." The transposition of a whole environment contests the accusation often made against adaptations, which is that they reduce and simplify the complexity of the "original" rather than expand the worlds they adapt.

Indeed, video games represent one of the most immersive forms of adaptation. The instrumentality with which a game can absorb a receiver into a digital world forces us to reconsider where traditional sites of adaptation are performed and who performs them. Natalie Corbett's paper, "Digital Performance, Live Technology: Video Games and the Remediation of Theatrical Spectatorship," analyzes the heterocosm, or "other world" of gaming, from both the perspective of those who sit at the controls and those who watch them. Corbett encourages us to understand the newer practice of gaming through the older practice of theatre (and, specifically, the role of theatricality). In drawing the link between gaming and theatre, she demonstrates how theatre conventions such as set, script, music, lighting, and performers are refashioned for video games and serve

as the key components of the fictional worlds of many games. In addition to conventions, theatre spectatorship is refashioned to fit the demands of game players and watchers: players mediate "real" and onscreen worlds through their physical engagement with the game (through interfaces such as gaming consoles); and game watchers navigate the "real" and virtual worlds of gaming by sharing the same time and space as the player. Corbett's focus on the use of theatrical conventions and spectatorship in gaming is ultimately concerned with the process of *remediation* rather than strict adaptation. While adaptations are traditionally understood as the borrowing and retelling of stories in new ways (repetition with a difference), remediation moves past borrowing and retelling stories and appropriates the medium itself. To remediate is to enfold one medium within another. Corbett demonstrates how folding a live medium into a virtual one results in the folding of different perceptions such as the quotidian into the representational. That is, gaming depends on players and watchers to interpret virtual worlds in "real" time and space. Mediums such as gaming, which revolve around accessibility and physical engagement, thus require players and watchers to not only respond to the graphical displays on screen but to perform and co-create virtual worlds.

While Corbett's essay points to a potential future direction for both understanding and actively engaging with adaptation as remediation, in "Pacifist Antigones," Alison Forsyth looks back at how the artistic practices of interpretation and adaptation have evolved—or been themselves adapted—according to changing social, historical, and political contexts. Why do we continue to adapt the classics? If our reliance on them belies a widespread belief in their "universality," what are the implications? Using theatrical adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone* as the focus of her case study, Forsyth shows how the "pacifist" interpretation of the play, which gained popularity in the twentieth century, has led multiple artists to present re-imaginings of *Antigone* in tense political climates. Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead* (1936), Bertolt Brecht's *Antigone* (1948), Griselda Gambaro's *Antigona Furiosa* (1984), and Seamus Heaney's *Burial at Thebes* (2004) are all discussed as examples of plays that adapted the Sophoclean drama in order to underscore the human costs of war. Beyond an exploration of how modern-day dramatists have adapted *Antigone*, Forsyth's essay is a meditation on our compulsion to return to the canon as a lens through which to view and understand contemporary social and political issues. The questions she asks us to consider regarding the enduring appeal of the classics are useful to apply to many of the other case studies that follow.

James McKinnon's essay builds upon Forsyth's investigation by considering a play that looks beyond the canon for its source text. Michael O'Brien's 1995 *Mad Boy Chronicles* tackles *Hamlet* using the thirteenth century anthology of Nordic texts, *Gesta Danorum*, to enter the story before Shakespeare's own adaptation. McKinnon discusses the function of the play's paratext (i.e., marketing materials including press packages, reviews, websites and programs) debunking potential discussions of infidelity by bypassing the comparison with Shakespeare's own. Notably, McKinnon connects his discussion of fidelity in adaptation to the Canadian climate in which the play was originally produced, arguing that Canadians inevitably favour what they perceive as the original: the Shakespearean text. This bias all too often decides the fate of the adaptation before it even enters the theatre. He suggests that Canadians are particularly loyal to the Bard himself, and that the producers of *Mad Boy Chronicles* resolved this prejudice in two ways: choosing a source beyond his canon, and marketing their production *as* an adaptation.

