Telling and Re-telling Stories

Telling and Re-telling Stories:

Studies on Literary Adaptation to Film

Edited by

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To my mum, who knew how to transform ordinary life
into an extraordinary film…

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Life may be seen as a path that splits in different directions. Each of them becomes a choice, as one can turn right or left, or walk straightforward. Choosing one direction implies leaving another aside, but usually each election becomes a new challenge that opens the way to new opportunities and experiences. Editing this book was, at the same time, a choice and an opportunity, especially an occasion to learn from others' ideas and new approaches to the topic of literary adaptation to film. It was also an opportunity to meet wonderful people. I am profoundly grateful to Peter Lubin, not only for reading and revising the first draft of this collection of articles, but also for his judicious and insightful comments and suggestions on editing.

FOREWORD

> Are we living in the age of adaptation? In contemporary cinema, of course, there are enough adaptations −based on everything from comic books to the novels of Jane Austen− to make us wonder if Hollywood has run out of new stories. But if you think adaptation can be understood by using novels and films alone, you're wrong. Today there are also song covers rising up the pop charts, video game versions of fairy tales, and even theme park rides based on successful movie franchises and vice-versa. We constantly tell and retell stories; we show and reshow stories; we interact and re-interact with stories −and these three different modes of engagement (and their interactions) allow us to rethink how adaptation works− and why.
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> —Linda Hutcheon's presentation of *A Theory of Adaptation.*[1]

At the end of a meeting in the autumn of 2013, a group of academics from the Institute of Literature and the Master in Screenwriting and Audiovisual Development at Universidad de los Andes (Santiago de Chile), decided to organise an international conference on literary adaptation to film. The purpose was to bring scholars from all over the world to the university in order to generate discussion and to create worldwide links that could result in future research on the field of Literature and Film Studies. The call for papers was so successful that in October 2013 we inaugurated the first International Literature and Film Conference at our university, with the participation of delegates from Japan, Spain, Belgium, Rome, Israel, Turkey, the United States, Mexico, Colombia, and Peru, as well as academics and postgraduate students from different universities in Chile. This book is the result of a selection of papers presented at that conference, apart from others that the organising committee decided to ask some experts to provide.

The volume aims to address the yet unresolved question of whether it is possible to adapt literary sources to the screen or, more exactly, what elements from a written narrative should be transferred to a visual medium

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[1] http://individual.utoronto.ca/lindahutcheon/theory_of_adaptation.html (accessed March, 2015).

and how. In addition, each chapter intends to answer different questions, as for example, what is the relationship between literature and film? What is meant when speaking about "adapting" a literary work to the screen? Is it possible to adapt? And if so, how? Are there films that have "improved" their literary sources? Is adaptation a "translation" or, rather, a "re-interpretation"? What is the impact of adapting literary classics to a modern context? Adaptation is an interpretative and creative act that involves a process of creation and re-creation, of interpretation and re-interpretation, and, as Linda Hutcheon argues, a transposition of a particular work or works. According to the well-known scholar in the field of Film Studies, "[t]his 'transcoding' can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view […]. Transposition can also mean a shift in ontology from the real to the fictional, from a historical account or biography to a fictionalized narrative or drama."[2] In fact, making a film out of a narrative has tempted many film makers to transfer stories to the screen, sometimes so successfully that the adaptation has become a film classic or a "better" version of the source story. However, the transition from literature to film is not easy and sometimes the filmed version may result in a poor adaption of a great story. Thus, what can films borrow from Literature? What exactly can be adapted from literary works such as novels, short stories, poems, and drama? Are the topic, the setting and the space that frame these narrations adaptable? Are the characters whose actions move the plot or the plot itself what constitutes the essence of adaptation? Can we argue that all of these elements can be adapted? To an extent, the answers to these questions may be quite simple and straightforward, as, in practice, each of these elements is prone to be adapted; nevertheless, "[m]ost theories of adaptation assume […] that the story is the common denominator, the core of what is transposed across different media and genres […]."[3]

   The assumption that the Aristotelian poetic *mythos*, which the Greek philosopher describes as "the soul of tragedy"[4], is the element that gives

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[2] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 7-8.
[3] Ibid., 10.
[4] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450 a 40-41. The myth is «the "soul" (or life-source) of tragedy», in *The Poetics of Aristotle*, Translation and commentary by Stephen Halliwell (London: Duckworth, 1987), 93. In chapter six of the *Poetics*, Aristotle enumerates the six elements of tragedy: *mythos* (plot), *ethé* (characters), *dianoia* (the characters' thoughts), *lexis* (the language by means of which the previous

unity and coherence to the source story and to the adapted version is present in one way or another in every chapter of this volume. From different perspectives, more or less explicitly, the authors analyse and discuss the double sense associated to *mythos* as fable (the series of incidents) and as plot (the combination of incidents in a story or the artistic organisation of them). According to Marta Frago, what matters in the process of adaptation is not the fable as *syuzhet*, which refers to the plot of the original story, but the fable as myth;[5] that is, the story in its pre-narrative and abstract phase. This becomes a somewhat vital principle within the story that gives consistency to the other elements in the narration: plot, characters, language, setting, and so forth. According to many of the authors, this dimension, which is usually neglected by adaptation studies, could give unity to the story and make the adaptation of literary works to film possible, as the new version may become a re-writing of the former's *mythos*. In other words, the screenwriter and the film director who decide to adapt a literary narration to the screen would not necessarily imitate –in Aristotelian terms– the story in itself –its sequence of events or narrative structure–, but the human actions, feelings, thoughts, and conflicts the story imitates. It is in this sense, I think, that Carmen Sofía Brenes considers that the poetic myth may become a "configurator of texts"[6] and, in my perspective, a configurator of film adaptations.

