

‘Shakespeare on Film’: Film-editing and Authorship
‘It is Only in the Editing Room that the Director has the
Power of a True Artist’

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Abstract

The purpose of the thesis is to question the hegemony of *auteurist*, director-based criticisms of Shakespearean films by rescuing the film-editor from anonymity. By drawing my attention to the determining, yet largely disregarded work of editorial creation, I offer a reading of a selection of Shakespearean films that acknowledges the centrality of collaborative work in representing Shakespeare on film. In order to recreate the editor as a ‘collaborative *auteur*’, I propose to trace the authorial signature(s) of the editor(s) by examining and identifying in which ways and according to which specific patterns the Shakespearean pre-texts are transformed into ‘Shakespearean’ film texts.

The first chapter will offer a discussion of Welles’s authorial agency through a reading of his Shakespearean films (*Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Chimes at Midnight*). While most of the studies of his Shakespearean screen adaptations focus on his directorial persona as well as on the circumstances surrounding the productions of these films, I would like to question these classically *auteurist* approaches. Rather, by offering an analysis of one particular aspect of Welles’s editorial practices — his manipulations of filmic time and rhythm — I would like to argue that it is mainly in the editing process that resides his authorial agency, and therefore that it is in the cutting room that his Shakespearean films acquired their definitive significance.

Examining the work of another recognised director-*auteur*, chapter two approaches the question of editorial authorship in Akira Kurosawa’s Shakespearean triptych: *Throne of Blood*, *The Bad Sleep Well*, and *Ran*. In this chapter, through a close reading of the relationship between characters and space, a comparative study of the battle scenes in *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*, as well as an analysis of how Kurosawa’s

editing strategies co-exist with his use of the dramatic style of the Noh in his modern adaptation of *Hamlet*, it is my purpose to map out the circulation and functioning of Kurosawa's authorial voice.

Chapter three will propose a reading of Al Pacino's *Looking for* desire within an essentially collaborative mode of production and post-production.

With the study of Julie Taymor's *Titus*, chapter four will take the idea of editing quite literally, thereby exploring the latent metaphor of dissection and dismemberment that is implicit in the practice of film-editing. By drawing an *Richard* from the vantage point of (a collective work of) film-editing. As well as locating Pacino's own authorial signature within the plurality of authorial voices that shapes the fragmented structure and nature of *Looking for Richard*, my intention in this chapter is to provide a discussion of the dis-location of Pacino's *auteur* analogy between the early modern culture of anatomization and the cinematic activities of *découpage* (cutting) and montage (splicing), I am particularly interested in the filmic performative body and the way Julie Taymor, with the collaboration of her editor Françoise Bonnot, has used *mise en scène* and film-editing to adapt the Renaissance narratives of *Titus Andronicus* to the cinema and to translate and interpret its thematic content within a violent postmodern context.

Finally, chapter five will examine the questions of authorship and film-editing in relation to Shakespeare films from a more cognitive angle. By using Michael Almereyda's millennial *Hamlet* as a case study, I propose to discuss the supplementary and artificial nature of the film-editing process. Based on Jacques Derrida's analysis of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Les Confessions* and on the latter's attitude vis-à-vis the act of writing, I would like to read the editorial activities of both Almereyda and his Hamlet, in and out of the film-text, as the critical response to a situation of distress.

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Introduction

‘It is probably as much of a mistake to ask whether ‘film’ can do justice to ‘Shakespeare’ as to reproach ‘Shakespeare’ with being inappropriate material for ‘film’.’¹

‘Shot and montage are the basic elements of cinema’.²

At this moment in time, to speak of ‘Shakespeare on film’ as a well defined area of study poses a simple, yet essential problem. In other words, what is exactly a Shakespeare film? Can a loose film adaptation of a Shakespearean play such as Gus Van Sant’s *My own Private Idaho* (1991), based on *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, be regarded as ‘worthy’ to belong to the pantheon of Shakespearean films? Or is it only the *chasse gardée* of such films as Laurence Olivier’s *Hamlet* (1948), *Franco Zeffirelli’s Romeo and Juliet* (1968), and Kenneth Branagh’s *Henry V* (1989)? Where, in the blurry landscape of adaptational faithfulness or even legitimacy, should we draw the line, if a line has to be drawn at all? In *Shakespeare, The Movie, II*, a jubilant Richard Burt clearly exults that:

now, the distinction between authentic and inauthentic Shakespeares is not even made consistently, much less policed. Few academic critics want to ask anymore how Shakespearean a given adaptation of a given play is because we all know there is no authentic Shakespeare, no “masterpiece” against which the adaptation might be evaluated and interpreted.³

¹ Russell Jackson, ‘Introduction: Shakespeare, films and the marketplace’, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1-12 (p. 9).

² Sergei Eisenstein, ‘A dialectic approach to film form’, in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 2nd edn, eds. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 101-122 (p. 104).

³ Richard Burt, ‘Shakespeare, “GLO-CALI-ZATION”, Race’, in *Shakespeare, The Movie, II, Popularizing the plays on film, TV, video, and DVD*, eds. Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 14-36 (p.17).

