

2

WHAT?

(Forms)

As it proved, among my best memories of the filmmaking are the conversations (drunken or otherwise) I had with [director] Fred [Schepisi], in which we both acknowledged, I think, that, different as film directors and novelists are, our abiding obsession was the same: the mysteries of storytelling—of timing, pacing and the exactly judged release of information and emotion.

—Novelist Graham Swift on the adapting of his novel, *Last Orders*

Medium Specificity Revisited

As a creative and interpretive transposition of a recognizable other work or works, adaptation is a kind of extended palimpsest and, at the same time, often a transcoding into a different set of conventions. Sometimes

but not always, this transcoding entails a change of medium. Although my main focus is on adaptations' different modes of engagement, the medium—as the material means of expression of an adaptation—is crucially important. But as W.J.T. Mitchell reminds us, “The medium does not lie between sender and receiver; it includes and constitutes them” (2005: 204; see also Williams 1977). My emphasis on adaptation as process (as well as product) means that the social and communication dimensions of media are important too, even when the particular emphasis, as in this chapter, is on form.

When a change of medium does occur in an adaptation, it inevitably invokes that long history of debate about the formal specificity of the arts—and thus of media. This concept received one of its most influential articulations in G.E. Lessing's 1766 “essay on the limits of painting and poetry” called *Laocöon*. As we have also seen, however, adaptation recalls as well, and usually to its disadvantage, that idea of a hierarchy in the arts. And this evaluative framework has had a significant role in this debate about specificity and difference throughout the centuries. Inevitably writers and literary critics hierarchize in their own particular art's favor. But in 1940, the visual art critic Clement Greenberg responded to Irving Babbitt's anti-Romantic *The New Laocöon: An Essay in the Confusion of the Arts* (1910) with “Towards a Newer Laocöon,” where he famously argued that each art has its own formal and material specificity and thereby defined modernist art's self-reflexive focus on that very specificity (see Groensteen 1998b: 11). This essay too has had a long history, for it has implicitly informed much of the critical response to new media, such as film: it seems that no art can acquire cultural capital until it has theorized itself as medium-specific with its own formal and signifying possibilities (Naremore 2000b: 6). Witness pronouncements like this: “Each medium, according to the ways in which it exploits, combines, and multiplies the ‘familiar’ materials of expression—rhythm, movement, gesture, music, speech, image, writing (in anthropological terms our ‘first’ media)—each medium ... possesses its own communicational energetics” (Gaudreault and Marion 2004: 65).

Adaptations are obviously least involved in these debates when there is no change of medium or mode of engagement: comic strip versions

of other comic strips or film remakes do not necessarily raise these particular issues of specificity (Gaudreault 1998: 270) nor do music covers or jazz variations. Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine* (1979) may adapt Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but it is still a stage play, however different. Rather, it is when adaptations make the move across modes of engagement and thus across media, especially in the most common shift, that is, from the printed page to performance in stage and radio plays, dance, opera, musical, film, or television, that they find themselves most enmeshed in the intricacies of the medium-specificity debates; so too when works are adapted from either print or performance to interactive media, with their multiple sensory and semiotic channels (Ryan 2004c: 338). What can one art form or medium do that another cannot, if indeed all the “essential elements of each of the arts” can be determined, as Greenberg insisted (1940/1986: 29)? Lessing had argued that literature was an art of time, whereas painting was an art of space (1766/1984: 77), but performance on stage or screen manages to be both.

Film is usually said to be the most inclusive and synthesizing of performance forms: “A composite language by virtue of its diverse matters of expression—sequential photography, music, phonetic sound and noise—the cinema ‘inherits’ all the art forms associated with these matters of expression ... —the visuals of photography and painting, the movement of dance, the décor of architecture, and the performance of theater” (Stam 2000: 61; see also Klein 1981: 3). But a dance work, a musical, a television show each has its own composite conventions and, some would say, even its own grammar and syntax that all operate to structure meaning for the perceiving audience. When Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli adapted a verbally and narratively complex novel, Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985), into a graphic novel (2004), they had to translate the story into what Art Spiegelman calls the “Ur-language of Comics”—“a strict, regular grid of panels” with “the grid as window, as prison door, as city block, as tic-tac-toe board; the grid as a metronome giving measure to the narrative's shifts and fits” (Spiegelman 2004: n.p.). Like all formal conventions, this grid both constrains and enables; it both limits and opens up new possibilities.

The familiar move from telling to showing and, more specifically, from a long and complex novel to any form of performance is usually seen as the most fraught transposition. In director Jonathan Miller's strong words, "most novels are irreversibly damaged by being dramatized as they were written without any sort of performance in mind at all, whereas for plays visible performance is a constitutive part of their identity and translation from stage to screen changes their identity without actually destroying it" (1986: 66). The differences in material scale alone make the novel-to-performance adaptation difficult, but the same is obviously true in reverse. When François Truffaut wrote a "cinéroman" (1977) of his film/screenplay (co-written with Suzanne Schiffman and Michel Fermaud) of his *L'homme qui aimait les femmes*, it was a very short and very un-novelistic book, even with its self-reflexive novel-within-a-novel structure.

On the contrary, a novel, in order to be dramatized, has to be distilled, reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity. Writer and director Todd Williams therefore chose to adapt only the first third of John Irving's *A Widow for One Year* (1998) for his 2004 film called *The Door in the Floor*. Most reviewers saw this cutting as a negative, as subtraction, yet when plots are condensed and concentrated, they can sometimes become more powerful. In 1975, when adapting Thackeray's novel, *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844), Stanley Kubrick tightened up the entire structure of the novel, "giving a hypnotic and fatal linearity to a narrative that in Thackeray's hands was a diffuse picaresque" (Sinyard 1986: 133). Another way to think about this distillation is in terms of narrative redundancy giving way to narrative pertinence, as in some *film noir* adaptations (Cattrysse 1992: 56).

Sometimes even the novelist agrees on the benefits of changes in his or her work. Witness Zadie Smith's response to the cuts made to her lengthy novel, *White Teeth* (2000), for a television adaptation:

The cuts were necessary to make the fat and messy kid presentable, and at least one of the changes is inspired A cut has been made; a motivation inserted, and an artistic clarity is the result. The moment I saw it, I gasped—this section of the novel would have been so improved had I thought of the same strategy In a novel, one scrabbles in the dirt for motivation or stretches for decorative

language to hide the lack of it. In film, no such disguise will be tolerated by the viewer. When we watch a man do something on screen, our guts much more than our brains will tell us the truth of the gesture. It cannot be fudged. (2003: 10)

What Smith points to at the end of these remarks is not just the cutting but also the adding in this case, of the motivation necessary in a naturalistic medium such as film. Of course, film adaptations obviously also add bodies, voices, sound, music, props, costumes, architecture, and so on.

When Raymond Chandler adapted James M. Cain's 1935 novel *Double Indemnity* for director Billy Wilder (1944), he may have streamlined the plot and cut expository passages, but he also added more wit to the dialogue, more cynical self-conscious play, more hard-edged eroticism, and a moral center. In short, he made it more like his own fiction than Cain's (Schickel 1992: 52). Additions in performance adaptations might range from this kind of stylistic and even ethical material to inserting new characters or increasing suspense. Or, in structural terms, the adapter might impose on a loosely episodic or picaresque narrative a familiarly patterned plot of rising and falling action, with a clear beginning, middle, and end; or he or she might even deliberately substitute a happy ending to mute tragedy or horror, as director Volker Schlöndorff and screenplay writer Harold Pinter did in their 1990 film adaptation of Margaret Atwood's dark, dystopic narrative, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).

Most of the talk about film adaptation, however, is in negative terms of loss. Sometimes what is meant is simply a reduction of scope: of length, of accretion of detail, of commentary (Peary and Shatzkin 1977: 2–8). Ray Bradbury's script for John Huston's 1956 film version of Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) might stand as a typical example of the pragmatic necessity of cutting a sprawling novel to make it fit the screen in terms of time and space, because it usually takes longer to perform an action than to read a written report of it. But at other times the change is perceived as less a question of quantity and more one of quality. To remain with Melville, the morally complicated tale in the novella of *Billy Budd* is rendered in black and white, both literally and ethically, in Peter Ustinov's 1962 film version. In this negative discourse of loss,

performance media are said to be incapable of linguistic or narrative subtlety or of representing the psychological or the spiritual. No film, it is said, can be as experimental as James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. (For an extended argument on this topic, see S. Smith [1981].)

It is opera, however, that has been singled out as particularly guilty on both the loss of quality and quantity counts, given its extremes of compression; again, it takes much longer to sing than to say a line of text, much less read one. Operatic recycling "denatures" a novel, we are told, "reducing it to a cartoon spray-painted in Day-Glo colors and outlined with a Magic Marker" (Honig 2001: 22). Yet, as we shall see, Benjamin Britten's opera of *Billy Budd* (libretto by E.M. Forster and Eric Crozier) turns out to be considerably more subtle in terms of psychology and style than is Ustinov's film—and, some would even say, Melville's novella. In other words, the customary theoretical generalizations about the specificity of media need to be questioned by looking at actual practice. And this is the main purpose of this chapter on the "what?" of adaptation, or what I am simply going to call its form(s). But first let us look at these formal elements from the point of view of each of the three modes of engagement open to adaptations.

Telling ← → Showing

The most commonly considered adaptations are those that move from the telling to the showing mode, usually from print to performance. But the flourishing "novelization" industry today cannot be ignored. Like the readers of earlier popular "cineromanzi" or "fotoromanzi," the fans of *Star Wars* or *The X-Files* can now read novels developed from the film and television scripts. The problem is, again, one of size or scale. As William Burroughs contentiously puts it: "If you took the actual filmscript of *Jaws* and turn it back into a novel, with no reference to the actual novel and just the filmscript as your given material, you would most likely end up with a very dull novel and also quite a short one" (1991: 76). Film adaptations of almost any medium are themselves open to (re-)novelization today: K.J. Anderson has written a novel adaptation (2004) of James Robinson's 2003 film adaptation of Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's continuing comic book series/graphic novel called *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. Of course, he had

to keep the changes made by the film adaptation to important elements like the villain and the number of characters, but because the script was so short, Anderson could add descriptions and develop character motivation, and to do so he often returned to the graphic novel.