Taking ideas from Juan José García-Noblejas's analysis[7] of "mimesis III" by Paul Ricoeur, Brenes resorts to the distinction between comprehension and application when reading a text. She explains that despite the fact that García-Noblejas does not make a chronological distinction between these two moments during the encounter between film and spectator, he suggests that in the moment of application readers, spectators, screenwriters, and directors gain "access to the deep poetic structures of the text or, in other words, the myth, by means of hermeneutical

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elements are communicated), *opsis* (visual elements) and *melopea* (rhythm). In his hierarchical design, plot is the most relevant.

[5] Cf. Chapter Three in this book: Marta Frago, "Adaptation, Re-Adaptation, and Myth", 45-60.

[6] Carmen Sofía Brenes, "The Practical Value of Theory: Teaching Aristotle's *Poetics* to Screenwriters", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 24:1 (2011): 107.

[7] See especially: Juan José García-Noblejas, "Pensar hoy un sentido trascendente para la catarsis aristotélica", in *Lavoro e vita quotidiana*, ed. Giorgio Faro, vol. IV (Roma: Edusc, 2003), and "Identidad personal y mundos cinematográficos distópicos", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 17: 2 (2004): 73-88 (English version: http://www.poetcom.org/2008/04/personal-identi.html, 13-9-2010);

analysis."[8] Hence, the same process should be followed when adapting literary works to film: comprehending the story and applying a real-life sense to it may constitute the hermeneutics needed to be able to adapt the poetic myth, thus re-tell stories on screen.

The book is divided into five sections. The first one −Theoretical Approaches on Literature and Film Adaptation: Who Borrows What and from Whom?−, deals with issues regarding the problems and challenges concerning the adaptation of literary works to the particular nature and dynamics of cinema (relevance of images and sounds over text). In the first chapter, "Descriptive Adaptation Studies: Why Do Systems Exist?", the author explains that Descriptive Adaptation Studies have updated a research programme that was developed in the mid-1980s and presented in the early 1990s; this method was called a "polysystem" (PS) study of adaptations. He points out that the PS approach and system theory more in general have been under attack within the humanities from multiple perspectives. So-called constructivist commentators have asserted that systems do not exist, except as mental constructs or as fictitious heuristic devices that help to describe and explain reality. This chapter argues that following certain counter-arguments developed by realism, critics may or may not consider system theory as relevant to adaptation studies, but they cannot discard the approach on the basis that systems would not actually exist.

The second chapter: "Revisiting Plato: The Hermeneutics of Adaptation in the Light of Theuth's Myth of Writing", examines the myth, which Plato presents at the end of *Phaedrus*. The author takes it in a broad sense –not just dealing with rhetoric and writing– in order to exemplify Plato's mature views regarding the possibilities and limitations of rendering a given account (or phenomenon) from one type of language into another. Thus, following Plato's steps along the *Phaedrus* and other mature dialogues (e.g., *Timaeus*, the *Seventh Letter*) he argues that Plato's scepticism on writing (linguistic or iconic) is not complete, insofar as he discriminates between different types or functions of "signs" [*týpoi*]. Some reach its object or remember it from the outside by means of exterior signs [*éxōthen*], yet others do from the inside [*éndothen*], i.e., by themselves. To this last kind of signs (or language), Plato also refers as alive and animated forms of speech [*lógon zōnta kai émpsychon*]. Therefore, any written (or iconic) language which seeks to truly communicate (or adapt) something, must be at some level an image or a reflection of such oral (dialectical) word, which in fact transmits an original truth (related to a golden time) now partly lost for us. Secondly, he defends the idea that a "secularized"

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[8] Brenes, 108.

form of this argument, one which is actually found in some important hermeneutic philosophers (i.e., Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur), can enlighten the *epistemological ground* which stands at the basis of this book by asserting that (a) adaptation is possible and (b) that some adaptations are better (or worse) than others.