If indeed ‘anything goes’ in the studies of Shakespeare on film, the possibilities for critical enquiry are now literally endless, which in itself should cause any scholar involved in the subject to rejoice. This is a far cry from the likes of Roger Manvell and Anthony Davies for whom the ‘seriousness’ — a concept which in itself is extremely vague — of an adaptation was the guarantee of its value. In his 1971 edition of *Shakespeare and the Film*, Manvell defines a Shakespearean film by what it is not: a remote adaptation which he significantly classifies in the same category as a ballet or an opera derived from the plays. Because, Manvell unequivocally contends, films like Ernst Lubitsch’s *To Be or Not To Be* (1941), André Cayatte’s *Les Amants de Vérone* (1948), or Claude Chabrol’s *Ophélie* (1962) ‘have used situations in the plays as sources from which to draw either period or modern “parallels” for their screenplays’, ‘these are not Shakespearean films, *of course*, and they are not discussed in this book’.⁴ If I may paraphrase Manvell, such films should be rejected *in toto* because between ‘Shakespeare’ and films, the scale tilts unmistakably toward the Elizabethan playwright: what is regarded as Shakespearean comes first and if it is not in sufficient quantity in a film, then this film is not worth considering. Is the question of authenticity therefore a matter of quantity versus quality? Throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s, Manvell and other critics like Anthony Davies, Donald Skoller, and Peter Wollen tended to sort out Shakespeare films by measuring their relative distance from the language and conventions of the theatre. This point of view was of course very reductive since it centered the debate within the primacy of the written text and the relevance of the cinematic medium to represent the theatrical and poetic works of Shakespeare. While Manvell, as a critic for whom ‘Shakespeare’ remained both a cultural icon and a scriptural text, maintained that ‘very very good writing like

⁴ Roger Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1971), p. xv.

Shakespeare's does not really suit so completely visual a medium as the screen';⁵ André Bazin reinforced this assumption by suggesting that 'the conventions of theatrical action and particularly speech do not accommodate themselves to the realism of cinematic space, which the décor makes concrete'.⁶

Such statements dominated the critical and theoretical debates of the 1970s and 1980s, so much so that although Jack J. Jorgens, in his *Shakespeare on Film*, argued in favour of a critical flexibility able to transcend the boundaries of disciplines like literature, theatre, and film, he nevertheless oriented his discussion of 'the principal Shakespearean films' (the films of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Grigori Kozintsev, Akira Kurosawa, or Franco Zeffirelli) toward a comparative study of film-texts and play-texts, thereby emphasising the primacy of the Shakespearean text and the discrepancies between the two representational media. Jorgens advocates that 'we must go far beyond categories which divide films according to their relative distance from the language of poetry and the theatre or which measure in some simpleminded way the relative distance of the film from the original play'.⁷ However, he also supplements his book with an appendix containing detailed descriptive outlines of the major films, each film scene being preceded by the number of the corresponding play scene 'so that one may see the overall shaping at a glance'.⁸ Jorgens's contradictory critical approach is significantly symptomatic of the state of confusion in which these critics found themselves when confronted with this new-born area of study. For a majority of critics who were used to think of Shakespeare essentially in terms of literature, the springing

⁵ Roger Manvell, 'Laurence Olivier on Filming Shakespeare', *Journal of the British Film Academy* (Autumn 1955), p. 3.

⁶ André Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View* (Venice, CA: Acrobat Books, 1991), p. 114.

⁷ Jack J. Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film*, 2nd edn (London: University Press of America, 1991), p. 34.

⁸ Jack J. Jorgens, p. xi.

to critical life of Shakespeare on film certainly posed various problems because it dis-located 'Shakespeare' from the realm of highbrow art to the more subversive domain of lowbrow mass entertainment and popular culture. Suddenly, the profane, low culture of the big screen was perceived as a threat to the sacredness and 'seriousness', as Manvell puts it, of Shakespearean studies, hence the systematic refusal to acknowledge the presence of 'Shakespeare' in what is now referred to as cinematic offshoots. Only directors who succeeded in making Shakespearean films prestigious and educational — *films d'auteur* — were regarded valuable and worthy of critical attention.

Within such a context of careful suspicion vis-à-vis the cannibalistic appropriations of the Shakespearean corpus, the prominence of André Bazin as a major theoretical influence does not come as a surprise. Bazin is perhaps most renowned for having, from 1951, co-versed (with Lo Duca and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze) over the editorship of the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which contributed to the elevation of cinema to the status of high art. By claiming a theory of the cinema based on the '*politique des auteurs*' in an essay entitled "*Une certaine tendance du cinéma français*",⁹ François Truffaut placed the director on a pedestal from which s/he has since been dominating the creative process of film-making. 'Why', asked Truffaut of the old school of the French *metteurs-en-scène*, 'couldn't we have the same admiration for all those film-makers who do their best to work within this Tradition and within the Quality which you deride so flippantly?'¹⁰ This essay was a mission statement that caused havoc among the international cinematographic community because in a medium dominated by the studio system and the conventions of narrative continuity,

⁹ François Truffaut, 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 31, January 1954, pp. 15-28.