When we work in the other direction—that is, from the telling to the showing mode, especially from print to performance—a definitional problem potentially arises. 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 (J. Miller 1986: 48); 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. In musical drama, the score too has to be brought to life for the audience and "shown" in actual embodied sound; it cannot remain inert as lifeless black notes on a page. A visual and aural world is physically shown on stage—be it in a play, a musical, an opera, or any other performance piece—created from verbal and notational signs on the page. But most theories draw the line here and claim that only *some* dramatic productions merit the designation of adaptation. Although it is not only stage and film directors like Peter Brook (though he is infamous for doing this) who edit a printed play text heavily, rearrange plot events, reassign lines, or cut characters, radical reinterpretations-in-performance like his usually qualify as adaptations in the sense that they are extended critical and creative engagements with a particular text. The Mabou Mines version (2003) of Henrik Ibsen's 1879 *A Doll's House* by director Lee Breuer was renamed *Doll-House* for a reason: to signal its adaptive status. Because all the men playing in it were shorter than 4 ½ feet tall and the women were much taller, this adaptation/production made an extended and announced visual commentary on the play's infamous sexual politics.

But when most of us consider the move from print to performance, it is usually the common and familiar phenomenon of the adaptation of novels that comes to mind. Novels contain much information that can be rapidly translated into action or gesture on stage or screen or dispensed with altogether, admits novelist and literary critic David

Lodge. In the move from telling to showing, a performance adaptation must dramatize: description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images. Conflicts and ideological differences between characters must be made visible and audible (see Lodge 1993: 196–200). In the process of dramatization there is inevitably a certain amount of re-accentuation and refocusing of themes, characters, and plot.

Because of the required changes, the epistolary novel would seem to present the most obvious difficulties for dramatization. *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Choderlos de Laclos' episodic novel (1782) written as a series of letters, has nonetheless undergone many adaptations in many different media in recent years. For instance, Christopher Hampton's 1986 play translated the novel's letters into spoken dialogue and, in the process, changed the focus from the extended ironies of a decadent aristocracy to the more intense intellectual battles of two mutually manipulative characters. But when Hampton wrote the screenplay of his own stage work for Stephen Frears' (1988) film, the story became a more straightforward moral one of evil punished. In the hands of filmmaker Miloš Forman (screenplay by Jean-Claude Carrière), the story was transmuted into *Valmont* (1989), which turned out more like a Molière comedy than the Hollywoodized moral tragedy of the film from the year before (Axelrod 1996: 200). In Frears' version, the letter concept was transcoded into a visual, medium-specific motif, that of eavesdropping: keyhole peeping and hiding behind screens. But when Roger Vadim had adapted and updated the novel in 1959, he had used the more literary device of a voice-over narration for some of the letters. The fact that there have also been a television miniseries, an opera, several ballets, and a good number of other stage and screen adaptations of this epistolary novel suggests that formal difficulties in dramatizing are more likely to be seen as challenges than as disincentives for adapters.

When theorists talk of adaptation from print to performance media, the emphasis is usually on the visual, on the move from imagination to actual ocular perception. But the aural is just as important as the visual to this move. First, there are, as Kamilla Elliott reminds us, many words spoken in films (2003: 78); then there are the separate soundtracks that permit elements like voice-overs, music, and noise to

intermingle. For the adapter, music in film “functions as an emulsifier that allows you to dissolve a certain emotion and take it in a certain direction,” according to sound editor Walter Murch (in Ondaatje 2002: 103). At best, it is “a collector and a channeler of previously created emotion” (in Ondaatje 2002: 122). Soundtracks in movies therefore enhance and direct audience response to characters and action, as they do in videogames, in which music also merges with sound effects both to underscore and to create emotional reactions. Film sound can be used to connect inner and outer states in a less explicit way than do camera associations: John Huston's 1987 adaptation of Joyce's “The Dead” (1914) uses music (the singing of “Lass of Aughrim”) and differences in Irish accents (the guests versus the servant Lily) to bring out not just the characters' responses but also the specifically Irish political implications of the story.

In stage musicals, the music has been called “the embodiment of excess”: when speaking characters break into song, they imply that “life cannot be contained in its ordinariness, but must spill over into it, and into rhythm, singing and movement” (Tambling 1987: 101). In opera, music is arguably as important a narrating component as are the words; this function is in addition to its manifest affective and even mimetic power. Composer Richard Strauss' infamous ability to make his music pictorially suggestive as well as emotionally powerful comes to mind.

Adapting a novel into a radio play brings the importance of the aural to the fore, for the aural is everything in this case. The issues common to all dramatizations come into play, with distillation uppermost; because each character/voice must be aurally distinguishable, there cannot be too many of them. For this reason, most radio plays concentrate on primary characters alone and therefore simplify the story and time-line, as Lindsay Bell did in her 2001 adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The characters who remain double as storytellers, but many are eliminated to keep the focus on the Ramsay family and Lily Briscoe. The words we hear come from the novel, but they are moved around, recontextualized, and read by different voices. These changes allow the aural version to give a sense of the novel's linguistic texture, its associative range, and its narrative rhythm. Here, as in all radio plays, music and sound effects are added

to the verbal text to assist the imagination of the listener. This addition was done particularly effectively in the 1981 BBC 26-part radio adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55), enabling listeners to enter an aural world of fantasy. In some ways, though, radio plays are no different from other performance media: as in any dramatization, with the director's guidance, the performers, who are adapting the script, we might say, must set up the rhythm and tempo and create the psychological/emotional engagement with the audience.

Adaptations for the ballet stage not only add a visual dimension but they also subtract the verbal, even when they retain the musical, as they do specifically when adapted from operas: Tchaikovsky's operatic adaptation of Pushkin's *Pikovaya Dama* (*Queen of Spades*; 1890) was adapted for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal by Kim Brandstrup in 2002, but there are many other examples in which the moving body replaces the operatic voice as the primary conveyer of both meaning and emotion through music. The adaptation of a novel or short story to the (spoken) dramatic stage also involves the visual dimension, as well as the verbal; with that added dimension come audience expectations not only about voice but, as in dance, also about appearance, as we move from the imagined and visualized to the directly perceived.

The limitations of the physical stage also add restrictions on the possible action and characterization. All performance media are said to lose internal character motivation in the shift to externalization (Brady 1994: 3), but the stage's material constraints potentially intensify this loss. When Salman Rushdie co-adapted his own verbally and narratively extravagant novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) into a play in 2003, it was met with predictable lamentations from the novel's fans, for the play's manner was as stylized and spare as the novel's was exuberant and complicated. The minimal props and scenery on stage offered a visual contrast to the baroque extravagance of the verbal fireworks of both the novel and the play. Yet there were formal attempts to incorporate the complexity of temporal and ontological states: the stage version used a large diagonally split movie screen at the back to present both historical scenes and magic realist ones.

This use of cinematic techniques points to one of the major advantages films have over stage adaptations of novels: the use of a multitrack

medium that, with the aid of the mediating camera, can both direct and expand the possibilities of perception. Yet, that is not how this point is usually made. More often we are told that the camera *limits* what we can see, eliminating the action on the periphery that might have caught our attention when watching a play on stage. Not only is the kind of attention and focus different in a theatrical production but plays also have different conventions than films or television shows. They have a different grammar: cinema's various shots, their linking and editing, have no parallel in a stage play. Film has its own "form-language," to use Béla Balázs' term.

Neither performance medium, however, has an easy time transcoding print texts. Telling is not the same as showing. Both stage and screen adaptations must use what Charles Sanders Peirce called indexical and iconic signs—that is, precise people, places, and things—whereas literature uses symbolic and conventional signs (Giddings, Selby, and Wensley 1990: 6). Graphic novels are perhaps adapted more easily to film for this reason. Frank Miller's *noir*-like series called *Sin City* (1991–92) was made into a visually spectacular surreal movie by Robert Rodriguez (2005) with live actors but digitally created settings that recall those of the comics. But when Dan Clowes' *Ghost World* (1998) was transferred to the screen by director Terry Zwigoff in 2002, fans felt it lost in the process what was considered the perfect, if sickly, analogue for the two punky girls' hyper-self-conscious and cynically ironic lives: the drained-out blue-green tint of the comics' pages.

One reason for this loss may be that conventional as opposed to avant-garde film is resolutely naturalistic in its mode of presentation, or as one theorist puts it more strongly, it gives "an ultra-naturalistic representation at every level from the *mise-en-scène* through to the behavioral stereotypes and codes of acting, linking to a form of montage and camera placement or movement that heightens the illusion of instantaneity" (LeGrice 2002: 232). If those manuals written for screenwriters are to be believed, realist film requires cause-and-effect motivation, basically linear and resolved plot development, and coherent characterization. To return to an example used earlier, when Thomas Mann presents his writer character, Gustav von Aschenbach, in the novella of *Der Tod in Venedig*, he insists on the writer's complex aesthetic and psychological

dualities from the start, offering internal motivation that frames reader expectations. When Luchino Visconti transfers this character to the screen in *Morte a Venezia*, he only allows viewers to see his contradictions progressively (Carcaud-Macaire and Clerc 1998: 157, 167). He also makes him into a composer, whose musical creativity is arguably easier or at least more potentially interesting to represent aurally and visually than that of a cerebral and verbal writer.

Avant-garde film, of course, offers other means to the adapter, and interestingly these devices have been exploited most in the transfer of poetic texts to the screen. The available technical possibilities have multiplied from the early, non-avant-garde days of cinema when D.W. Griffith's silent film *Pippa Passes* (1909) could use Robert Browning's poem for the intertitles, to Sandra Lahire's more recent (1991) cinematic response to Sylvia Plath's reading of her poems in *Lady Lazarus*. The poetry, poetic prose, and songs of Leonard Cohen, in particular, have been adapted in modes that vary from photographic montage (Josef Reeve's *Poem* [1967]) to animation (Roselyn Schwartz's *I'm Your Man* [1996]): in each case, the texts are read or sung, and their story elements and even their metaphoric language are translated into evocative visual images.

Poems simply set to music are also adaptations from the telling to the showing mode when they are then performed. In 2005 composer William Bolcolm adapted William Blake's (1789/1794) "Songs of Innocence and Experience" for over 400 musicians and chorus members. But this adaptation is only an amplification of the long *Lieder* tradition of poems set to music and sung to piano or orchestra accompaniment. However, Simon Keenlyside recently adapted even the *Lieder* or song cycle to an even more performative medium when he worked with choreographer Trisha Brown to develop a danced version for himself and three dancers of Franz Schubert's famous cycle of songs called *Winterreise* (1827).