Shakespearean adaptations are so pervasive in Canada—where both re-visionings of *Hamlet* discussed in this volume were created and produced—that in 2004, the University of Guelph's Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project (CASP) created an online digital archive to track "performances, productions, playwrights, and other materials that date from pre-Confederation times to the present day" (Fischlin). At the time of its launch, CASP's website contained over 6,000 pages of information on over 450 plays, a number which continues to grow. Amongst the performances included in CASP's database is Tom Stroud's *The Garden*, which debuted in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 2004. As he describes in his essay, "*The Garden*: Reinterpreting *Hamlet* as an Image-Based Creation," his dance piece pushes the boundaries of Shakespearean adaptation by resisting the impulse to rebuild the play's linear narrative, instead creating a series of images based on key metaphors inspired by the source text. Stroud argues that his creation process, which he has also used in adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, maintains the integrity of Shakespeare's play while connecting to the audience's senses, instincts, and collective frames of reference in a way that distinguishes it from text-based adaptations.

Like Stroud's *The Garden*, Tony Perucci's adaptation of the classic noir film *Double Indemnity*, first presented at California State University, Northridge, in 2004, places performers' bodies at the fore in both its method of creation and presentation style. As Perucci argues in his essay, "'Pretty, Isn't It?': Adapting Film Noir to the Stage," this focus on the body, achieved through American theatre director Ann Bogart's Viewpoints,

and the contemporary dance technique of contact improvisation, emphasizes the liveness and presence unique to performance. In this way, rather than produce a mere replication of the source text, as many stage adaptations of film have done in the past, the performance underscores a key difference between the mediums of the adaptation and its source(s). Perucci suggests that while the discourse surrounding adaptation has historically been obsessed with the notion of fidelity, theatre, in its liveness, necessitates a rethinking of traditional modes of adaptation. What the theatrical form offers Perucci's adaptation is what he terms the "actually indeterminate"—the fact that, despite rehearsal, the actors cannot always know or control what will happen next. Perucci takes advantage of this sense of unpredictability for both actors and spectators and leads them to identify with the criminal impulse to "crook the system," a key theme in both the film and the novella on which it is based (an example of one adaptation leading to another).

Perucci's adaptation of *Double Indemnity* makes reference to multiple source texts—both film and literature, and beyond this, tabloid newspapers, whose gritty crime stories serve as the basis for the detective fiction of the 1930s and 1940s upon which film noir is based. Similarly, Stephen Johnson, in his essay, "Time and Uncle Tom: Slowing Down Edwin S. Porter's film of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," explores how the 1903 film adaptation of the Tom Show drew on more than the stage play, but on the performance traditions that developed around it. The interpolations added to the film (various pieces of comic business, as well as songs and dances developed over time as versions of the Tom Show toured around the United States) are not always obvious to the modern-day viewer. Johnson argues that it is incorrect to assume that the film's original audience would have missed these nuanced interpolations, many of which are only visible to us today by literally slowing down the film reel. Rather, familiarity with the traditions would have allowed audiences themselves to slow down time. Johnson emphasizes that the contemporary adaptation scholar must understand time as a social construct and perception as inseparable from the environment in which it takes place. If we want to uncover some of the meanings originally generated from the film *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, we must look beyond the script and film to the social context in which they were produced.

Similarly, social context plays an important role in the reception of Canadian playwright Marjorie Chan's work. Her play, *a nanking winter*, is once again an example of adaptation as recuperation, as it stages an event all too often overlooked or diminished in the history books, and, by some, even denied. In her interview with Michelle MacArthur and Lydia

Wilkinson, "Adaptation as Remembrance," Chan addresses her motivation for staging the Nanking massacre, while also enacting the emotionally intense final days of Iris Chang, who spoke out against the atrocities in her 1998 account, *The Rape of Nanking*. Discussing her role as an artist who can stage controversial and often unsettling narratives, Chan suggests that her theatre is a forum from which to articulate messages that theatregoers might reject or avoid in other venues. This basic assertion threads its way into a discussion of accessibility in content and form as Chan reflects upon the challenge of imparting the severity of sexually graphic and violent events in a way that is sensitive to a potentially unprepared theatre audience.