¹⁰ François Truffaut, pp. 15-18 (p. 19).

the concept of creative film-making through the free manipulation of *mise en scène* and editing which inspired French New Wave directors like Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer, scandalised the bourgeoisie at the very moment when it was expressing a ‘culturally conservative, politically reactionary attempt to remove film from the realm of social and political concern’.¹¹ Against all odds, the *politique des auteurs* became a theory of film criticism on the initiative of American film critic Andrew Sarris who coined the concept of *auteur* theory in what is now a most decried essay published in *Film Culture* in 1962. Sarris defined his theory essentially in terms of technical mastery from the part of the director so that ‘if a director has no technical competence, no elementary flair for the cinema, he is automatically cast out of the pantheon of directors’.¹² In “Toward a theory of film history”, Sarris’s goal was to rediscover the great American *auteurs* in Hollywood cinema, which, because of its standardised modes of production, had been generally discarded from the potential sites where *auteurs* could thrive. It is only through the detailed and rigorous reading of films that the critic was able to tell the real *auteur* from the ‘simple’ director. Such a simplistic and arbitrary categorisation between good and bad directors was virulently criticised by Pauline Kael who, in her provocative essay “Circles and squares”, argued that *auteur* theory, ‘silly as it is, can nevertheless be a dangerous theory (...) because it offers nothing but commercial goals to the young artists who may be trying to do something in film’.¹³ And she went on to deplore that ‘The *auteur* critics never tell us by what divining rods they have discovered the *élan* of a Minnelli or Nicholas Ray or a

¹¹ John Hess, ‘La politique des auteurs’, *Jump Cut*, no. 1, May-June 1974, pp. 19-22 (p. 19).

¹² Andrew Sarris, ‘Notes on the *auteur* theory in 1962’, *Film Culture*, no. 27, Winter 1962, pp. 1-8 (p. 3).

¹³ Pauline Kael, ‘Circles and Squares’, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3, Spring 1963, pp. 12-26.

Leo McCarey. They're not critics; they're inside dopesters'.¹⁴ As we can see, the *auteur* theory gave rise to a series of heated debates and to much controversy amongst film critics who felt the need for new and less arbitrary models of authorship criticism.

But however controversial it might have been, the practice of *auteurism* as Sarris postulated it found a particularly significant parallel in Manvell, Jorgens, and Davies's distinction between good ('serious' and highbrow) and bad (lowbrow) Shakespearean films. In fact, adopted and utilised by most of the Shakespearean critics of the 1970s and 1980s, and early 1990s, this value system based on the artistic and technical ingeniousness of the director proved to be an extremely useful tool for them to sort out, albeit very partially, the valuable Shakespearean films from the downright mediocre ones. Is it the mirage of tradition and quality that lured the Shakespearean scholars into a practice of *auteurism*? However, if *auteur* theory had the appearance of a radically revolutionary film theory,

the critical shift which *auteurism* effected within the history of film criticism can be seen as a step backwards to a romantic conception of the artist as it is described by Abrams: a regressive step precisely at the moment at which romanticism was becoming less secure in other branches of criticism, and in a medium in which an aesthetic of individual self-expression seemed least appropriate.¹⁵

Indeed, formalist by nature, *auteurism* placed a great emphasis on a romantic conception of the director and subsequently on *mise en scène* which, for Fereydoun Hoveyda, amongst many other *auteurist* critics, was 'what constituted the essence of cinema'.¹⁶ The romantic, high modernist concept of a director able to create and compose an original work of art through his personal use of *mise en scène* provided a safe fundamental principle from which to approach Shakespearean films critically. By

¹⁴ Pauline Kael, pp. 12-16 (p. 26).

¹⁵ John Caughie, 'Introduction', in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 9-16 (p. 11).

¹⁶ Fereydoun Hoveyda, 'La réponse de Nicholas Ray', *Cahiers du cinema*, no. 107, May 1960, pp. 13-23 (p. 17).

elevating the director to the status of an idolised creator, the parallel between an almost sanctified Shakespeare and a venerated Orson Welles becomes only too obvious.

The influence and centrality of André Bazin's seminal essay "Theatre and cinema" on the early critical history of Shakespeare on film cannot be underestimated. Not only did Bazin was a precursor as he began to grow an interest in Shakespearean films as soon as the 1940s and 1950s through his studies of Orson Welles's and Laurence Olivier's adaptations, but he also fully participated in the *auteurist* movement which aimed at legitimising the cinema as an art. Building up bridges between theatre and cinema, Bazin defined the latter as the 'dramaturgy of Nature'¹⁷ and favoured the work of *mise en scène* within the sequence shot because of its affinity with the spatial composition of stage productions. According to Bazin, the concept of '*découpage* in depth' is 'more charged with meaning than analytical *découpage*' (i.e. montage) because it is pervaded with realism, 'a realism that is in a certain sense ontological, restoring to the object and the décor their existential density, the weight of their presence'.¹⁸

Particularly influenced by Bazin's comparative studies of the theatrical and cinematic media applied to Shakespearean films, Anthony Davies (*Filming Shakespeare's Plays*, 1988) and Lorne Buchman (*Still in Movement*, 1991) offered two major *auteurist* readings of the 'principal adaptations' based on the assumption that it is essentially through the manipulations of the spatial and temporal dynamics — through *mise en scène* — that the director creates his/her personal interpretation of a Shakespearean play. While Davies and Buchman focussed their approaches on the structural implications of translating 'Shakespeare' from one representational art to

¹⁷ André Bazin, 'Theater and Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 378-393 (p. 392).