When operas and musicals adapt literary works, the move to the showing from the telling mode has the usual formal consequences, because condensation is crucially necessary for both plays and novels. As Ulrich Weisstein explains, other conventions also lead to modifications in the process of adapting:

Since music lacks the speed and verbal dexterity of language, fewer words are needed in opera than would be required in a play of comparable length. Librettos are usually shorter than the texts of ordinary dramas [not to mention novels] Repetitions are frequently called for This drastic reduction in the quantity of text, in conjunction with the highly sensual nature of music, necessitates a simplification of both action and characters, the emotions expressed in the closed musical numbers occupying a large segment of the time normally reserved for the dramatic events. (1961: 19)

Characters are defined "succinctly and forthrightly" as a result (Weisstein 1961: 19), but may seem poorly motivated for that reason.

Yet the paring down of the plot can have a coherent and powerful dramatic effect, as in Peter Pears' reduction of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to about half its size for Benjamin Britten's operatic adaptation. A musical, which uses dialogue, may keep a literary text's words—as did Richard Nelson in writing the musical stage adaptation of part of Marcel Proust's multivolume (1913–27) *À la recherche du temps perdu* as *My Life with Albertine* (2003; music by Ricky Ian Gordon)—but it may still translate its themes to a different medium. In this adaptation, the stage version uses repetitions of the music itself to make the audience experience directly Proust's theme of time and memory and also makes Marcel a composer and not a writer.

The move from a telling to a showing mode may also mean a change in genre as well as medium, and with that too comes a shift in the expectations of the audience. W.R. Burnett's novel, *The Asphalt Jungle*, has been adapted into a straight crime film of the same name (1950), a western (*Badlanders* [1958]), a caper film (*Cairo* [1963]), and even a "blaxpotation" film (*Cool Breeze* [1972]; see Braudy 1998: 331). The same genre shift can happen with various media within one mode of engagement as well. Richard Loncraine's 1995 updated cinematic version of Shakespeare's *Richard III* has been called a generic mix of the British "heritage film" and the American gangster movie (Loehlin 1997: 72–74), no doubt causing conflicting responses in audiences. When the same playwright's *Romeo and Juliet* was transcoded into Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* as both a stage musical (1957) and a film (1961), its generic focus shifted along with the medium, as it

did once again when choreographer and hip-hop poet Rennie Harris created his *Rome and Jewel*—a political allegory of power and desire in which Jewel/Juliet is never seen on stage but remains an invisible projection of male desire and male gang politics. These last examples suggest, however, that the formal properties of the different media involved in this one particular mode of showing need to be further distinguished one from the other.

Showing ← → Showing

Stories shown in one performance medium have always been adaptable to other performance media: movies and even movie adaptations become stage musicals (*Mary Poppins* [2004], *The Producers* [2001], *The Lion King* [1997]) and turn back into films again (e.g., *The Little Shop of Horrors* [1986]). A French stage farce, *La cage aux folles*, became a 1978 film (director: Edouard Molinaro), and then had two movie sequels (1980 and 1985) before becoming a Broadway musical in 1983 and then being remade as an American story (*The Birdcage* [1996]). Television skits from *Saturday Night Live* have been adapted to film (*Wayne's World* [1992], *Blues Brothers 2000* [1998]), and films have been made of TV series (*Maverick* [1994], *The Flintstones* [1994], *Mission Impossible* [1996], *I Spy* [2000], *Starsky and Hutch* [2004], and so on). But both film and television are relatively realist media. What happens when a manifestly artificial performance form like an opera or a musical is adapted to the screen?

There seem to be two possible ways to proceed. The artifice can be acknowledged and cinematic realism sacrificed to self-reflexivity, or else the artifice can be “naturalized.” An example of the first case is Hans-Jürgen Syberberg’s 1982 film of Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal* (1872), which uses an anti-naturalistic *mise-en-scène* that is both strikingly theatrical and bravely uncinematic: the director has the characters play out the action in a highly stylized manner and on a set that consists of an enlargement of Wagner’s death mask. The opera is filmed in a studio, using rear projections of other works of art as settings. Refusing to direct our eyes by the customary shot/reverse shot structure, the director deliberately moves the camera slowly, using pan and dissolve and echoing the leisurely pace of the continuous music (Syberberg 1982:

45). All but two of the characters are played by nonsinging actors, and the prerecorded music is lip-synched—but never perfectly. Using Brechtian alienation effects, Syberberg refuses to coordinate sound and image. He also casts two actors as Parsifal—a woman (Karin Krick) and a man (Michael Kutter), but retains only one voice (the male one of Rainer Goldberg).

The alternative to this kind of reveling in filmic artifice is the naturalizing that takes place in the 1972 Bob Fosse film version of *Cabaret* (screenplay by Jay Allen with Hugh Wheeler). More naturalistic than either the John van Druten play (*I Am a Camera* [1952]) or the Harold Prince-directed musical (book by Joe Masteroff and John Kander; music by Fred Ebb [1966]), the film allows only one major plot character to sing and that is Sally Bowles—because she is a singer by trade, like the MC—and even then, she only sings at the Kit Kat Klub, where her singing can be realistically explained. The deliberate exception is the politically charged Nazi song, “Tomorrow Belongs to Me”: when the chorus joins the Hitler Youth soloist, the orchestration swells to unrealistic proportions (Clark 1991: 54). But the film’s other music is played, naturalistically, on a gramophone, on the street by an accordionist, or in a room by a piano player.

Television shares with cinema many of the same naturalistic conventions and therefore the same transcoding issues when it comes to adaptation. However, in a television series, there is more time available and therefore less compression of the adapted text is required. When Tony Kushner adapted his own plays from the 1990s, *Angels in America*, for television in 2003, the running time was approximately the same (six hours) for the series as for the plays, and the verbal text and dramatic scenes were not altered substantially. Mike Nichols, the director, did not therefore have to use filmic techniques for condensation the way the television adaptation of David Lodge’s novel, *Nice Work* (1988), had used cross-cutting at the start to convey a lot of visual information quickly. In contrast, the novel had taken its time to describe places and characters and to give biographical information about relationships in order to set up the two very different worlds of the two protagonists; the television version did this very quickly and effectively. The self-conscious, self-reflexive theatricality of Kushner’s plays—in their

portrayal of that eerie Angel, for starters—was translated into technological wizardry in the TV version, but when Peter Eötvös composed an opera based on the plays in 2004, he used different vocal and musical styles plus sound effects to get the same kind of hallucinatory effect.

Less intuitively obvious is the fact that television has also provided adaptations for the operatic stage, most controversially with *Jerry Springer—The Opera* (2003) (music by Richard Thomas; libretto by Stewart Lee). This opera transfigures “trash TV” into a high art form musically while retaining its coarseness of words and action. In a final ironic twist, a televised version of the opera adaptation was broadcast by the BBC in 2005, but not without considerable outrage from the public who found its anti-Christian allegory inappropriate for an opera on television!

Films too have been adapted to opera: Robert Altman’s 1978 movie, *A Wedding*, was “operatized” by Arnold Weinstein and William Bolcom for the Chicago Lyric Opera in 2004, with Altman directing once again. In the adaptation, 48 film characters are reduced to 16 singing parts, and the multiplotted, diffuse, and chaotic (because improvised) screen story is focused more narrowly. The realistic film’s sharp class satire, the vulgarity of the nouveau riche, the snobbery and hypocrisy of the blue-bloods, the pieties of both regarding marriage, is attenuated in the more artificial sung and staged version, perhaps because of the conventions of operatic comedy: Mozart’s class-based comic opera, *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786), was clearly the model for this modern marriage story, and the impact of its mix of comedy of manners and romance conventions was what likely made for a gentler and more sympathetic portrayal of the characters than the realist film had allowed.

Hybrid forms that provide sung music for existing films (often silent) are partial remediations that also function as adaptations. Philip Glass’ *Beauty and the Beast* (1995) takes the 1946 film by Jean Cocteau and provides music and new words for live singers, who are never quite in synch with the film action we watch on screen. Benedict Mason’s *Chaplinoperas* (1988) adapts three Chaplin shorts from 1917, *Easy Street*, *The Immigrant*, and *The Adventurer*, by, again, showing the films and adding live sung words and music that this time are synchronized with the screen action, but often more parodically than realistically.

In a reversal of this adapting relationship between film and musical theater, there is, as we have seen, that strange mixed form that many consider a kind of adaptation: the opera film or “screen opera” (Citron 2000) in which the naturalistic conventions of cinema are used to translate a most unrealistic staged art form. The integrity of both the musical score and the verbal libretto is usually retained, despite the different exigencies of a different medium, even though cuts can be made and parts of the music even recorded at different tempos to accommodate the film director’s needs, as happened in Franco Zeffirelli’s 1986 film version of Giuseppe Verdi *Otello* (1887). But in film the orchestra disappears into the sound track, and the physical presence of the conductor is lost as the “horizon stabilizing the level of artificiality the audience is asked to accept” (J. Miller 1986: 209). Instead, opera films can be shot on location, even if not necessarily the location intended in the libretto: Don Giovanni’s Seville becomes a visually sumptuous Palladian Veneto in Joseph Losey’s 1979 film of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (1787). People appear to sing in the open air, but the sound we actually hear is that of a concert hall or recording studio. Miming, they “sing,” but their mouths and throats do not strain in close-up on camera. The embodied drama and intensity of live performance are replaced not by realism so much as by the conventions of cinema’s realist acceptability: these close-ups do not risk exposing the very real physicality of singing, including the “quite repulsive detail of dental fillings and wobbling tongues” (J. Miller 1986: 208). Of course, the miniaturization that occurs with video or DVD viewing of these films reverses the effects of this gigantism of the close-up on the big screen.

All the media discussed above are performance media. What all share, therefore, is a showing mode of engagement; where they differ is in the specific constraints and possibilities of each medium’s conventions. When Andrew Bovell adapted his own 2001 play, *Speaking in Tongues*, for the cinema (renamed *Lantana* and directed by Ray Lawrence [2001]), he found he had to change the nonrealistic play’s plot, based as it was on coincidence, to suit the cinema’s naturalistic rules of probability. But when John Guare transposed his 1990 play, *Six Degrees of Separation*, to the screen (1993), he left the text virtually unaltered, but changed the theatrical conceit of the play, in which

characters tell the story to the audience, to a cinematic and realist one. He made the audience for the film's story a shifting group of friends who tune in for successive installments at different public gatherings. Not all showing is the same.