In "Adaptation, Re-Adaptation, and Myth", the third chapter of the book, the author shows how due to the influence of transmedia storytelling, adaptations from the same story to different narrative forms have proliferated in the last years. These "re-adaptations" take multiple directions, as they do not only converge towards film and television, but also to literary forms and other narrative platforms such as musicals, comics, videogames, ballets, thematic parks, to mention but a few examples. In relation to this phenomenon, the chapter serves two purposes: first, to describe how adaptation studies, generally linked to Literature Departments, have faced re-adaptation cases and have had to review their approaches and methods to literary theory by looking for a more interdisciplinary scope. Second, this chapter aims to recover the semantic analysis, focused on the fable as myth of the story, as a way to understand re-adaptation better. That dimension of the fable directs the attention to the core of the story, linking up all possible adaptations. Far from making comparisons between main text and derived text, this perspective levels all versions. As the fable-myth may dress up different clothes, any new arrangement is welcome. The diversity of modes and interpretations reveal the universal force of myth. Besides, the way to access from the narrative work to the fable-myth always becomes a challenge for the screenwriter.

The second section −From Stage to Screen: The Problem of Theatrical Adaptation to Film− focuses on the specific problem of adapting theatre to film and the challenges this implies; for instance, the unique experience of staging, of being part of an audience, thus present during a performance, and so forth. It presents three study cases taken from Greek tragedy, Shakespearean drama, and from a modern theatre adaptation. In "From Theatre to Film: The Case of Ancient Greek Tragedy", the author analyses how ancient Greek tragedy has been an inspiration for centuries to its original art form: theatre. However, from the 60's onwards there has been an attempt to interpret, translate and transform ancient Greek tragedy into film. The cinematic language had to challenge a long tradition coming from theatre with various distinctive features regarding ancient Greek tragedy such as outdoor performances, strict rules of acting and the austere structure of this theatrical style, as well as its special logos.

Through case studies, the fourth chapter specifically examines the alterations and innovations that cinematic language brought to light while

adapting ancient Greek tragedy in different modern contexts. Taking the
films of Michael Cacoyannis, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Jules Dassin, the
author compares the proximity or the distance that the directors kept from
the original theatrical text and its performance in the attempt they made to
interpret ancient Greek tragedy. The chapter also discusses the reception
of these films by the critics and the audience, as well as the feedback they
received concerning the adaptation of ancient Greek tragedy into film
language.

   Despite the fact that the raw material for adapting a play to the screen
is provided for the film director, as he/she accounts for both the story and
its written script, the complexities of adaptation from theatre to film are
manifold and have opened diverse discussions in Film Studies. In "The
Film Industry Woos Shakespeare: Theatrical versus Cinematographic
Space in the Adaptations of *Hamlet* and *Henry V* by Kenneth Branagh",
the author questions the possibility of adapting a Shakespearean play and
explores how to reproduce its inherent spatial dimension, which she
considers essential for its meaning. She analyses two film adaptations of
plays by William Shakespeare: *Hamlet* (1996) and *Henry V* (1989) by the
British director Kenneth Branagh as study cases. By examining the films,
she pays special attention to the use of space, an element that adds
complexity to the process of adaptation because Shakespearean plays have
almost no stage directions or indications of place that guide and frame the
setting of scenes. This theatrical/technical aspect transforms the job of the
film director into a challenge of creative reinterpretation that goes beyond
the mere filming of a determined theatrical performance, but aims to
represent a certain notion of space precisely by filling the Shakespearean
flexible and empty space with film images and symbols. She suggests that
a "good" adaptation of Shakespeare to film –that which is a mirror of the
human conflicts proposed by the dramatist– will result not only from its
fidelity to the text, but from its understanding of Shakespearean spatial
poetics that the director will configure according to his/her own
interpretation of the dramatic *mythos*.

   The second section ends with chapter six: "*Duet for One*: When Less is
More", in which the author explores the problem of transposition of
theatrical material to the screen which, in turn, raises the question of
whether one can succeed in such a move from one medium to another at
all. She brings to the fore theories of intermediality, a concept that,
according to the Spanish playwright and scholar Guillermo Heras, is one
of the most relevant contributions to adaptation studies. Focusing on *Duet
for One,* a film by Andrei Konchalovsky released in 1986, based on a play
of the same title by Tom Kempinski –an English contemporary playwright–,

the author analyses its process of adaptation both from a theoretical perspective, as well as from her own experience as translator, producer, actress, and director of the play.

The third section −From Written to Visual Narrative: The Story behind the Screen− includes a good number of examples of literary works that have been adapted to film or TV series. The six chapters in this section function as "study cases" that aim to answer, in practice, the general questions posed in the introductory section; that is to say, whether literary adaptation to film works successfully or not, and in what ways or aspects it does so. Literary authors are presented in chronological order; that is to say, according to the years when they lived and published their novels or narrative works.

Grounded in the idea that the theory of cinematographic adaptation must consider the possibilities of subjective re-creation, the author of chapter seven: "Impossible Voyages and Possible Adaptation in the Work of Jules Verne", argues that if Cervantes started his famous novel by addressing an idle reader, a modern writer may implicitly address a busy screenwriter. He will be able to see the possibilities of re-creation for the screen in the writer's work. Méliès, the cinematic pioneer, also turns out to be a pioneer in his adaptation for that early cinema, of pre-existing literary texts –in his case, those of Jules Verne. The example of Verne provides an opportunity to consider the adaptation of science fiction, in order to demonstrate that not only technical possibilities link science fiction to cinema but there is also a relationship between both that resides in the extreme landscapes that the science fiction text provides and that can be adapted to the screen in a natural way.