¹⁸ André Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, p. 80.

another, i.e. translating the verbal into the visual, Peter Donaldson (*Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors*, 1990) further developed the *auteurist* ethos — the identification of the individual vision of particularly strong directors as the most influential element shaping their productions — by probing into the personal history of some directors from the ‘pantheon’ in order to produce psychoanalytical criticisms of their Shakespearean works of catharsis. Donaldson, for instance, offers a Freudian reading of Laurence Olivier’s *Hamlet* based on the multiple biographies as well as on the autobiographical writings of Olivier himself. Donaldson uses a particular incident that marked Olivier’s childhood — a homosexual rape attempt on a staircase at school — to explain Hamlet’s chronic passivity and irresolution. Because the critic notes a significant parallel between this incident and the visual imagery of film, he observes that ‘Staircases are often the setting for violence, the locus of a repeated pattern in which someone is thrown down on the steps and the attacker flees upward’.¹⁹

Such a systematic recourse to psychoanalysis and *auteurism* at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s may seem anachronistic and even post-dated if we consider that the author had already died a symbolic death in 1968 when Roland Barthes provocatively declared that ‘it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author’.²⁰ In this seminal essay (“The death of the author”) for post-structuralist studies, Barthes dislodged the author from the seat of authority to place the reader — and the text — triumphantly on it. Indeed, in Barthes’s anti-*auteur* theory what is essential is that ‘We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original,

¹⁹ Peter Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* (Boston, Mass.: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 39.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, ‘The death of the author’, in *Image Music Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 142-148 (p. 146).

blend and clash'.²¹ The break from authority that is demanded in this essay was a direct attack against the modernist (bourgeois) privileging of the author as well as the hallmark of the cultural and political upheavals of the 1960s in both France and America. Under post-structuralist intervention, the author, 'rather than standing behind the text as a source, becomes a term in the process of reading and spectating'.²² But while these considerations were throwing authorship studies into confusion, dividing the critics into the reactionary pro-authors and the revolutionary pro-readers, the study of Shakespearean films was still immune to such preoccupations, so dominant was (and still is to a certain extent) the sway of the modernist idea of unique authorship among Shakespearean scholars. However, by asserting that 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture',²³ Barthes certainly sowed the seeds of reception theories and postmodernism that later blossomed in the 1980s and 1990s.

Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, contemporaries of Roland Barthes, also 'laboured within the field of post-structuralist theory'²⁴ and investigated the problems of agency and intentionality within cultural ideology. Indeed, for Derrida writing (*écriture*) is an act of 'inscription', and the mark left through this act finds meaning because of its iterability or repetition. In other words, 'the category of intention', writes Derrida in "Signature Event Context", 'will not disappear; it will have its place, but from this place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and the entire system of reference'.²⁵ The text being thus transformed into a combination of other texts and discourses, the author, it follows, cannot be located as the single prime source of the

²¹ Roland Barthes, p. 148.

²² John Caughie, *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, p. 200.

²³ Roland Barthes, p. 148.

²⁴ Kaja Silverman, 'The Author as Receiver', *October*, no. 96, Spring 2001, pp. 17-34 (p. 23).

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context' [1971], in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 326.

text's coherence. What was left after such a conscientious fragmentation of intentionality and significance was — ideally — a door opened on infinite possibilities.

As Foucault writes in “What is an Author?”:

It is not enough, however, to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared. For the same reason, it is not enough to keep repeating (after Nietzsche) that God and man have died a common death. Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers.²⁶

However, the disappearance of the author was only symbolic for while those critics were preaching for the practice of ‘transtextuality’, the term used by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes* to refer to ‘all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts’,²⁷ others in a non-dominant situation — mainly influenced by feminist theory — were firmly determined to stand their ground and affirm that, in spite of Foucault's deconstructionist approach, it does matter who is speaking. As Nancy Hartstock deplores, ‘Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic?’²⁸ As we have seen before, while these considerations were dominating the debates on authorship, the approaches taken to the study of Shakespeare films were still operating around the centrality of the director and the work of *mise en scène*. The works of the likes of Anthony Davies, Stanley Wells, Jack J. Jorgens, Peter Donaldson, and Lorne Buchman, were invariably stressing the director as the major influence and the unique

²⁶ Michel Foucault, ‘What Is an Author?’ [1975], *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Josué V. Haveri (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 101-120 (p. 105).

²⁷ Gérard Genette, quoted by Robert Stam in *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), p. 207.