Interacting ← → Telling or Showing

The formal and hermeneutic complexity of the relationship between the telling and the showing modes that I have been exploring so far is certainly matched by that of the shift of level and type of engagement from either of these modes to the participatory one. "Deliberate user action," to use Marie-Laure Ryan's term, is what is considered fundamental and "truly distinctive" in digital media (2004c: 338), along with the interface and database (Manovich 2001). But the dice game adaptation of Jane Austen's (1796/1813) novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, arguably involves deliberate user action as well: the winner is the player who gets to the church first in order to marry. Computerized gaming, however, is the most frequent form taken by this particular adapting process. Nika Bertram's novel *Der Kahuna Modus* (2001) has a computer game adaptation (available at <http://www.kahunamodus.de/swave.html>) that, according to those who play it, changes how we read and interpret the novel. But most videogames have a close, not to say permeable, relationship to film, rather than to prose fiction and not only in the obvious sense of usually sharing a "franchise."

The computer-generated animation movie *Toy Story 2* (1999) opens with a self-reflexive gaming theme that continues throughout. *Buzz Lightyear to the Rescue* is the PlayStation game adaptation both of this film, with Buzz being a character, and of the game in which the opening sequence of the film itself is supposed to be taking place (Ward 2002: 133). The *Die Hard* films (1988, 1990, 1995) spawned the games *Die Hard Trilogy* (1996) and *Die Hard Trilogy 2* (2000), and their narrative provides the frame for the gaming experience. But in the games, there is none of the films' security that the protagonist will prevail; that insecurity or tension is, of course, part of the fun for the player. As with the various forms of hypermedia, it is process, not final or finished product, that is important.

We saw in Chapter 1 that what is often most significant for videogames is the adapted heterocosm, the spectacular world of digital animation that a player enters. Our visceral responses to the immersive experience of both the visual and audio effects (sounds and music) create an "intensity of engagement" (King 2002: 63) unrivaled in most other media.

But interactivity also makes for different formal techniques: the sense of coherence is spatial and is created by the player within a game space that is not just imagined or even just perceived but also actively engaged (Tong and Tan 2002: 107). The heterocosm of film is experienced in a game in a more intense form of "vicarious kinesthesia" and with a feeling of sensory presence (Darley 2000: 152), whether it is the world of *Star Wars* or *The Blair Witch Project*. For this reason, perhaps, the game versions (by 2004, there were five), of the survival horror story, *Silent Hill*, are predicted to be much more nightmarish than anything Christophe Gans' forthcoming film adaptation could manage. In addition, game programming has an even more goal-directed logic than film, with fewer of the gaps that film spectators, like readers, fill in to make meaning. Digital games may draw on televisual, photographic, and cinematic devices, tropes, and associations, but they always have their own logic (King and Krzywinska 2002b: 2).

Equally interactive, though in different ways, are theme parks, where we can walk right into the world of a Disney film, and virtual reality experiences, where our own bodies are made to feel as if they are entering an adapted heterocosm. Much virtual art presents mythic contexts in an illusionistic manner through a polysensory interface (Grau 2003: 350). Less immersive but still more involving than most other media are CD-ROM and Web site kinds of "interactive storytelling." Although users here are actively involved in making plot choices at certain nodal points as they experience the narrative, it is also the case that the way they "navigate through scenery and scenes, 'interact' both with locations and, even more importantly, virtual actors, the perspectives from which they view events, the atmospheres and moods encountered and experienced: everything has to be consciously designed and must adhere to fixed rules. This might also be termed the 'staging of interactivity'" (Ward 2002: 166). This carefully designed electronic staging

is best for adapting certain kinds of narrative structures and therefore genres, namely those of thrillers, detective stories, and documentaries.

Throughout this section, in referring to a generic category of form when discussing adaptations and the question of medium specificity, I have obviously been including what Gérard Genette (1979) would separate out as “form” (prose, poetry, images, music, sounds), “genre” (novel, play [comedy, tragedy], opera); and “mode” (narrative, dramatic). My alternate choice of theoretical focus—on the shifts among telling, showing, and interacting modes of engagement—is what has motivated my seeming mixing of categories. To explore the complexities of these shifts in more detail, however, I select several formal areas that either have been the most contested or have spawned the most “givens” or accepted truisms and therefore need challenging. For instance, the teleological historical argument for film as the culminating development of other genres and media, or at least as the most absorptive of media, goes like this: “Historically, the novel succeeded the drama, but absorbed some of its qualities (character, dialogue) while adding possibilities of its own (interior monologue, point of view, reflection, comment, irony). Similarly, film initially followed the basic principles of narrative prose and copied stage drama” while developing its own techniques and forms, as well as its own means of production, distribution, and consumption (Giddings, Selby, and Wensley 1990: ix-x). Of this long list, it is precisely such elements as interior monologue, point of view, reflection, comment, and irony, along with such other issues as ambiguity and time, which have attracted the most attention in the critical and theoretical work on the move from the printed page to any form of performance and from there to the participatory. Therefore, they are my main focus in what follows as I test out some of the most common theoretical truisms or clichés against actual adaptation practice.

Cliché #1: Only the Telling Mode (Especially Prose Fiction) Has the Flexibility to Render Both Intimacy and Distance in Point of View.

As we have seen and as any basic book on storytelling or for that matter any advanced book on narratology will confirm, telling a story is not the same thing as showing a story. But the interrelationships between the novelistic and the cinematic alone suggest that such a

simple statement is not without problems. Joseph Conrad, in the preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* famously wrote: “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*” (1897/1968: 708). Critics differ on whether the modern novel owes a debt to film or vice versa in its use of multiple points of view, ellipses, fragmentation, and discontinuity (Elliott 2003: 113–14; Wagner 1975: 14–16). Novelist Claude Simon claimed, “I cannot write my novels other than by constantly defining the different positions that the narrator or narrators occupy in space (field of vision, distance, mobility in relation to the scene described—or, if you prefer, in another vocabulary: camera angle, close-up, medium shot, panoramic shot, motionless shot, etc.)” (qtd. in Morrissette 1985: 17).

But the early adaptation theorist, George Bluestone, had argued back in 1957/1971 that film adaptations actually arose when the novel underwent a crisis of identity in the early twentieth century, turning to “the drama of linguistic inadequacy” (11). Because film could represent visual and dramatic narrative so vividly, the novel retreated to interiority (Elliott 2003: 52). This theory makes film adaptations into the revenge of story, abandoned as the novel got all caught up with language. It is as if film versions were the response to that 1927 attempt at literary prognostication, *Scheherazade, or the Future of the English Novel*. Its author, John Carruthers, relegated the high modernists to the trash heap of the future in favor of “a fresh insistence on the story, plot” (1927: 92) by “reincarnations of Scheherazade, the Teller of STORIES” (95). But precisely how would these future Scheherazades tell their stories on film or on stage? Are performance media limited to a third-person point of view? Or can the intimacy of the first-person narrator be achieved in performance? Do techniques like voice-over or a soliloquy work? What about the power of the close-up and its ability to offer “the microdrama of the human countenance” (Bluestone 1957/1971: 27)?

If *Story* (1997), Robert McKee’s bible for screenwriters, is to be trusted, films should *never* resort to “literary” devices or their equivalents, such as *deus ex machina* endings or voice-overs: that would be telling not showing. The splendid joke of McKee’s “appearance” in the film *Adaptation*, of course, is that the film itself both enacts and

explodes his injunction. Linda Seger's popular adaptation manual, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, calls devices like voice-over disruptive (1992: 25) for they make us focus on the words we are hearing and not on the action we are seeing. It is thus not surprising that Bapsi Sidhwa insisted on voice-overs in the film adaptation of her novel, *Cracking India* (1991), directed by Deepa Mehta (released as *Earth* [1999]), or that this insistence made the director distinctly uneasy (Sidhwa 1999: 21). Clint Eastwood's film of *Million Dollar Baby* (2004)—Paul Haggis' adaptation of F.X. Toole's (Jerry Boyd's pseudonym) *Rope Burns: Stories from the Corner* (2000)—effectively uses voice-over throughout to make one character (Eddie Scrap-Iron Dupris) the moral center of the work. But when Robert Bresson used an off-camera voice to represent the diary entries in his 1950 film adaptation of Georges Bernanos' *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1936), the critics were immediately divided over its success.

Attempts to use the camera for first-person narration—to let the spectator see only what the protagonist sees—are infrequent. Despite the well-known example of Robert Montgomery's 1946 adaptation of Raymond Chandler's *Lady in the Lake* (1943), in which a camera was positioned on the protagonist's chest, first-person point-of-view films are often called "clumsy, ostentatiously and even pretentiously artistic" (Giddings, Selby, and Wensley 1990: 79). From the other direction, novelizers of films have to decide what point of view to take to replicate the eye of the camera, and their task can be just as difficult. Most films use the camera as a kind of moving third-person narrator to represent the point of view of a variety of characters at different moments (Stam 2000: 72). This is so much the norm that when specific points of view are used, the film stands out, as does Akira Kurosawa's famous *Rashomon* (1950), which provides four different characters' versions of events. When the BBC televised, in a studio, Benjamin Britten's 1951 opera of *Billy Budd* in 1966, the camera made Captain Vere central in a way that librettist E.M. Forster decried (Tambling 1987: 88); however, arguably the opera text itself, in adapting Melville's novel, had already made Vere into a central point-of-view character by having him narrate the beginning and the end of the story on stage.

I have been using the term "point of view," but there is a difference between what characters and therefore what we *see* and what they might actually *know* (Jost 2004: 73). In Anthony Minghella's 1996 film adaptation of Michael Ondaatje's narratively disorienting novel, *The English Patient* (1992), the titular character is the major focalizer: the one who determines what we know. However, in fact our perspective is much broader, thanks to voice-overs and other characters' information, conveyed often through flashbacks (B. Thomas 2000: 222).

In a multitrack medium, everything can convey point of view: camera angle, focal length, music, *mise-en-scène*, performance, or costume (Stam 2005b: 39). What is more important than thinking in terms of first- or third-person narration, argues Robert Stam, is "authorial control of intimacy and distance, the calibration of access to characters' knowledge and consciousness" (2005b: 35). An example is Gustav Hasford's 1983 autobiographical novel, *The Short-Timers*. It is narrated by a character named Joker, a writer for a Marine paper, and the story is told in an episodic, fragmented, disconnected style—ostensibly as an objective correlative to the character's and author's subjective experience of the "insanity" of the war in Vietnam. When Stanley Kubrick and Michael Herr adapted this novel into the film, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), they substituted a more ironic, distanced journalist's perspective and offered a more self-reflexive showing of the construction of images of war and of war as morally absurd.