In "Intercultural Adaptation in *Market of Tales*," three members of the AfriCan Theatre Ensemble discuss how they adapt myths, folktales, and histories from across the African continent to collectively create their 2005 production, *Market of Tales*. This artist statement includes the viewpoints of Modupe Olaogun, artistic director, Ronald Weihs, director and dramaturge, and Aktina Stathaki, performer-collaborator. As artistic director and founder of AfriCan, an independent company on project-to-project funding, Olaogun's account of *Market* weaves together both the practical and analytical perspectives of creation and production. Knitted into her descriptions of costume, narration, scene development, and artistic collaboration is a commentary about the complexities and potentialities that arise from adapting African stories in a North American context. The site of *Market*, Toronto, Ontario, figures largely in who adapted the stories, how they were adapted, and where the show was staged and, eventually, toured. As dramaturge and director of *Market*, Ronald Weihs's use of "ensemble performance" and collective creation (a collaborative play model used extensively in the Toronto theatre community throughout the late sixties and early seventies) meant that the performers had an authorial stake in the creation of show. Their family histories and cultural background served as potential material for the production. *Market* was composed of performers from the Africa Diaspora as well as players from other ethnic backgrounds and communities in the city. Included in this ensemble was Stathaki, a performer and collaborator from Greece, residing in Toronto. Stathaki details how she and other ensemble members constantly negotiated the issue of "cultural representation" when adapting a story, song, or dance: "[W]here cultural representation is at stake, the performers-creators are often sensitive about how their cultures are represented on stage, and as a result, the process of scripting the performance and putting the components together in a collaborative way can become a very slow and even scholastic one." Stathaki, Weihs, and

Olaogun demonstrate that constructing a revisionist history of Africa, through the adaptation of "original" tales and histories, is not an easy or straightforward task. For this reason, Olaogun describes *Market of Tales* as a "hybrid," an incongruous and egalitarian mix, where myths jostle with history; dramatic narration sparks song and dance; and different African languages are interwoven to demonstrate the multicultural character of the continent—and the city—where it was adapted and staged.

Beth Watkins too, mixes a unique brand of history and myth (that of celebrity and pop culture) in her play, *Chick Joint*. Inspired by the letters of Jesse Carr, a student activist incarcerated at Alderson Prison, Watkins resuscitates the voices of such famous prisoners as Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme and Tokyo Rose. Carr is a transgendered man, in the process of hormone treatments at the time when he enters the women's prison. As such, Carr straddles traditional gender divides, providing a unique perspective into the binaries of male-female and oppressor-oppressed that form the basic structure of institutional hierarchies. Alderson prison provides Watkins with a unique forum from which to voice the experiences of women whose stories are rarely heard, while Carr offers a vantage point that is at once intimately involved in and far removed from the space. The circumstances of Carr's imprisonment, as well as his educational and class background, set him apart from the other women in the prison, many of whom have been incarcerated following crimes of desperation. Actively involved with his community outside of the prison, he can reflect upon and document events there with relative impunity. Watkin's commentary on the play offers valuable insights into her adaptation process and explains the various conventions that she uses within the work. The play proper provides a provocative site for discussions of privilege and inclusion; asking how particular stories are selected for our cultural narratives; underlying the importance of education and privilege in telling one's story; and finally suggesting the importance of an outsider's perspective in making sense of other's stories.

The use of adaptations as a site of inquiry, knowledge, and dialogue within dominant institutions also characterizes the work of iconoclastic queer filmmaker John Greyson. In "Colonizing the 'Original': John Greyson and Queer Adaptations," Greyson, in conversation with J. Paul Halferty and Keren Zaiontz, discusses his redoubtable roles as artist, activist, and adapter. The interview covers a wide range of Greyson's most ambitious works including *Urinal*, *Zero Patience, Lilies*, *Law of Enclosures*, *Uncut*, *The Making of Monsters*, *Proteus*, and *Fig Trees*. Throughout his career, which spans over three decades, Greyson repeatedly tackles and disrupts our most basic assumptions about genre,

sexuality, politics, and popular culture. To decentre our most ingrained truths, he creates what he calls "mixed-genre works" in film, stitching together documentary, drama, musicals, and other forms. Treating genre as a tool that can be deployed to rewrite the past—and rethink the present—Greyson does not, for example, prioritize the documentary over the musical or magic realism over opera. This refusal to approach genres as stable forms with clear boundaries transforms how we tell stories. The undoing of generic boundaries not only means that historical and fictive sources share the screen but the sources themselves become subject to critical "violation" and "colonization." Greyson states that: "colonizing existing cultural forms is about purposely engaging an audience with what they think they already know." Greyson's work thus makes visible our anxiety of the dialogical by showing that sources, textual and otherwise, do not have priority or autonomy from one another. Canonical works swirl in the same polyphonic pot as popular traditions.