²⁸ Nancy Hartstock, ‘Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?’ [1987], reprinted in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 163-164.

source for the film's 'internal meaning',²⁹ precisely at a time when the concept of authorship as personality was being questioned and placed under so much scrutiny. As Robert Shaughnessy puts it in *Shakespeare on Film* (1998), 'As the combined and sometimes contending forces of , psychoanalysis, Marxism, new historicism, feminism, and cultural materialism began to reshape Shakespeare studies during the 1980s, Shakespeare on screen for a time received rather less attention'.³⁰ In fact, it is only during the second half of the 1990s, with the release of films such as Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1994), Oliver Parker's *Othello* (1995), Al Pacino's *Looking For Richard* (1996) and Richard Loncraine's *Richard III* (1996) that Shakespearean films have begun to be viewed within the broader context of popular culture.

The publication of books of collected essays — notably Linda E. Boose and Richard Burt's *Shakespeare, The Movie* (1997), Robert Shaughnessy's *Shakespeare on Film* (1998), and Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray's *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle* (2000) — special issues in *Shakespeare Survey* or *Shakespeare Quarterly* dedicated to Shakespeare on screen as well as various other publications on the subject — have contributed to re-position the study of Shakespearean films within a more contemporaneous, interdisciplinary, and challenging framework. Suddenly, the question of whether or not a particular film version was or was not true (or faithful) to 'Shakespeare' became far less primordial, not to say irrelevant. Instead, a plethora of exciting new critical approaches to Shakespeare films emerged as if in response to the widespread incorporation and appropriation of 'Shakespeare' within popular culture and mass media. Emblematic of this 'absorption' of the Elizabethan playwright and his

²⁹ Andrew Sarris, 'Notes on the *auteur* theory in 1962', *Film Culture*, no. 27, Winter 1962, pp. 1-8 (p. 2).

³⁰ Robert Shaughnessy, "Introduction", *Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), pp. 1-17 (p. 7).

work into either mainstream or art house cinema, is Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* which, because of its cockiness and flamboyant use of 'hypertextuality'³¹ (in Genette's sense of the word), challenged the 'classic' modes of criticism as practised by a Davies or a Donaldson. With the boom of Shakespearean films in the 1990s as well as the growing and thriving practice of self-reflexivity and irony in the performative arts, there was an urgent and significant need for a reshuffling of the theoretical and critical cards, and central to these new approaches are the concepts of postmodernism and globalization, and the works of thinkers like Fredric Jameson, Slavoj Zizek, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Gilles Deleuze, and Pierre Bourdieu amongst others. What ensued was a fundamental repositioning of the study of Shakespeare on screen within a trans-disciplinary plurality of theoretical paradigms, particularly in line with Robert Stam's suggestion that:

The question is not one of relativism or mere pluralism, but rather of multiple grids and knowledges, each of which sheds a specific light on the object studied. It is not a question of completely embracing the other theoretical perspective, but rather of acknowledging it, taking it into account, being ready to be challenged by it.³²

Amongst the gamut of contemporary theoretical approaches (their innovative character being heralded *à propos* by a prefix such as post-, neo-, or new-) that have been dominating the discussions on Shakespearean films, queer theory appeared as one of the most engaging and promising. Because 'the concept of gender replaced the idea of binary anatomical difference with a more plural concept of culturally and socially constructed "identity"',³³ and because gender is not regarded as an essence any longer but as a practice (following the works of Judith Butler³⁴ and Michel Foucault³⁵), queer

³¹ In *Palimpsestes* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), Genette defines the concept of hypertextuality as the relation between one text (the 'hypertext') to an anterior text or 'hypotext', which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends.

³² Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, p. 330.

³³ Robert Stam, p. 263.

³⁴ Judith P. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London:

theory has become an inclusive movement for issues of feminism and masculinity as well as gender hybridism, thus allowing for a greater representational fluidity. Queer theory made its entrance into the study of Shakespeare films through the works of critics such as Richard Burt, Lynda E. Boose, Barbara Hodgdon Courtney Lehmann, Carol Chillington Rutter, and Bruce R. Smith (amongst many others). Mainly based on queer and poststructuralist theories as well as addressing the appropriation of Shakespeare by popular culture, Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose's approach of Shakespeare films in *Shakespeare, The Movie* (1997) aims to go beyond a dialogic model of text and film, and concentrates on the ways in which gender and sexuality define and have been defined by the relationship between various adaptations and their links to 'Shakespeare'. While Boose explores the politics of voyeurism in her reading of Jonathan Miller's *Othello* (1981), Burt insists on the distinction between the terms 'gay' and 'queer' ('between a legible, secure identity and position on the one hand, and a disorienting of such an identity and position, on the other'³⁶) and argues that 'What is crucial for an analysis of Shakespeare as gay signifier in film, is attention not only to the means of production and distribution but above all to the coding and recoding of gayness'.³⁷ Taking this movement toward a more 'cinematic' and trans-theoretical approach of Shakespeare films further, *Shakespeare, The Movie, II* (with the contribution of critics like Peter Donaldson, Courtney Lehmann, Thomas Cartelli and Michael Anderegg, and Barbara Hodgdon), published in 2003, addresses the question of the popularisation of Shakespeare not only on cinema and television but also on DVD,

Routledge, 1993).