A less explored aspect in the relationship between Literature and Cinema is that of films that are hermeneutical exercises of the literary works that inspired them –be that intended or not by their screenwriters/directors. Starting with George Steiner's notion that "true theatre hermeneutics is representation"[9], the author of "Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* as Hermeneutics of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" questions whether this hermeneutical process may occur, in a similar way, with film adaptations of certain novels, so that a film, beyond its intrinsic value, may become a hermeneutics of the novel on which it is based. Following T.S. Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent* in the idea that not only the new work is influenced by the canon, but it may alter the canon itself, the author proposes that *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola (1979) is a lucid hermeneutical exercise of *Heart of Darkness*

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[9] George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), I. 3.

(1899) by Joseph Conrad. That is, not only that Coppola's film was inspired by and is a "rewriting" of Conrad's novel, but that the very meaning and scope of Conrad's novel has been deepened and enriched thanks to the film. The reason would lie, in his view, in the fact that the same *mythos* of the novel has remained in the film and this is "the principle and [...] the soul of tragedy"[10] in the words of Aristotle. Furthermore, he argues that film adaptation of literary works is only possible through rewriting the *mythos* of the latter.

The author of chapter nine: "*Death in Venice*: From Thomas Mann to Luchino Visconti. An Artistic Interpretation of Art", expands Steiner's theory regarding hermeneutics; that is to say, how a work of art can be criticized, valued, weighed, and even broadened and corrected only by another work of art: an artistic interpretation of art. By making a comparison between Thomas Mann's and Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice* (the novel and the film), the author establishes a significant landmark that allows us to examine Visconti's film not only as a movement of a written narrative into the realm of images, but also as an expansion into a much more complex series of aesthetic problems. These, he argues, do not only refer to literature, but also to a plurality of discourses ingrained in a semiotic framework of a larger scope.

Chapter ten: "In Dialogue with the Poetic Myth of *Brideshead Revisited*" charts the study of two cases of adaptation of the novel *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh. One of them is the adaptation to the TV series made by Granada / ITV in 1980, and the other is the film directed by Julian Jarrold in 2008. The analysis starts from Marta Frago's perspective on adaptation, specifically her proposal of an alternate approach, besides current semiotics. This approach focuses on the fable or myth as a structuring element of the poetic text, in addition to an analysis of structural and narratological issues. Frago understands adaptation as a dialogue with the fable and its interpretation. One adaptation will differ from another inasmuch as it manages to recreate, in an original way, the same vital core that gives life to the original work.[11] This poetic perspective is used to analyse the two adaptations of Waugh's novel.

The last two chapters in this section give way to the study of contemporary authors such as Paul Auster and Henning Mankell. In "Auster vs Auster: An Analysis of the Feedback Process between Cinema and Literature", the author explains how the rise of contemporary literature created a structural break in the adaptation process −mainly

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[10] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450ª38-39.
[11] Cf. Marta Frago, "Reflexiones sobre la adaptación cinematográfica desde una perspectiva iconológica", *Comunicación y Sociedad* XVIII, no. 2 (2005): 49-81.

literary and cinematographic− that traces its origin to the beginning of the film industry. Adapting this new linguistic line −subjective and psychological− presents more problems than solutions when available mechanisms are insufficient to permit an adaptation from one medium to another without disrupting the linguistic and conceptual balance of the work. She presents an analysis of the works of the writer and screenwriter Paul Auster, where cinema and literature are united to demonstrate that in the contemporary world adaptation from one medium to another is a valid alternative within this new way of representing human reality. In Auster's work, she argues, language is presented as a tool that provides balance between two ways of representation in the cinematographic adaptation process.

Finally, the author of "*Nordic Noir*: The World of Wallander and Mankell as Seen on *Sidetracked*, the BBC Episode" studies the television adaptation of ten novels by Henning Mankell made by the BBC. The stories have Kurt Wallander as protagonist and are included in the *Nordic Noir* genre of police investigation. This chapter has two main characteristics: 1) it studies, in an holistic way, the critical view of the social world offered by Mankell's texts and its faithful British screen adaptation, and 2) it fixes its attention on the strong "thematic sense" of the personal and familial perspective that lies in the voice and conscience of Wallander as protagonist. According to the author, because Mankell explores real life in Swedish society, the analysis highlights the real extent of his "strong critical sense" on society, and it does not only deal with the story from the diegetic, generic and intertextual point of view. In other words, the study wants to open a channel for dialogue with the "myth" that rules Wallander's world, a "myth" or soul that tends to make the literary and the audio-visual version coincide, especially when the same person is the reader and the viewer. He concludes that there is a "thematic feeling" of melancholy, disappointment, and life difficulties both in Mankell's text and in its British adaptation. Thus, the focus is on revealing the presence of a special nostalgia for a past in which family ties, especially parent-child, and marriage, are stronger, more stable and personal than in the literary and audio-visual *Nordic Noir* worlds in which Wallander lives, those that in a more or less reliable way, reflect the world criticized by Mankell.