In the adaptation from film into videogame too, the use of point of view challenges the truism about prose fiction's unique flexibility. Even without the use of virtual reality, which really is an embodied first-person perspective, computer animation allows for more variety than is usually acknowledged. Games offer either a third-person or a first-person shooter position, with multiplayer options. There are also variants that combine both: we can *act* as first-person shooters, but *see* third-person shooters—from behind the character or avatar. In the first-person role, players do not so much passively watch as have "a proxy view of the gaming world from behind the eyes of their onscreen character" (Bryce and Rutter 2002: 71). This provides a more immediate relationship with the character and a greater immersion in the animated world of the game. Third-person shooter games use prerendered

camera angles to direct the attention of the player, much as the camera directs the film spectator's eyes.

However, this cliché about point of view in these different modes of engagement points toward the larger and much-debated issue of the ability of different media to present inner and outer worlds, subjectivity and materiality. Although the discussions of this issue in the critical literature are limited to telling and showing, they may relate as well to the participatory mode, which may not share what film and literature do: "a more or less highly developed use of dialogue, speech, and language" (Morrissette 1985: 13).

Cliché #2: Interiority is the Terrain of the Telling Mode; Exteriority is Best Handled by Showing and Especially by Interactive Modes.

In other words, language, especially literary fiction, with its visualizing, conceptualizing, and intellectualized apprehension, "does" interiority best; the performing arts, with their direct visual and aural perception, and the participatory ones, with their physical immersion, are more suited to representing exteriority. Arguably, modernist fiction exacerbated the division between print literature and cinema, in particular, by giving new significance to the inner life of characters, to psychic complexity, thoughts, and feelings. James Joyce may have claimed that his memory functioned like a "cinematograph," but his classic modernist works have also made him, in some eyes, into the precursor of the new media: "The process of thought itself now constitutes the topic and makes it possible to leave the linear, straightforward world of logic. Joyce ... uses the stream of consciousness technique to express the merger of subject and world, of the internal and the external" (Dinkla 2002: 30). And, by this logic, the "rhizomatic networking" of *Finnegans Wake* found a worthy heir in hypertext as a narrative strategy (Dinkla 2002: 31).

That said, there has nonetheless always been a difference between what critics say about Joyce's use of stream of consciousness as cinematic or even new medial and their view that his verbally and structurally complex works are, in fact, unadaptable to the screen (Gibbons 2002: 127). Yet Joseph Strick's film adaptations of Joyce's novels have sought purely cinematic equivalents of such issues as the tension

between realism and abstraction by using, in *Ulysses* (1967) for example, a wide-angle lens, associative editing patterns, and a sound design that undermines logic and continuity (Pramaggiore 2001: 56). In short, he refuses the standard Hollywood conventions for representing subjectivity (shot/reverse shot, eye-line match) and uses avant-garde film techniques instead, including experimentations with sound and even trying out screens of total darkness. In his later (1978) adaptation of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Strick uses sequential flashbacks and flashforwards to give a sense of Stephen's fractured subjectivity. In the film version of the story, internalized guilt, more than the birth of artistic creativity, becomes the central theme. The director expands on the text's line, "Tear out his eyes / apologise," and selects a visual motif of eyes, in close-up and symbolic montage, to embody and establish this theme in the opening minutes of the film.

Stephen's personal diary has less of a role in the film than in the novel, but in the scenes at the end where it is present, Strick uses voice-over and montage, refusing to let the aural and the visual cohere perfectly until the fourth journal representation as a sign of the diary's "presence"; then, the fifth time the diary is shown, the voice-over gives way to the actual enactment of the scene described (Armour 1981: 284). Presumably the audience has, by this time, been taught and learned this diary-code, even though the voice-over returns at the end just to make sure. It is true that the novel's emphasis on language—Stephen's obsession with words, written and oral—and on the other senses (smells, sounds, sensations) is sacrificed to the visual in the film adaptation. And one result is that the transformation of Stephen into an artist feels unmotivated, but the movie does find visual ways to allow us into Stephen's psyche and imagination.

Nevertheless, despite cinematic attempts like this, *New Yorker* film critic, Pauline Kael, could still confidently assert, "Movies are good at action; they're not good at reflective thought or conceptual thinking. They're good for immediate stimulus" (qtd. in Peary and Shatzkin 1977: 3). She is in good company in this assertion, of course: Bertolt Brecht too claimed that the film demands "external action and not introspective psychology" (1964: 50). Film is not supposed to be good at getting inside a character, for it can only show exteriors and never actually tell

what is going on beneath the visible surface. Seger's manual puts it this way: "Material that is internal and psychological, that concentrates on inner thoughts and motivations, will be difficult to express dramatically" (1992: 55). It is decidedly the case that elaborate interior monologues and analyses of inner states are difficult to represent visually in performance, but as Strick shows in *Portrait*, sound and avant-garde film devices can work to signal interiority nonetheless.

Virginia Woolf could not resist attacking the very idea of a film adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, with its heroine presented as a "voluptuous lady in black velvet wearing pearls." She simply refused to recognize her, because she insisted that, as a reader of the novel, she knew Anna "almost entirely by the inside of her mind—her charm, her passion, her despair" (1926: 309). Without that inside information, we would miss the essence of the character. Helen Schlegel's "Panic and emptiness!" moment of terror in *Howards End*, as we saw in Chapter 1, becomes a mere abstract description in a lecture on Beethoven in the Merchant/Ivory film adaptation. Therefore, the argument goes, film can show us characters experiencing and thinking, but can never reveal their experiences or thoughts, except through that "literary" device of the voice-over.

Yet film can and does find cinematic equivalents, as we have seen already. Certain scenes, for example, can be made to take on emblematic value, making what is going on inside a character comprehensible to the spectator. For example, the protagonist in Visconti's *Morte a Venezia*, an aging man, is transformed by a barber through the use of hair dye and cosmetics into a parody of the image of a young man capable of falling in love with a beautiful boy. This scene exists in Mann's novella of *Der Tod in Venedig*, but it has much greater significance and weight in Visconti's film version: given the power of the visual image itself and of Dirk Bogarde's subtle acting, the tension between Aschenbach's anguish and his desire, between his fear and his hope, is made manifest on screen in brutally tight close-up.

External appearances are made to mirror inner truths. In other words, visual and aural correlatives for interior events can be created, and in fact film has at its command many techniques that verbal texts do not. The power of that close-up, for example, to create psychological

intimacy is so obvious (think too of Ingmar Bergman's films) that directors can use it for powerful and revealing interior ironies: in the Stephen Frears film adaptation, *Dangerous Liaisons*, described earlier, Valmont watches a woman miscarrying his child in great pain, and the close-up on his face shows his frigid detachment.

Although it is a naturalistic medium in most of its uses, film can also create visual, externalized analogues to subjective elements—fantasy or magic realism—by such techniques as slow motion, rapid cutting, distortional lenses (fish-eye, telephoto), lighting, or the use of various kinds of film stocks (Jinks 1971: 36–37). Stam insists, "As a technology of representation, the cinema is ideally equipped to magically multiply times and spaces; it has the capacity to mingle very diverse temporalities and spatialities" (2005a: 13). Editing becomes what Susan Sontag once called "an equivalent to the magician's sleight of hand" (1999: 256), because unlike theater, film can represent *anything*. Flashbacks and flashforwards can contribute to a sense of unreality, as can sound effects and music, of course. The use of shadow and space in Orson Welles' 1962 adaptation of Franz Kafka's *Der Prozess* (1925) or the deployment of color in Roger Corman's 1964 version of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842) are other good examples of how film can represent the subjective cinematically.

Dream-like states, in fact, have come to have their own visual and auditory conventions in film. It is not for nothing, therefore, that the Dada and surrealist poets saw film as a privileged mode of conveying the unconscious. They were thinking of avant-garde expressionist film, no doubt, with its odd camera angles, unusual lighting, slow motion, and sequences repeated or presented in reverse (Morrisette 1985: 13), but even traditional narrative film has its accepted means of representing interiority, and they are often very sophisticated narratively. The separation of the sound and image tracks, for instance, can allow a character's inner state to be communicated to the audience while remaining unknown to the other characters on the screen. As early as 1916, Hugo Münsterberg had argued that, unlike a stage play, a "photoplay" or film could reproduce mental functions on screen: it "obeys the law of the mind rather than those of the outer world," shaping material to "approximate flashes of memory, imaginative visions,

time leaps" (1916/1970: 41). Many years later novelist and filmmaker Alain Robbe-Grillet would corroborate this notion from the reverse angle, arguing that the French New Novelists, as they were known, were not attracted to the objectivity of the camera as an analogy for their work, but rather to its possibilities in the domain of the subjective, of the imaginary (1963: 161).

Lawrence Kramer has argued that it is the music in films that "connects us to the spectacle on screen by invoking a dimension of depth, of interiority, borrowed from the responses of our own bodies as we listen to the insistent production of rhythms, tone colors, and changes in dynamics" (1991: 156). If this is the case for film music on a sound track, how much more so must it be for live opera, for which, it has been argued, music conveys the rhythm of the emotions at the same time as language names them: "The merger of music and words, the temporal and the spatial, the general and the particular, should theoretically result in a more satisfactory image of the mental universe than is furnished by either in isolation" (Weisstein 1961: 18). Although admittedly more often an ideal than a reality, such a merger does allow a consideration of interiority in even this incredibly "stagey" art form.

Characters in an opera or a musical may appear two-dimensional because of that necessary compression of their stories, but their music has been likened to their un verbalized subconscious. The words they sing may *address* the outer world, but their music *represents* their inner lives (Halliwell 1996: 89; Schmidgall 1977: 15; Weisstein 1961: 20). Why? Because the convention of opera is that characters on stage do not hear the music they sing, except when they self-consciously perform what are called "phenomenal songs" (lullabies, toasts, etc.). Only the audience hears the rest of the music; only the audience has access to its level of meaning (Abbate 1991: 119). This is why music can represent interiority. In fact, however, opera also has a fixed convention for representing interiority: the aria. Dramatic action and conversation stop during the aria, and we eavesdrop on a character's moment of introspection and reflection (Weisstein 1961: 18). In "through-composed" operas without arias, such as the music dramas of Richard Wagner, musical repetitions and variations—usually called leitmotifs—can bring to the audience's ears what the characters cannot consciously

face. Isolde may sing of her hatred for Tristan in Wagner's work named after the legendary lovers, but she does so to music we already associate with her love for him.