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

³⁶ Richard Burt, 'The Love That Dare Not Speak Shakespeare's Name: New Shakesqueer Cinema', in *Shakespeare, The Movie*, ed. Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 247.

³⁷ Richard Burt, *Shakespeare, The Movie*, p. 247.

in relation with issues of race, postcolonialism, multiculturalism, spectatorship, and technology.

Closer to a more classically, albeit not exclusively, feminist approach, Carol Chillington Rutter, in her fascinating *Enter the Body*, offers a compelling discussion of the performative female body on stage and screen. Drawing on the assumption that Shakespeare's 'playtext tells only part of the story: that, until the text he did not write down — the performance text — is recuperated, re-imagined, put back into play and accounted for by spectators, we are reading only half Shakespeare's play',³⁸ Rutter tries to conjure up the other half of the Shakespearean corpus by focussing her readings on actorly performance and subsequently costume designs because 'like bodies, costumes on Shakespeare's stage were legible, freighted with significance that is both iconic and performative'.³⁹ By making bodies and their various 'adjuncts' the core subject of her inquiry, Rutter summons colourful remembrances of performances and provides fascinating insights into the spectatorly practice of reading meaning out of designs and gestures, thereby building insightful bridges between film and theatre.

Going against the ethos of New Criticism, which emphasises 'the evaluative criteria to privilege transcendental and universal statements over historical and political commentary',⁴⁰ another avenue of research which has been and is being explored is that of New Historicism. By incorporating, or rather re-placing, the films within broader cultural, and socio-historical contexts, this critical practice seems to be the logical continuity of poststructuralist thinking and reception theory as formulated by Roland Barthes. With the combining resources of film theory and film history, and as an answer

³⁸ Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation in Shakespeare's Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. xv.

³⁹ Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body*, p. 110.

⁴⁰ Janet Staiger, 'Authorship approaches', in *Authorship and Film*, ed. David A. Gerstner and Janet Staiger (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 31.

to the contemporary movement toward multiculturalism, 'new historicists' saw filmtexts as parts of complex symbolic negotiations and from this point of view, they produced readings of the films through their context in the broadest sense of the term. The integration of 'Shakespeare' within film theory and film history by critics like Michael Anderegg, Judith Buchanan, Luke McKernan and Olwen Terris, Courtney Lehmann, and Kenneth S. Rothwell (amongst many others), have favoured a dynamic discussion of the interpretations of the plays adapted to the screen based on a trans-theoretical and interdisciplinary awareness which has opened new perspectives on the production and reception of these films.

Michael Anderegg for instance, has produced a critical study of Orson Welles's lifelong interest in the Shakespearean corpus which encompasses not only his films but also his stage productions, radio shows, and literary projects. In *Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and Popular Culture*, Anderegg offers a reading of Welles's Shakespearean triptych (*Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Chimes at Midnight*) in the light of his other Shakespearean activities, his biographical self and cult status, the socio-historical circumstances surrounding his productions, as well as American popular culture. Through a thorough examination of new materials and a consideration of the interrelations between Welles and 'Shakespeare' as well as between Welles and popular culture, Anderegg's multifaceted approach focusses on Welles's impact on the reception of Shakespeare's plays, either in the newspapers or in the classrooms. 'Welles', Anderegg writes, 'in his lifelong love affair with Shakespeare, acted out of a very American conviction that art, whatever other needs it may serve, ought to have an educational function and serve a social purpose'.⁴¹

⁴¹ Michael Anderegg, *Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and Popular Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 167.

The move toward well documented and historically accurate studies of Shakespeare films has shed a new light on areas which had been largely unexplored or ignored until then such as the production of Shakespeare films during the silent era. Although the growing interest in these early recordings — precious testimonials of intensely creative and competitive times — had started in 1968 with Robert Hamilton Ball⁴² and his careful survey, or more exactly archaeology of the primordial Shakespearean films, it is only fairly recently that his contribution has been fully recognised and appreciated. Following on Ball's footsteps, Luke McKernan and Owen Terris, Kenneth S. Rothwell, and Judith Buchanan (who is about to release a book partly dedicated to silent Shakespeare films) are taking the research further to uncover and investigate the forgotten, but not lost (hi)story of Shakespeare's appearance into the cinematic apparatus. While Rothwell, in *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*,⁴³ offers a detailed international filmography and a comprehensive account of the Shakespearean films from the silent era to contemporary days, in *Walking Shadows*⁴⁴ McKernan and Terris present a critique of the National Film and Television Archive collection of Shakespeare productions which is supported by meticulous historical considerations. Such studies are particularly, yet not exclusively, concerned with the tensions between theatre and early cinema, the cultural and socio-historical contexts surrounding these early Shakespearean films, the aesthetic values attached to them and their conventions of representation, the technological developments they have gone through, as well as with the organisation of their reception and with questions of spectatorship.

⁴² Robert Hamilton Ball, *Shakespeare on Silent Film: A Strange Eventful History* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1968).