The fourth section within the adaptation of written narratives into film and TV series is called: Latin American Voices on Screen, as it includes two chapters on literary works by authors from Colombia and Peru with their respective− adaptations to the screen. Chapter thirteen: "Bleeding the Rubber Trees: Parallelism and Paradox in *La vorágine* and *Fitzcarraldo*"

presents a comparative analysis between the novel *La vorágine* (1924) by the Colombian writer José Eustasio Rivera and the film *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) by the German film maker, Werner Herzog. Although there is no factual connection between the film and the novel, a series of peculiar parallelisms between both narratives appear repeatedly. The author analyses the similarities between the two stories, which take place in the early twentieth century during the Amazonian rubber extraction processes. She explores the similitude between the two heroes (Arturo Cova and B.S. Fitzgerald), their individualistic and romantic character, as well as their desire to defeat the jungle. In addition, the chapter explores the epic and partially autobiographic vision of both authors, highlighting the diffuse line between reality and fiction that these texts present. Both authors, who at times appear to become their own fictional character, had to confront −in reality and in the fictional story they created− the violent exploitation of indigenous people along the Amazon jungle. The parallelisms mentioned above, generate an uncanny effect, especially considering that the film's hero also incarnates the feared rubber lords constantly described in the novel.

According to the author of chapter fourteen: "Other Expressions of Indigenism: Film Adaptations of Two Stories by José María Arguedas", the Peruvian author, José María Arguedas, positions himself in a dual space −both biographically and textually− between the indigenous and the white ("*blancos*", term used in Peru, and elsewhere in Latin America to identify people of non-Indian origin). In this way, he is situated in a peripheral and privileged, but also pathetic place. His writing, within the indigenous movement, tries to give an account of this reality, striding two worlds, in modern Peru, through linguistic, historical, anthropological and narrative resources. In this chapter, she examines two of Arguedas's stories: "La agonía de Rasu Ñiti" (1962) and "El sueño del pongo" (1965), together with their corresponding film adaptations: *La agonía de Rasu Ñiti*, a short film made in 1985 by Augusto Tamayo for the Communications Centre at *Universidad Católica de Perú*, and *El sueño del pongo*, a documentary short film by the Cuban director, Santiago Álvarez, in 1970. The purpose of this study is to analyse the way in which these films succeed in telling two stories, namely, the one about the last dance performed by the *danzak'*−or scissors dancer− Rasu Ñiti, and of his tormented death; and the story about the abject *pongo* (native man freely working in a house-estate), who suffers his master's constant abuse. However, the main objective of the author is to show how (and by what means) the directors of both films incorporate Arguedas's aesthetic and ideological approach in their filmed versions of the stories.

The fifth and last section of the book: Films and their Narrative Strategies, also consists of two chapters which deal with the structures and devices that film directors use in order to tell stories. In chapter fifteen: "Narrative Strategies in the Films of Peter Weir", the author shows the stylistic unity that brings into focus the notion of cinema *d'auteur* −both European and classic American− in the films of Weir. He argues that this is not a mere eclecticism that consists of working for feature films in an interesting way, but a true synthesis that embodies the best of both traditions. Weir admirably combines his extensive knowledge of classic Hollywood with the narrative discipline of European art cinema. In the author's perspective, what gives unity to Weir's films is his cinematic technique of high artistic quality, but mainly, the configuration of the narrative plot, as the director considers himself primarily as a story-teller and is not afraid of addressing the major issues related to human existence. The chapter offers an analysis of the narrative strategies deployed in most of Weir's works, focusing first on common structures the film maker uses in the configuration of the films' frame, and then, on how different developments of these are embodied in the narrative of his films.

The last chapter of the book: "Meta-Literature and Meta-Art in *The Taste of Others*", deals with the dramatic comedy *The Taste of Others* (France, 2001), as an example of a meta-literary and even meta-artistic work. The author explains that the film's protagonist is an actress who plays roles in two plays (Racine's *Berenice* and Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*) and is preparing for a role in *The Imaginary Invalid,* by Molière. Her friends are artists and/or dilettantes who allude easily to such playwrights as August Strindberg, Werner Schwab, and Tennessee Williams. In contrast, her co-protagonist is a businessman with no connection to the world of culture; he is, however, comically similar to Monsieur Jourdain, the Molière character who is unaware he has been speaking in prose. However, according to the author, the film does not glorify art for art's sake. Rather, its reflection is subtle, distancing itself from both narcissistic self-reference (so frequent in postmodern art) and biased, anti-artistic criticism (representing the most conservative point of view), and equidistant from both intra-artistic discourse and the embittered critique of the extra-artistic world. Thus, the author concludes, *The Taste of Others* offers a smiling criticism, which is simultaneously a self-criticism (Agnès Jaoui, the director, is an actress and writer, and her husband and co-scriptwriter is a well-known actor).