Greyson's use of source texts as social, political, and institutional critique are examined in Lawrence Howe's case study, "The Epistemology of Adaptation in John Greyson's *Lilies*" (originally published in the Canadian Journal of Film Studies). Greyson adapts Quebec playwright Michel Marc Bouchard's stage play, *Lilies*, or *Les Feluettes, ou, la répétition du drame romantique*, into a feature-length film. The film records a repressed queer history that is "outed" through a tireless employment of theatricality (i.e., performers in drag, self-conscious camera work, overlapping real locations and sound stage locations, etc.) The film is part of Greyson's larger project, which, in the interview for this anthology, he describes as "tak[ing] on lies, distortions, priorities, and ideological agendas that mediate what we can or cannot know." It is precisely the individual and collective push-and-pull between knowing and not knowing (or, more precisely, repressing what we know) that defines *Lilies* and leads Howe to characterize the adaptation as an instructive or "epistemological project." Such a project dialogues with numerous texts, cultures, times, and places in both French and English Canada even as it adapts the play proper. Howe observes that: "The film constructs its own way of knowing the world it screens and the antecedent texts that contribute to its knowledge of that world." Ultimately, *Lilies* constructs a world, a way of knowing, where violence and homophobia can no longer seek refuge in the church confessional or pastoral village.

George Elliott Clarke's works also draws upon a heterogenous set of historical, personal, and popular traditions and sources. He broadens the field of adaptation, including historical events and their non-fiction sources (newspapers, biographies, family histories) in his novel, *George*

and Rue, and opera, *Trudeau: Long March/Shining Path*. In his interview with Wilkinson and Zaiontz, "Adapting Identities: Race and Rescue in the work of George Elliott Clarke," Clarke emphasizes his role in recuperating voices through adaptation and using the form as a means to expand—if not right—the historical record. While *Trudeau* gives a new voice to a public figure that has been imagined and reinterpreted by dozens of artists, *George and Rue* gives first speech to two men whose voices only remain in court records and family histories. The range of Clarke's subjects and sources is testament to his breadth as a scholar and artist, as well as the possibilities offered by adaptation. In contrast, his thoughts on the verse-play and libretto of *Beatrice Chancy*, in his contribution "Embracing Beatrice Chancy," point to the potential challenges of particular approaches to adaptation. Clarke uses his discussion of these challenges to illustrate the potential of one adaptation to develop out of another, expanding upon his approach to the subject, which is fluid and evolving.

Given the ever-increasing value placed on inter- and cross-disciplinarity within the academy and performing arts, it is no surprise that adaptation—a practice that, as our contributors note, is centuries-old—is taking centre stage now more than ever. Since we directed the Festival of Original Theatre and began the process of putting this book together, an academic journal dedicated to adaptation, the *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*, published by Intellect Publishers, was founded in 2007. Playwright Michael Healy, reflecting on the pervasiveness of Canadian adaptations, has observed that:

> "as the third wave of Canadian playwrights emerges, the desire to tell our own stories continues, but alongside that is the recognition that we can successfully bring our own sensibilities to texts that already exist" (Nestruck).

While Healy is describing Canadian theatre practice, his words resonate across borders; as is evidenced by this volume, adaptation is not only trans-historical, but trans-national and trans-cultural as well, facilitating ongoing artistic conversations across time and space.