⁴³ Kenneth S. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴⁴ Luke McKernan and Olwen Terris eds., *Walking Shadows: Shakespeare in the National Film and Television Archives* (London: British Film Institute, 1994).

As I have mentioned earlier, the advent of and the subsequent shift in emphasis from *auteur* theory to reception studies has been extremely influential not only in literary studies but also in film and media studies. And while film and literary theories are subject to an ongoing process of fragmentation, which is the reflection of a contradictory movement toward specialisation and globalization, the study of Shakespeare on film is also deeply influenced by these new critical and theoretical trends. ‘Theory’, Robert Stam writes, ‘is currently undergoing a kind of re-historicization, partly as a corrective to the elision of history by the Saussurean and Freudian-Lacanian models, and partly to answer the multiculturalist call to place film theory within larger histories of colonialism and racism’.⁴⁵ However, the gap between the partisans of psychoanalysis and structuralism on the one hand and the partisans of new historicism on the other is not as wide and clear-cut as it might seem. Indeed, as critics and scholars like Fredric Jameson, Slavoj Žižek, and Michel Foucault increasingly reveal in their discourses a critical flexibility able to transcend the partitions between opposing theories — Žižek for example, makes a fascinating use of Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as political, philosophical, and historicist paradigms in his readings of selected artefacts of cinematic popular culture such as David Lynch’s *Lost Highway* or Charles Chaplin’s *City Lights* — the study of Shakespearean films is becoming less dogmatic, more pragmatic, less centred on the primacy of the Shakespearean text, and more in tune with the pluralisation of film and literary theories.

However, although the current heyday of multiculturalism, postmodernism, and — with their strong emphasis on community work and intertextuality — should bring the sudden ‘death of the author’ in practice as well as in theory, it seems that the (film) author has never been more alive and *en vogue* as it is now, as if the romantic idea of a

⁴⁵ Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, p. 328.

solitary creative genius should survive even the strongest blows of non-agential theories. If this romantic idea of authorship has come to be attached to William Shakespeare in such a mythical and idolising way, it also permeates, perhaps by some mental process of osmosis, most of the critical discussions of the Shakespearean films to date. Indeed, although film-making is *the* collaborative mode of representation *par excellence*, the urge and desire to discuss it theoretically and market it in relation to the director-*auteur* are striking. After all, we are still speaking of watching a Kenneth Branagh or Akira Kurosawa film. It just does not seem to be possible to do without 'the name of the author'.

Since the emergence of the '*politique des auteurs*' and the establishment of the director as the unique and ultimate possessor of authorial agency (of Truth?) in the film-making process, the figure of the Author has silenced the other collaborators, deprived all the other agents involved in cinematic production of their share of the merit which is their due. According to Barthes, 'to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing',⁴⁶ for once the parental lineage of a text has been attributed, it is already too late: the text becomes the property of the author and all other potential authorial sources are automatically ruled out. Because 'the author', as Foucault contends, 'also constitutes a principle of unity in writing where any unevenness of production is ascribed to changes caused by evolution, maturation, or outside influence',⁴⁷ to assign a unique author or rather *auteur* to a film is a powerful way of controlling its reception while simplifying its evaluative criteria. Alternatively, to acknowledge the fact that a film is the product of a collaborative effort

⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, 'The death of the author', in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. by John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 212.

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, 'What is an author?', in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, p. 287.

and that film authorship can be understood in terms of work division and of a plurality of artistic interventions, is to open the discussion to new and fruitful considerations.

The emphasis on the film-director and *mise en scène* promoted by *auteurist* critics like André Bazin or Andrew Sarris has had a long-standing impact on the study of Shakespearean films, for from the psychoanalytic, director-centred discussions of Peter Donaldson to the most recent publications of Richard Burt who addresses issues of identity and social changes, the ‘unassailable’ figure of authority and authorship is always and invariably the director. In literary and film criticism, there is a need to name the author and the director fills this need. According to Michel Foucault, the function of the author is governed by ‘the belief that there must be — at a particular level of an author’s thought, of his conscious or unconscious desire — a point where contradictions are resolved, where the incompatible elements can be shown to relate to one another or to cohere around a fundamental and originating contradiction’.⁴⁸ The author fills a void and eases a certain anxiety inherent in the production of any text; it is a reassuring presence that brings meaning and purpose to a text which otherwise would remain open to too many interpretations. In her fascinating *Shakespeare Remains*, Courtney Lehmann offers a compelling discussion of Shakespeare’s authorial presence, post-‘death of the author’, in our postmodern culture. She convincingly argues that ‘To refocus the Shakespearean corpus through the lens of *auteur* theory is to recognise “Shakespeare” as a montage of historically charged collisions between bodies and texts that cannot be reduced to the work of either a solitary “author” or an ever-metamorphosing dramatic and textual “apparatus”’.⁴⁹ Offering a close reading of Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*, Almercyda’s *Hamlet*, and Kenneth Branagh’s

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, ‘What is an author?’, p. 287-288.

⁴⁹ Courtney Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains: Theatre to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 237.