The list of contributors (included at the end of the book) shows the variety of backgrounds and expertise of the academics involved in this project. We hope this will contribute to widen the book's readership, as it

will interest academics and researchers working in the field of comparative studies between Literature and Film, novelists, screenwriters, film makers, dramatists, theatre directors, postgraduate students, and those researching on topics related to the philosophy of art and aesthetics from all over the world.

The art of telling and re-telling stories originated long ago in ancient times; soon, these oral narrations were adapted into written versions. Since then, adaptations are present everywhere in our world, and we hope their process and development is well told and re-told in this volume.

—Paula Baldwin Lind
Winter, 2015.

PART I:

THEORETICAL APPROACHES
ON LITERATURE AND FILM ADAPTATION:
WHO BORROWS WHAT AND FROM WHOM?

CHAPTER ONE

DESCRIPTIVE ADAPTATION STUDIES: WHY DO SYSTEMS EXIST?[1]

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1. Introduction

Descriptive adaptation studies (DAS) aims to describe and explain adaptations in terms of systems and norms. It is based on a research program called a "polysystem" (PS) study of adaptations. PS theory was developed first in the 1970s by two Israeli translation scholars: Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury, to study (mostly literary) translations.[2] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, proposals were developed to adapt the research program to a PS study of adaptations.[3] These proposals emerged as a reaction to a number of then common criticisms within the field of (mostly film) adaptation studies. Some of these criticisms still sound familiar today. In response to the lack of meta-theoretical thinking in the discipline, PS served as a conceptual and methodological framework that allows scholars to study adaptations in a more consistent way. In an effort to eschew value judgments, it aimed at a descriptive-explanatory approach.

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[1] This essay represents the first part of a paper that was presented at the *Congreso Internacional de Literatura y Cine*, Universidad de los Andes, Santiago de Chile, 9-10 October 2013, under the title: "DAS: Why systems do exist and good (or bad) adaptations do not?".

[2] See, e.g., Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem"; Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theories"; Toury, *In Search of the Theory of Translation*.

[3] See e.g. Cattrysse, "L'Adaptation filmique de textes littéraires. Le film noir américain"; Cattrysse, "Film (adaptation) as Translation: Some Methodological Proposals"; Cattrysse, *Pour une théorie de l'adaptation filmique*.

In an attempt to step beyond the endless accumulation of *ad hoc* selected case studies, the PS approach called for the development of broader corpus-based research. It also entailed a break with the customary fidelity-based discourse and the single-source text model. It suggested looking at adaptations as adaptations, the production and reception of which are determined by multiple conditioners to be found in both source and target contexts. At once, the multi-source text model raised the question of whether and how one can study adaptational relationships as a more or less specific class that can be distinguished from other (e.g., intertextual intermedial, intercultural,...) types of relationships. A PS study of adaptations steps beyond Auteurism, i.e. it looks for explanations beyond the level of individual agency (even if contextualized). It suggests investigating also conditioners that operate at non-individual levels (expressed in terms of systemic features and norms). In 1995, Toury replaced the word "polysystem" with "descriptive" proposing DTS: descriptive translation studies. In a recent study called *Descriptive Adaptation Studies: Epistemological and Methodological Issues*, I examine whether and how a similar update is possible within adaptation studies. The focus remains on description and explanation in terms of systems and norms, but the two words are redefined respectively as "descriptive coherence" and "explanatory coherence". Whereas systems reply to what-questions, norms reply to why-questions.[4] Coherence, as opposed to randomness, may reveal itself in various "forms". This question is the subject of a research area that has become a discipline in and of itself: system theory. System theory originated in Ludwig von Bertalanffy's *General System Theory* and since then it has been applied in other fields: philosophical action theory (e.g. Donald Davidson, Michael Bratman), social action theory (e.g. Talcott Parsons) or social systems theory (e.g. Niklas Luhmann), systems as networks (e.g. Bruno Latour, Michel Callon), social networks (e.g. Manuel Castells), so-called "distributionists" (e.g. Miguel Nicolelis), etc. Hence, in DAS, systems and norms, understood as descriptive and explanatory coherence or non-randomness, may refer to more traditional notions of systems (e.g. Ferdinand de Saussure, Itamar Even-Zohar, Gideon Toury), as well as to the aforementioned more recent usages of the word.

To the extent that DAS adheres to a systems approach, it runs into two types of criticisms. One concerns the ontological status of systems where opponents claim that systems do not exist. The other concerns their

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[4] The distinction between description and explanation represents a fascinating and ancient epistemological issue. For a more elaborate discussion with respect to adaptation studies, see e.g. P. Cattrysse, *Descriptive Adaptation Studies,* 171ff.

relevance: when they display systemic features, so the argument goes, phenomena are not interesting or not relevant. The following argues that adaptation scholars may debate whether they find a search for systemic coherences in adaptational phenomena scientifically relevant or not, but following some arguments advanced in realist theories of truth, they cannot claim that these systemic coherences would not exist.