When operas are filmed, as we have seen, the conventions of realism seem to work against even the genre's conventionalized ability to convey interiority. Yet here too ways have been found to do so: Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's 1976 television version of Puccini's 1904 opera, *Madama Butterfly*, visualizes the idea that arias provide the internal thoughts and emotions of characters by not having the singers' lips move during the arias. We hear the arias, but do not see them physically sung. Franco Zeffirelli uses different means to externalize the internal in his 1983 film version of Verdi's opera, *La Traviata* (1853): drawing on the text that the opera had in fact adapted (*La Dame aux camélias* [1848] by Alexandre Dumas, *filis*), he has his Violetta repeatedly look at herself in a mirror. Although this action is cinematically realistic (she is checking to see if she is still beautiful or whether she looks ill), it is also a self-reflexive way of both letting us into her mind and also showing us how she has internalized the objectifying male gaze. The director had already established and underlined the specifically male view of her early in the film by adding the image of a young man's curious and desirous stare. Zeffirelli also allows his camera to get into Violetta's mind in a sense and to show us how she sees her lover, especially when she is ill and feverish (Tambling 1987: 182).

So far, I have been countering one half of the second cliché, suggesting the ability of performance media in the showing mode to "do" interiority, despite assertions to the contrary. However, it is also necessary to examine the other half of the cliché, which claims the reverse, that performance "does" exteriority better than print media. Siegfried Kracauer insisted that filmic adaptations make sense "only when the content of the novel is firmly rooted in objective reality, not in mental or spiritual experience" (in Andrew 1976: 121). So Emile Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877) would be adaptable; Bernanos' *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1936) would not. Yet Robert Bresson valiantly attempted the latter, as we have seen. But are film adaptations necessarily always better at conveying exteriority than the novels themselves? After all, prose description can go on at some length, but can also select

the details that are narratively significant; in a film all the items are concurrently present, of equal weight and thus significance—at least until the camera lingers or lighting cues our eye. Characters may be described once and in significantly selected detail in a novel, but are seen over and over in a movie, so the significant particularities of their appearances are lost with repetition and naturalization. Film is, in editor Walter Murch's terms, a "highly redundant" medium, whereas the novel is characterized by "story abundance," and if this difference is not taken into account by the adapters, it makes for "filmic trouble" (qtd. in Ondaatje 2002: 127). In a novel like *Great Expectations* (1860–61), Dickens was obsessed with both the naturalistic and symbolic value of dress and appearance, but he specifically chose not to describe Jaggers in any detail. Yet, "in the pictorially-naturalistic medium of the film, if we are to see a character, then the character must by necessity be described. But to describe, to visualize the character, destroys the very subtlety with which the novel creates this particular character in the first place" (Giddings, Selby, and Wensley 1990: 81).

With animation in film, video, interactive fiction, or videogames, exterior action is not captured at 24 frames per second by a camera, but is created frame by frame. This is how special effects can be created that make possible comic book adaptations to film—like the recent *Spider-Man* movies. Likewise the supernatural world of wizardry and monsters of the Harry Potter stories can be made visible—and realistic—through computerized media. But just as Eisenstein saw in montage the equivalent of dialectical reasoning, Lev Manovich argues, in "From the Externalization of the Psyche to the Implantation of Technology," that new visual technologies, from Galton's photography to the new media, have indeed been used to externalize and objectify the workings of the mind.

Is this the reason why the animated worlds of videogames can be used to create both interiority and exteriority, the latter either with uncanny naturalistic accuracy or as total fantasy? The use of perspectival space, the precise rendering of surface detail, and the ability to represent movement realistically in games like *Shrek* (2001) all work together to "offer a technological 'appropriation' of the real" (Ward 2002: 132). And although it may be true that the characters or avatars

have no real interiority, players do, and in manipulating the avatar's movements, they can attribute their own motives, desires, hopes, and fears in the context of the game, of course, to this character (Weinbren 2002: 186).

Representations of interiority and exteriority obviously involve this spatial dimension and not only in animation; however, the temporal is also relevant to the formal dimension of adaptation: both the time of the content and that of the "narration" (in whatever mode or medium). If Lessing were correct in calling literature an art of time (and painting an art of space), we might expect the telling mode, as in an extended narrative fiction, to be the best at depicting time, thus creating particular problems for adaptation to other modes. Again, however, the truisms of theory need testing against the realities of practice.

Cliché #3: The Showing and Interacting Modes Have Only One Tense: The Present; The Mode of Telling Alone can Show Relations among Past, Present, and Future.

The camera, like the stage, is said to be all presence and immediacy. The same is claimed for electronic technology. Prose fiction alone, by this logic, has the flexibility of time-lines and the ability to shift in a few words to the past or the future, and these abilities are always assumed to have no real equivalents in performance or interactive media. In a realist aesthetic, at any rate, stories in these media take place in the present tense; they are more interested in what is going to happen next than in what has already happened (Bluestone 1957/1971: 50; Seger 1992: 24): "In translating literature into moving pictures, once-upon-a-time collides with here-and-now" (Giddings, Selby, and Wensley 1990: xiii). This is why a film can tolerate less plot "retardation" (Abbott 2002: 109), even for suspense purposes, than can a novel. Yet, unlike the stage, the cinema is indeed capable of flashbacks and flashforwards, and its very immediacy can make the shifts potentially more effective than in prose fiction where the narrating voice stands between the characters immersed in time and the reader. Performance tropes do exist, in other words, to fuse and interrelate past, present, and future.

For instance, literature's "meanwhile," "elsewhere," and "later" find their equivalent in the filmic dissolve, as one image fades in as another

fades out and time merges with space in a more immediate way than is possible with words. With the time-lapse dissolve, not only time and space but also cause and effect are synthesized (Morrisette 1985: 18–19). This is one of the ways in which the modernist novel's stream of consciousness and interior monologue became adaptable. Likewise, visual and aural leitmotifs can function in a movie to suggest the past through memory—with the memory of the audience replicating that of the characters, though on another level of narration. Arguably Marcel Proust's externalized internal signs—the Madeleine cookie and the uneven pavement stone that provoke the protagonist's memory in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27)—prefigure cinema's techniques. And as Stam reminds us, there are in fact many ways in which the past or “pastness” can be represented in film: through décor and costumes, props, music, titles (e.g., London 1712), color (sepia tints), archaic recording devices, and artificially aged or real past footage (2005b: 21).

Another aspect of this temporal truism is that a novel's description of action, setting, or character can be long or short, detailed or vague, and that the reader judges significance from the time spent on it by the narrator. In film, people appear within a setting in action all at once, with no mediating assistance for the spectator. But the kind of shot (long, medium, close-up; angles; reverses), not to mention the duration of the shot, is in fact always dictated by the dramatic importance of what is being filmed, not by any naturalistic timing or pacing of the actual action. The director or editor or camera operator does indeed mediate and not only through the visual. Unlike a live performance on stage that occurs in real time and in which sounds and images are correlated exactly, in a film the relation between sound and image is a constructed one. Visual frames and different soundtracks (dialogue, voice-overs, music, noises) can be combined, as the film editor manipulates time and space relations.

Cinematic adapters, in other words, have at their disposal a veritable wealth of technical possibilities and now learned and accepted conventions to tackle the move from print to screen, even with texts that are temporally complex or resolutely interiorized. However, this does not mean that there will be no problems. Thomas Mann has and takes much time in his novella of *Der Tod in Venedig* to allow a young

boy's beauty to insinuate itself into the mind of both his protagonist, Aschenbach, and his reader. In the film adaptation, Visconti has to “throw the image at us, via the handsome Björn Andresen” to get the story going. Rather than gradually learning to see Tadzio through the learned Aschenbach's idealizing (indeed Hellenizing) eyes in the novella, we instead watch him and the boy “exchange lengthy glances, whose sexual explicitness turns Aschenbach into a foolish dirty old man, and the boy into a pretty little tease” (Paul Zimmerman, qtd. in Wagner 1975: 343). Time and timing clearly present a real challenge for the adapter to a different medium.

The stage has different and perhaps more limited means at its disposal for dealing with temporal issues because, as just noted, a live performance takes place in real time. An adaptation has to take into account not only changes in time in the story but also the technicalities of, for example, the time needed to change scenes. Kracauer points out that staged operas have added temporal problems: arias in effect stop time. Not only are arias conventionalized moments of interiority in a seemingly very exteriorized art form, as we have seen, but they also arrest the action: their “sung passions transfigure physical life instead of penetrating it” (Kracauer 1955: 19). For this reason, he argues, “[t]he world of opera is built upon premises which radically defy those of the cinematic approach” (19). The naturalism of television and film may seem alien to the artifice of this sung, staged form, but that has not prevented opera from having a second life in both media, thanks to what are more adaptations than recordings of productions.

Although the opera's drama does indeed go on in real time, its timing is not the timing of the stage play, and the reason is the music (Halliwell 1996: 87–88). As composer Virgil Thomson vividly puts it: “An opera is not a concert in costume. Neither is it just a play with music laid on. It is a dramatic action viewed through poetry and music, animated and controlled by its music, which is continuous. It owes to poetry much of its grandeur, to music all of its pacing” (1982: 6). The pulse of the music, in operas as in musicals, provides another temporal dimension—both an advantage and a constraint—that other art forms do not have. Directors and editors of video versions of operas often

derive the pacing of camera shots from the rhythm of the music—including its chord structures and harmonies (see Large 1992: 201).

A special adaptation problem occurs in all media: how to represent or thematize the unfolding of time—something that can be done so easily in prose fiction. Classical films resorted to images of calendar pages turning to cue spectators to time passing. In a novel, characters can *become* bored; we can read of time passing, of mounting boredom, yet not become bored ourselves. In a graphic novel we can actually see this numbing occur, without succumbing to it in our own right. On film, however, the process of becoming bored cannot really be represented so easily, given the amount of screen time in real viewing time it would take to do so naturalistically, as Claude Chabrol discovered when he attempted to dramatize Emma Bovary's boredom in his 1991 film adaptation of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857). Yet it is also the case that a leap forward (off-screen) is also a cinematic convention that spectators understand. And the repeated breakfast scenes in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) also convey time passing into boredom through the simple act of repetition.