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Notes

[1] The conference call read as follows: "We invite papers, artistic presentations, or hybrid paper-presentations that examine themes surrounding Adaptation in Performance for the 2006 *Festival of Original Theatre: Adaptation in Performance*. This conference and performance festival sets out to investigate the adaptation of theatrical texts/scenarios/documents into literature, visual art, performance art, dance, radio plays, film, multimedia, etc., or, conversely, the theatrical text as an adaptation of mediums such as poetry, ballads, biblical accounts, historical events, diaries, religious rites, novels, opera, ballet, etc" (MacArthur, Wilkinson, Zaiontz).
[2] See Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* and *Art and Answerability*.
[3] In the interview for this anthology, Linda Hutcheon briefly discusses Kamilla Elliot's observations in *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*, about the "heresy" of separating form and content: "[T]he one thing that adaptations do is make us aware that you can separate form from content. And it has been one of the biases of recent literary and dramatic culture […] that you can't separate them."

The Art of Repeating Stories

An Interview with Linda Hutcheon

With Keren Zaiontz

Keren Zaiontz: In *A Theory of Adaptation* you describe yourself as having a "perverse de-hierarchizing impulse" and "a desire to challenge what is viewed as secondary or inferior" (xii). Can you discuss your history of recuperating concepts connected to postmodern thought such as irony, parody, and now, adaptation?

Linda Hutcheon: It really is a personality defect, I've decided. I seem to be interested in things that other people don't like—the parasitic, the secondary. I don't know if it's an impulse to defend the underdog, but it started for me when I realized that I loved parodies. When people denigrated them I thought, that's just not fair. So I was kind of ripe for postmodernism when Fredric Jameson came along and started slamming it. I thought, no, he's wrong, and I'm going to defend this. Adaptation was of particular interest, because, as you know, you read a movie review in the newspaper, and it's an adaptation of a novel, and immediately the first line is, "Well, you know, it's not the novel." Or, "It's not as good as the novel." And I thought, well, wait a minute, only one of Shakespeare's plays is not an adaptation, right? So adaptation has been with us for a long time. I became convinced it was a major mode of the storytelling imagination. So why did we have to denigrate it? I was fascinated by this, and I think that provoked me to want to do this. My new project that I've started is the same sort of thing.

KZ: Can you give us a sneak peek into your current focus?

LH: I'm interested in the uses and abuses of reviews, and reviewing as a process: everything from peer review to movie reviews to book reviews because, again, I think reviewing is something that nobody takes seriously. It's always secondary; it's a reactive mode. I think they have very important functions in our culture. So I'd really like to explore that more. I'm just starting but I think it's part of the same impulse.

KZ: In *A Theory of Adaptation*, you explain that we must treat adaptations *as* adaptations. What does it mean to examine or define an adaptation on its own terms?

LH: In the book, I thought I had to treat adaptations *as* adaptations. The reality is that as readers or moviegoers, if we don't know it's an adaptation, or we know it is but don't know the adapted text, then it doesn't matter, we simply experience it the way we would any other work of art. So, I don't think we *have* to treat adaptations as adaptations. If we do know the source text, however, inevitably our experience of the adaptation is a kind of oscillating experience where we move between the text we know and the text we're experiencing. There's a kind of dialogic relationship that's really important. And I don't think we can*not* discuss that. What I do want to get away from is just comparing the source text to the adaptation—doing "this" is like "that"—going back and forth. I think that's not useful and yet most of the work done on adaptation, I learned when I started working on this, is in the form of case studies: "This is how this film is not like this novel." (It's mostly about film and fiction.) Surely there have got to be other ways to think about adaptations.

KZ: One of the many cultural assumptions that you address about adaptations is the rhetoric of fidelity, or how faithful an adapted text such as a movie, musical, video game, or opera is to the original or source text. From where does this rhetoric emerge and why is contempt often expressed toward adaptations?

LH: As I said, there is this oscillation that goes on all the time in your experience of an adaptation. But to judge it—the issue is the evaluative element—only in terms of how faithful it is to the text seems silly to me. In adaptation criticism there are usually at least three or four models offered, where people have created categories of adaptations in terms of how close they are to the original: one calls a close one a transcription, and a commentary would be more distant, for example. There's all of these different terms. What I kept thinking was why do I find these useless? This proximity issue isn't what's interesting about an adaptation. I think the reason that this rhetoric of fidelity grew up, and therefore why there is a certain contempt for the adaptation as a secondary, derivative mode, is that the implied valuing of the original does not have a very long history (only about two hundred years).