2. System Studies: Attacks

It is an understatement to assert that for decades, film studies in particular, and the study of the arts more in general have not embraced a science-based approach.[5] Therefore, it should not be a surprise that any systems approach for that matter, and *a fortiori* one that calls itself a "polysystem" approach, has not fared so well: not in translation studies and even less in adaptation studies. As stated above, the co-founder of the PS approach, Gideon Toury, abandoned the term in 1995, and replaced it with the label "Descriptive Translation Studies". His followers argue that systems do not exist.[6] Even in less science-antagonistic disciplines like behavioural economics and psychology, high profile researchers like Daniel Kahneman[7] assert that systems merely represent fictitious heuristic devices that help to describe and understand human behaviour. Attacks against system studies have come from different directions. I hereafter briefly discuss three: ontological and methodological individualism, a Romantic view on art and culture, and relativism that propagates the Heraclitean view that reality is in a constant flux.

Individualism versus Collectivism

The individualism/collectivism divide appears in a number of debates such as the agency-structure debate and the mereological debate about parts and wholes. The Dutch epistemologist Chris Lorenz[8] distinguishes between what he calls methodological and ontological individualism vs. methodological and ontological collectivism or holism. With reference to

[5] See, e.g., Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 3ff.; Grodal, *Embodied Visions. Evolution, Emotion, Culture, and Film*, 13ff.; Boyd, Carroll, and Gotschall, *Evolution, Literature & Film: A Reader*, 1ff.
[6] See, e.g., Hermans, *Translation in Systems. Descriptive and System-Oriented Approaches Explained*, 103.
[7] Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 29.
[8] Lorenz, *De Constructie van Het Verleden. Een Inleiding in de Theorie van de Geschiedenis*, 175ff.

the study of history, Lorenz explains this fourfold divide as follows: the ontological/methodological divide refers respectively to ontological status and explanatory power; the individualist-collectivist distinction refers to a focus on the parts or the whole, respectively. Hence, ontological collectivism claims that what is composed is as real as the parts that constitute it, while ontological individualism argues that only the parts that make up the whole are real. For example, when studying history, society or art, the ontological individualist states that only individuals are real while the society they form is not; only individual films are real, genres are not, etc. By contrast, the ontological collectivist claims the opposite. Furthermore, the methodological individualist argues that the whole can only be explained by its parts, while the methodological collectivist claims that wholes may acquire relative autonomy from their constituent parts, and thus function in ways that cannot be explained by considering each part separately. When the whole is reduced to the sum of its parts, they call it "reductionist". Hence, in addition to describing *which* parts constitute a whole, one must also investigate *how* these parts constitute the whole through mutual interaction (e.g. networking). This fourfold distinction is useful because an ontological collectivist may accept that social facts are real, but argue, at the same time, that only their constituent parts can explain them. In that case, the ontological collectivist would adhere to methodological individualism. The ontological individualist, on the other hand, may subscribe to the methodological collectivist view by stating that wholes such as institutions, social classes or film genres do not actually exist, but serve as heuristic devices for explaining the features and functioning of the parts that constitute these wholes. Consequently, it is not hard to see how a systems approach adheres to methodological collectivism while an Auteurist approach for example adheres to methodological individualism (see section 1). However, to acknowledge systems studies also within ontological collectivism entails a significant but controversial implication: systems are not merely heuristic devices that help explain reality but are as real as the parts that constitute them. In support to this argument, Lorenz[9] compares a table, which is made up of numerous particles, with a society, which consists of multiple individuals. No one "in her right mind" would argue that the particles that constitute the table are real, but not the table. Similarly, the argument goes, one cannot assert that only the separate individuals that make up a society are real, but not the society. Indeed, the claim that the composed would be less real than the singular is inconsistent. If a society is not real because it consists of numerous individuals, individuals are not real because they too

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[9] Ibid., 176.

consist of numerous biological particles, and these biological particles would not be real because they in turn are made up of yet smaller particles, and so on. The only difference, Lorenz argues, between a table and a society is that the latter consists of elementary parts that are able to act intentionally and to reflect upon things. The question about explanatory power brings us to the next paragraph.

The Romantic versus Classicist Value System

A strong and well-known proponent of methodological individualism can be found in the Romantic value system. It prevails currently among tertiary educated people in the West. The Romantic view values practices and products that result from the free-willed creation of an individual genius-Auteur. This genius-Auteur produces phenomena that are considered "original" and "different". Artistic expression is said to be "free", for example, when rules are bent, broken, or simply ignored. An arduous defender of the Romantic view in film (adaptation) studies is the *Politique des Auteurs* or Auteurism. Auteurism started as a critical paradigm in the 1950s in France, and spread soon after in Europe, the US and elsewhere. According to this view, systems refer to commonality rather than to unicity, determinism rather than free-willed creativity, structure rather than agency. That is why in this view, if systems do exist, they are considered to be irrelevant in a study of the aesthetic, except to depreciate a work of art or cultural phenomenon.[10] However, each day, more recent findings *int. al.* in social neuroscience[11], behavioural biology[12], social biology[13], and social psychology[14] chip away some of that intuitive belief in the explanatory power of so-called "individual free-willed intentions".[15] They suggest one accord focus also to infra- and trans-individual bio-psycho-social conditioners in order to explain practices and products. DAS approach concurs with this suggestion.