Television adaptations usually have more time at their disposal, of course, and therefore more flexibility. Novels like David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988) have been made into serials. But this move entails other temporal constraints, such as the need to divide the narrative into a specified number of blocks of equal duration. In the words of Lodge, who wrote the screenplay for his own novel, "No narrative medium is as precisely timed as an episode of a television series. When transmitted, it must fit a preordained slot measured in minutes and even seconds" (1993: 193). Although the writer needs to think about this precise timing, it is the editor, of course, who in the end must achieve it. But this is where another kind of time constraint appears: as a medium television is conventionally faster paced than film, for instance, and an adapter has to take this pace into account even when working with inevitably slower paced literary works. When classic novels are adapted for television, however, a textual resonance of the literary connection is often retained in both action and camera movement, recalling the idea that reading is a more "leisurely, measured and thoughtful pursuit" than television viewing (Cardwell 2002: 112).

The visual and aural immediacy of performance media may indeed create the sense of a continuous present, but time and timing are much more complex than this would suggest in the process of adaptation. The proof is in the parodies. In the 30-second classical movie versions created by animation artist Jennifer Shiman, the stories are deconstructed, reconstructed, and reshown, as acted out by serious, earnest bunny characters. At the other extreme, Douglas Gordon takes popular films and expands them—stretching Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1963) to 24 hours and Ford's *The Searchers* to 5 years (were we to want to play the whole thing). Both artists' parodic adaptations ironically place in the foreground the conventions of the cinematic manipulation of time. The "instantaneity" made technically possible by remote communications systems (telephone, radio, television) is new to the last century, and it is this that makes possible our acceptance of the illusion that a film is happening in the present and that we are present as it happens (LeGrice 2002: 232).

Videogames based on films, of course, go one step further and immerse us in the time and pace of real life while still maintaining this cinematic illusion. But electronic technology in general offers various new adaptation possibilities, not least when it comes to representing the temporal. Lev Manovich argues that in computerized films, for instance, time and memory can actually be spatialized through montage:

The logic of replacement [of one image by another, filling the screen], characteristic of cinema, gives way to the logic of addition and co-existence. Time becomes spatialised, distributed over the surface of the screen. In spatial montage, nothing is potentially forgotten, nothing is erased. Just as we use computers to accumulate endless texts, messages, notes and data, and just as a person, going through life, accumulates more and more memories, with the past slowly acquiring more weight than the future, so spatial montage can accumulate events and images as it progresses through its narrative. In contrast to the cinema's screen, which primarily functioned as a record of perception, the computer screen functions as a recorder of memory. (2002b: 71)

Whether these possibilities will be exploited extensively by adapters remains to be seen, because most of the films being produced on this

model so far are not in fact adaptations at all. The new media, however, are available for use; indeed they offer very suggestive possibilities for adapting temporally and spatially complex works from other media. Hoss Gifford's (Screenbase Media and Canongate Books) production of an interactive Web site (http://hossgifford.com/pi/promo/life_of_pi.htm), "inspired by" Yann Martel's 2002 novel, *Life of Pi*, selects several scenes from the novel and presents them in a mix of animation and an interactive game, with engaging visual effects. The aural text, both words and sounds, enhances the visuals (in the form of computerized images and words). We experience time passing as in a film, but we also control time in the game parts, making for an intriguing hybrid temporal dimension.

Over the years, point of view, interiority/exteriority, and time have become major contentious issues, as well as a major source of theoretical truisms, about adaptation and medium specificity. But they are joined by another loose grouping of issues around verbal and narrative complexity, and these too need testing against actual practice.

Cliché #4: Only Telling (in Language) Can Do Justice to Such Elements as Ambiguity, Irony, Symbols, Metaphors, Silences, and Absences; These Remain "Untranslatable" in the Showing or Interacting Modes.

In 1898, Henry James published and in 1908 revised what he himself thought of as a "potboiler" called *The Turn of the Screw*. In 1934, Edmund Wilson provoked, even if he did not begin, what has proved to be a seemingly endless scholarly debate about how to interpret this enigmatic text. The fight over this text has always been over its resolute and deliberate ambiguities. Is the story's governess hallucinating the appearance of Quint and Jessel (said to be deceased) because of her own sexual repression? Are the children in the governess' care possessed by something supernatural and malevolent that the governess discovers, or is she herself possessed by some neurotic obsession? *The Turn of the Screw* would seem to be very recalcitrant to adaptation to a performance medium. Yet, it has proved quite the contrary. In one of the many film adaptations of it, Jack Clayton's 1961 *The Innocents* (screenplay by Truman Capote and William Archibald), the spectator is, in fact, given a chance to weigh the evidence for these different possible interpretations

of the text's ambiguities. The result is a constant flipping back and forth of our sympathies in response to the governess' imagination. The camera too sometimes alternates point of view, as in the final confrontation between the governess and her charge, Miles (J. Allen 1977: 136). The soundtrack is used not only to suggest interiority but also to reinforce ambiguity: are the eerie sounds we are hearing in the governess' mind, or do they signal supernatural presences? When what we hear does not match what we see, the resulting suggestiveness can be more potent than the actual appearances of the ghosts. But, in the end, James' narrative ambiguity is refused in the naturalistic medium of film, though in an interestingly inclusive way: Quint does exist and possesses Miles, and the governess is herself possessed and in the end also possesses the dead Miles (J. Allen 1977: 140).

When Myfanwy Piper and Benjamin Britten adapted James' story in 1954 to a chamber opera form, they faced an even greater challenge than that of the screenplay writers: how to represent this kind of ambiguity in *live sung stage* action. In fact, however, it is Britten's music that pulls it off. Each of the brief, separate scenes that compose the opera is linked to the one before by a repeated musical theme (with variations), whose intervals rotate in screw-like fashion (Whittall 1992: 847). These children do not *sound* musically like Clayton's "innocents," for even while looking guileless and singing "Tom, Tom, the piper's son," they manage to sound very sinister indeed. Here the ghosts do appear, but their eerie and exotic music makes clear they are from a different realm, even if their malign but seductive power over the children is palpable—and audible. Yet, the novella's famed ambiguity is retained to the very end, as the music underlines the doubt as to the real cause of Miles' death by having the governess' vocal line fade on a chromatic dissonance.

This example seems to contradict Patrick J. Smith's famous pronouncement that in operatic adaptation "any ambiguities or variant readings possible in any of the very great works of art ... must necessarily be omitted or toned down, to the detriment not only of the original but also of the adaptation itself" (1970: 342–43). Verbal and narrative ambiguities do indeed need to be dramatized in performance media, but that task is far from impossible. And something can be gained as well as lost. The visual and aural immediacy of that dramatization

cannot be matched even by the prose of someone like Henry James. The price to pay? (There always is a trade-off in adaptation.) When a play or opera is staged, the director and performers make choices that inevitably reduce the “interpretive richness” of the written text (Scholes 1976: 285); in a movie or television adaptation, those choices are final, recorded forever. From a word-oriented writer’s point of view, this is a serious limitation, as revealed by Patrick McGrath, who adapted his own novel *Spider* for David Cronenberg’s 2002 film:

The writer of prose fiction, when he first turns his hand to screen-writing, often does so with a condescending air. Surely this can’t be so very difficult, he thinks; all that’s required is to come up with the bare bones of a story. So he goes to work anticipating a quick job with easy money at the end of it, and possibly a bit of glory. He is soon disabused of these prideful assumptions. It becomes apparent to him that what he has at his disposal is merely an ordered succession of dramatic pictures. With these he must do the work he once did with all the infinite resources of the English language at his back. (2002: R1)

But for visually oriented filmmakers, the opposite is true. They can move from that single-track language to a multitrack medium and thereby not only make meaning possible on many levels but appeal to other physical senses as well.

However, the “infinite resources” of the English—or any other—language include symbols and metaphors, and if these are to be realized in a showing mode in performance media, they could simply be spoken by a character or else they must be physically materialized in an iconic form or otherwise translated into equivalents. Despite the feeling among critics that none of the over 100 adaptations to stage, screen, and radio of Dickens’ *Great Expectations* ever managed to achieve the melding of the naturalistic and symbolic in the novel’s verbal texture (see, for examples, Bolton 1987: 416–29; Giddings, Selby, and Wensley 1990: 86–87), performance media once again do have their own resources on which to draw. As we have seen, operas and musicals can deploy music to symbolic ends: just as Shakespeare’s *Othello* gradually takes on Iago’s imagery, Verdi and Boito’s operatic *Otello* gradually takes on Iago’s music (most audibly, its triplets and dotted rhythms),

as the protagonist in both the play and the opera is brought down to his antagonist’s level. Even in film, with its naturalistic demands, editing can manage to suggest metaphoric comparison by linking disparate images together. The camera can isolate some element of a scene and bestow upon it not only meaning but also symbolic significance by its act of contextualizing. Thomas Hardy’s image of his protagonist in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) with her “peony lips” is translated by Roman Polanski in his 1979 film *Tess* into an image of Natassia Kinski’s full red lips opening to receive a strawberry from Alex (Elliott 2003: 234).

Verbal irony presents a particular challenge for adaptation to performance media, not in dialogue, obviously, but when used in the showing mode. To invoke a work mentioned earlier in another context, William Makepeace Thackeray’s 1844 novel, *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, is presented as intended by its first-person narrator to be the tale of “the triumphs and misfortunes of a sympathetic and resourceful eighteenth-century gentleman,” or so we are told. Thanks to Thackeray’s deft irony, however, it actually comes across as “the diary of a wicked and self-deceiving brute” (Sinyard 1986: 130). We have already seen that first-person narration is difficult for film, and indeed, Stanley Kubrick’s omniscient narratorial camera in his 1975 *Barry Lyndon* rejects intimacy for distance, and what we lose of the sense of the voice of a crass, self-obsessed individual we gain in the feeling of that individual in the context of a snobbish society. The result, however, is that this Barry Lyndon is much more sympathetic than that of Thackeray’s novel, despite the movie’s use of an ironic voice-over narrator between scenes.