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[10] Within the limits of this essay, I must simplify the respective points of view. A more elaborate discussion of the legitimation process of genre studies for example could offer a more nuanced illustration of the battle between the valuing of the individual and the valuing of the common.
[11] See, e.g., Harmon-Jones and Winkielman, *Social Neuroscience. Integrating Biological and Psychological Explanations of Social Behavior.*
[12] See, e.g., the work of Robert Sapolsky.
[13] See, e.g., the work of Edward O. Wilson.
[14] See, e.g., the work of Elliot Aranson.
[15] See, e.g., Toleffson, "Collective Intentionality."

The Heraclitean Flux

Finally, a third attack against a systems approach I mention here comes from post-modern relativists who propagate the so-called Heraclitean view that reality is a constant flux. I first explain the main features of this view. Section 2 outlines some arguments realism has advanced to counter these attacks. Section 3 draws some conclusions with respect to a systems-based study of adaptations.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (6th century BC) purportedly uttered the proverbial "All things are flowing". Reality is constantly in flux. It follows that "systems" are not useful as a concept because they cannot account for constant change. The word "system" fixates so-called "becomings", processes or change, and thereby represents a falsification of the world. For the reader who is not familiar with this Heraclitean view, it is not difficult to explain how the world is constantly changing and moving, both at the nano and galactic levels. At the nanolevel, the second law of thermodynamics states that entropy[16] will universally and continuously increase in matter until a state of thermodynamic equilibrium is reached. If matter changes continuously and humans consist of matter, then humans change continuously, both physically and experientially. Physically, most if not all the cells in a person's body have changed or been replaced after a certain number of years. This recalls the paradox of Theseus' ship[17], and raises the question if after that time, I am physically still "the same" person? But also experientially, every split second, I am someone having experienced something I had not experienced one split second before. One may think that personal pronouns such as "I", "you", "we" refer to fixed identities, but apparently they do not. Moreover, while the world is constantly changing, perception of the world takes time. It follows that whatever I perceive is not what is but what was. When I look at the sun from the Earth, I do not see the sun as it is, but as it was eight minutes ago. If I talk to a student in front of me at a distance of thirty centimetres (close, I know, but it makes it easier to calculate), I do not see the student as he is but as he was one million femtoseconds[18] ago, and the

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[16] Entropy refers to the degree of disorder, i.e. the randomness of energy distribution.

[17] Plutarch (46-120 AD) wondered about "the ship of Theseus" and asked himself if all the parts of a ship have been replaced one by one, one can still consider it "to be" the same ship, and if not, at what time it stopped "being" the same ship.

[18] One femtosecond is one thousand of a trillionth of a second. These shorter intervals are commonly used in computer and laser technology, and in high

same goes for the student who sees me. At the time we see and hear or smell each other, we no longer exist as such; we have already changed. Make the distance between the student and I three meters instead of thirty centimetres and perception and communication, counted in femtoseconds, take "forever". Similar discrepancies between reality and perception apply to all human senses. Whatever I hear, smell, taste, or touch takes "forever" (again, in terms of femtoseconds) before the nervous system and the brain register and communicate the sound, smell, taste, or touch to one's consciousness. To changes at the nanolevel, one must add changes at the galactic level. While I am typing these disturbing data into my computer, I and everyone else on this planet are spinning around the Earth's axis at a speed greater than the speed of sound. And while planet Earth and all of us are spinning, we are at the same time racing around the sun at approximately one hundred thousand kilometres per hour. And this racing around the sun happens while our Milky Way and we are rushing through the fabric of space at almost two million kilometres per hour. In fact, according to Einstein's special theory of relativity, the very notion of "speed" or "absolute velocity" is problematic because it must be measured with respect to some "inertial" frame of reference. Since everything constantly moves in the universe, finding such a frame becomes impossible.[19] It follows that human perception can only be summarized as "always too little, too late".

It should come as no surprise that various postmodern or relativist philosophers[20] writing about "processes" and "becomings" in literary studies, film studies and in cultural studies more in general, have used this Heraclitean perspective as an argument against what Philip Bell[21] has called "empirico-realist epistemologies in Anglo-American humanities and social science curricula". On the basis of these writings, many critics have concluded that only change and difference are real. Stasis and similarity result from perception and construction, and are therefore not inherent properties that can be recognized in the things themselves. Nelson

frequency trading. To put these dimensions somewhat in perspective: there are more femtoseconds in one second than there are seconds in 31 million years.

[19] See, e.g., Greene, *Fabric of Cosmos. Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality*, 24–29. See also Wikipedia on this: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milky Way (accessed June 24, 2014).

[20] See, e.g., Mikhael Bakhtin, Nelson Goodman, Willard Van Orman Quine, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Brian Massumi, Douglas Medin, etc. quoted, *inter alia*, in Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, 59ff., and Bell, *Confronting Theory. The Psychology of Cultural Studies*, 8.

[21] Bell, *Confronting Theory*, 8.