The difficulties of dramatizing such verbal elements as irony, ambiguity, metaphor, or symbolism pale in comparison with the problems faced by the adapter who has to dramatize what is *not* present. Absences and silences in prose narratives almost invariably get made into presences in performance media, or so this aspect of the cliché would have it, thereby losing their power and meaning. But is this necessarily the case? In the next section, I test this truism against an extended example of an adaptational practice that not only addresses this particular point but also engages en route almost all of the issues around mode and medium specificity that this chapter has been addressing. Therefore, it can function as a summary and conclusion.

Learning from Practice

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Benjamin Britten, with the help of the then-elderly E.M. Forster and the younger, self-defined “man of the theatre,” Eric Crozier, adapted for the operatic stage Herman Melville’s last, unfinished, and resolutely ambiguous work, *Billy Budd*. Many scholars have written about the problems of the inaccurate and modified editions of the Melville text, but it is of both relevance and interest that Britten’s librettists used the 1946 edition by William Plomer, who was the first to talk openly about the homosexual and homosocial themes of the novella. The story is set on a British navy ship in the eighteenth century, just after a series of mutinies that had left the authorities shaken and newly alert; it tells the tale of Billy, the “Handsome Sailor”—presented as a kind of naval stereotype—who is tried and executed for the decidedly provoked killing of the malicious master at arms, John Claggart, who was plotting Billy’s own destruction. Although the killing could have been seen as an accident, the sole witness, Captain Vere, chooses not to save the popular and good young man, but rather to give into his professional fears that this act could be seen as the first step to a possible mutiny.

There are obvious difficulties in adapting this story. Most of the critical literature on this particular adaptation has focused on the character of Vere, for in Melville’s text he dies shortly after Billy is hanged, whereas in the opera he lives on and in fact narrates the story’s frame. This change potentially eliminates two of the immediate problems for the operatic adaptation of the novella: the loss of a narrative voice and the complexity of characterization because of compression, for this character sings of his motivations and worries. The operatic version is framed emotionally and formally by Vere’s continuing anguish at his actions or lack thereof and then by his final sense of absolution achieved through Billy’s forgiveness and love. Forster said these alterations were undertaken because he wanted to “rescue Vere from Melville” (qtd. in Brett 1984: 135).

But others have been less charitable, if more accurate, in their evaluation of these changes. Robert Martin charges that Vere is changed from the novella’s “pompous and pretentious hypocrite” into an “intellectual caught up in a dilemma of conscience” (1986: 52). The effect, for

him, is that the opera depoliticizes and de-eroticizes Melville’s text, taming his “subversive eros” into a “sentimental and domestic vision” (55). Yet by Eric Crozier’s account, the librettists saw themselves as being very faithful to Melville’s text and his intentions—at least as interpreted by them, working from Plomer’s edition (Crozier 1986: 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21). Yet in their alterations of the character of Captain Vere, they ended up changing much: Melville’s Vere not only differs in terms of moral character and life expectancy from the opera’s character but he is also able to offer rational reasons why Billy has to die: the ship was on a war footing and there was a fear of mutiny. In the opera, mutiny is a threat only *after* Billy, so beloved by the crew, is executed. Vere’s motivations in the opera are presented as confused or ambiguous, a decision that has been read as a formal failure (Emslie 1992: 51).

But what if that confusion were intentional? Indeed, what if it were the whole point of the adaptation? Britten was a pacifist and spent the war years just before he wrote this opera in the United States. What if the appeal of the military tale for the opera’s multiple creators was, in fact, its very ambivalence, its unfinished and indeterminate nature? The operatic scene that would suggest precisely this kind of reading is one that brings to the fore the questions we are dealing with in this chapter: how to represent in dramatized form such elements as interiority, point of view, and especially ambiguity, equivocation, and, even more radically, absence.

The scene in question comes after Claggart’s death and after Billy has been put on trial before a drumhead court of officers that does not include Vere, for the captain must testify as the sole witness to the fatal event. In the section examined here, Vere must inform Billy, who has left the room, of the court’s decision: he is to hang from the yardarm for his “crime.” In the novella, Vere does so in a scene that is *not* narrated. Melville’s garrulous and usually omniscient narrator suddenly changes course and claims, “Beyond the communication of the sentence what took place at this interview was never known” (1891/1958: 337). Nevertheless he remains in character enough to venture what he calls “some conjectures”: he speculates that Vere kept nothing from Billy about his own role or motives and that Billy would have accepted his confession in the spirit in which it was tendered. The narrator adds:

Even more may have been. Captain Vere in the end may have developed the passion sometimes latent under an exterior stoical or indifferent. He was old enough to have been Billy's father. The austere devotee of military duty, letting himself melt back into what remains primeval in our formalized humanity, may in the end have caught Billy to his heart even as Abraham may have caught the young Isaac. (337)

It is a challenge, to say the least, to dramatize in an opera a silenced scene or even one left to narratorial conjecture. The narrating figure of the opera version is Vere, not Melville's anonymous and only (obviously) partially omniscient narrator. But the equivocation and ambivalence that Melville achieves by his mix of silence and speculation are indeed recreated in the showing mode—and in a most imaginative way. In the libretto, Vere is said to disappear into the room in which Billy is being kept; there is no further action on stage. Instead, the audience hears only a sequence of 34 clear, triadic chords, each of them harmonizing on a note of the F major triad and each scored differently. The verbal silence and the lack of stage action are accompanied, in other words, by musical sound—but sound with no real melody and no rhythmic variation.

Other showing-mode adaptations of the story have not been this reticent. The Broadway play by Louis O. Coxe and R.H. Chapman, which opened less than a year before the opera, in 1950, dramatizes the narrator's speculations. Billy openly asks Vere to help him understand his sentence. Vere's answer—that the world is full of good and evil and that "most of us find out early and trim to a middle course"—seems enough to bring Billy to understand that "maybe there's a kind of cruelty in people that's just as much a part of them as kindness" (1951: 68). Although critics have argued for years about whether this scene in the novella works or not, what this stage version does is effectively eliminate its ambiguity. The film adaptation of this play mentioned earlier, directed by Peter Ustinov, who also plays Vere, dramatizes the scene as well, though differently. In the film Vere says there is no answer to Billy's question, but then asks the condemned man to hate him as a way of conquering his fear. Billy replies that he is not actually afraid: "I was only doing my duty. You are doing yours." Ustinov accompanies

this scene with melodramatic music by Antony Hopkins that could not be more different from the opera's strange and estranging chords.

Britten's silence-substituting music has been interpreted in many different ways. Some readings are resolutely mimetic ones, with critics imagining in the changing chords changes in the emotions of the two men behind the closed door; that is, with critics offering "some conjectures," not unlike those of Melville's narrator. The chords are therefore usually interpreted as articulating the shift from surprise to terror to resignation and composure. Others read the chords thematically as realizing musically the passions involved or as implying a positive or even idealized form of homosexual affection that, at the time, could not be spoken of openly for fear of legal prosecution. For still others the meaning is symbolic or metaphysical. The fact that the chords are heard in two later scenes of the opera determines some of these readings: they are heard right after this scene in the last aria of the condemned man, the piece known as "Billy in the Darbies," at the moment when Billy attains his greatest moral and psychological strength and accepts his death. The chords are heard again in the climax of Vere's Epilogue, as he sings Billy's melody and words (which he could never, realistically, have heard): "But I've sighted a sail in the storm, the far-shining sail, and I'm content." Is the implication of the replaying of some of these chords that Vere's redemption began behind the closed door? If so, did Billy's acceptance and strength begin there as well?

Arnold Whittall points out that composers "often use successions of slow-moving chords ranging widely across the tonal spectrum to represent the sublime, the monumental, but rarely if ever with the complete rejection of melody or significant linear motion involved here" (1990: 157). He goes on to suggest that the harmony may be used here as a way of expressing interiority. If so, this is another example of how music can supplement or replace what is lost when fiction's introspection and reflection are transposed into a performance medium. Thanks in part to the work of Carolyn Abbate (1991), who has brought the insights of literary narratology to musical studies, it has become common to say that the narrator of fiction is replaced by the orchestra in opera. In this scene in *Billy Budd*, the dialectic of chromatic and diatonic chords creates an uneasy, unstable F major tonality that is, to the ears that

can hear it, the musical equivalent of Melville's verbal equivocation (see Whittall 1990 for the extended argument). This also suggests that—despite the librettists' visionary *language* suggesting Vere's redemption and peace—the opera's *musical* ending is decidedly more ambiguous and complicated: "It is undoubtedly right that Britten's music should remain perfectly, precariously poised on the knife edge, challenging but not rejecting tonal syntax, challenging but not rejecting the great operatic theme of redemption through love" (Whittall 1990: 170).

The music's ambiguity, however, is mirrored in the very lack of action in the scene being discussed here. This is a supremely un-operatic operatic moment, one in which words and music do *not* interact, in which words do *not* help us interpret what we are hearing in the music. In fact, we are deprived of visual as well as verbal clues. Not surprisingly, audiences are often puzzled by this scene: they think it is a prelude to the encounter between Billy and Vere and so may become restless. They do not feel anything important is happening on stage, and they are right, of course: the action is all off-stage behind that door. But the impact of those chords is such that the un-represented can be made to be more powerful than the represented. It obviously depends on the individual director's ability to provoke our imaginations, to move us to fill in the gap.

Wolfgang Iser's theory of reading—of how readers fill in the narrative gaps that are part of any literary text (1971)—applies here as well (see Abbott 2002: 114–16 on narrative gaps in various media). As we watch and listen, we do not free associate; instead, we fill in the gaps, with the combined guidance of the dramatic set up of the encounter in the previous scene and those 34 chords in their ineffable and suggestive ambiguity.

Billy Budd's infamous closed-door scene is as good an example as any of the complexities involved in the transposition across modes and media. Like realist film, only perhaps more so, staged opera is not self-evidently a medium conducive to representing ambivalence, equivocation, and absence. However, the combination in this scene of a refusal to stage or to verbalize with the addition of the estranging music can render a version of that complexity. And in the process, it can provide an instance of artistic practice that contests a good number of the cli-

chés about the representational inadequacies of the performing media compared to prose fiction. These truisms are usually articulated, it must be said, not by adapters themselves, but by protective literary critics and self-protective writers like Virginia Woolf, writing vividly about her sense of the small worth of film adaptations of fiction: "So we lurch and lumber through the most famous novels of the world. So we spell them out in words of one syllable written, too, in the scrawl of an illiterate schoolboy" (1926: 309). Need we necessarily trust such a view? Should we perhaps listen to the adapter for a change?