Shakespearean adaptations in keeping with the concept of *auteurism* and the anxieties surrounding it, Lehmann suggests that ‘though no adaptation of Shakespeare has a credit sequence reading “screenplay by William Shakespeare”, this is [...] what Shakespeare’s plays were — screens — with holes in the middle that prompt us to go where “authors” fear to tread, forcing us to engage with the absence that leaves in its wake the makings of the *auteur*’.⁵⁰ Although Lehmann acknowledges the manifest death of the author in theory and the subsequent birth of the reader, she deplores ‘the more devastating, symbolic death of authorial attribution in practice’,⁵¹ and establishes directors like Lurhmann and Branagh within the system of postmodern *auteurism* which she defines as ‘the attempt to reinvent the high-modernist notion of artistic production within a low-postmodern mode of mass cultural reception’.⁵² While Lehmann’s work reinforces the position of the director as the sole authorial figure in Shakespearean films, I would like to suggest that the concept of *auteurism* is not completely incompatible with the collaborative work involved in the process of film-making. Indeed, since a film is the product of a plurality of creative interventions, and since an *auteur* is etymologically someone who acts and creates (who is responsible for doing something), could we not consider all these collaborators as individual *auteurs* per se? And could it not be possible to think of the director in terms of authorial leadership and within the broader scope of collaborative (late) *auteurism*? Without minimising the importance of the director in the process of adapting Shakespeare’s plays to the screen, it is my purpose in this thesis to resurrect, in the same spirit as Andrew Sarris has attempted to rescue American directors like Howard Hawks from anonymity, one of these ‘silent collaborators’⁵³ in particular: the film-editor. Although from Manvell, to

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 238.

⁵² Ibid., p. 22.

⁵³ Courtney Lehmann, p. 233.

Donaldson, Jorgens, and Davies, the work of *mise en scène* has been largely documented and studied. the contribution of film-editing to the production of meaning still remains in the shadow of the director's work in production. It seems that montage (from the French *assembler*), this fundamental aspect of film-making, has been either reduced to a sub-branch of *mise en scène* or simply ignored.

And yet, before the establishment of the director as the romantic figure of the *auteur* in film theory by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics in the 1950s, Sergei Eisenstein had located film authorship in the work of film-editing. In his highly influential *Film Form*, Eisenstein, in his particularly dogmatic and enthusiastic tone, refers to montage as 'the dramaturgy of the film-story'⁵⁴ and thinks of the editor as the person responsible for making a film signify. Moreover, according to the Russian film-maker (ahead of contemporary reception theory), the spectator is an active participant in the cinematic experience because 'Emotional effect begins only with the reconstruction of the event in montage fragments, each of which will summon a certain association — the sum of which will be an all-embracing complex of emotional feeling'.⁵⁵ From a somewhat different approach to film-making, Vsevolod Pudovkin shares Eisenstein's assumption that 'The foundation of film art is *editing*'.⁵⁶ However, unlike his colleague and rival, Pudovkin understands film authorship in terms of Marxism, as a collective enterprise within which the editor is a collaborative agent — a worker — in the same way as the director, the cinematographer, or the actors. 'Work by such a collective', Pudovkin writes, 'is conceivable only in circumstances where all the workers of a producing unit collaborate in as close contact as possible from their very inception as a unit'.⁵⁷ Within

⁵⁴ Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949), p. 55.

⁵⁵ Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Vsevolod I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, trans. Ivor Montagu (London: Vision Press Ltd, 1954), p. xiii.

⁵⁷ Vsevolod I. Pudovkin, p. 135.

such a system of collaborative authorship, the individual remains anonymous in favour of the group and its authorial voice remains indistinguishable within such a polyphonic ensemble.

These considerations put aside, the irreconcilable divergence of opinion between Eisenstein and Pudovkin takes its roots in a more fundamental understanding of the process of film-editing. Indeed, while Pudovkin, who belonged to the old school of Russian cinema and who had been taught by Kuleshov, thought of editing in terms of linkage, Eisenstein had developed a theory of montage based on the concept of conflict. For Pudovkin, the primordial function of film-editing was to ‘control the “psychological guidance” of the spectator’⁵⁸ by linking the shots in such a way that the spectator’s attention is constantly nourished by the flow of images. To this assumption, Eisenstein opposed a system that placed the spectator in a much more active position. He was interested in involving the spectator in a stimulating intellectual activity by offering a cinema based on disruptions, diegetic digressions, and conceptual montage: ‘A view that from the collision of two given factors arises a concept’.⁵⁹ Within this system, Eisenstein saw the combination of opposing shots (or ‘ideograms’) as the key to the production of a true ideological cinema. In fact, he was so intoxicated with the concept of dialectical montage that he began to see all artistic creations — from literature to drama, from photography to painting — as an expression or as the product of montage: ‘In the realm of art this dialectical principle of dynamics is embodied in conflict as the fundamental principle for the existence of every art-work and every art-form’.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

⁵⁹ Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, p. 37.

⁶⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, quoted in *Film Theory: An Introduction*, by Robert Stam, p. 41.

Between the Charybdis and Scylla of an Eisenteinian conceptualisation of the omnipotent director-editor and a Pudovkinian vision of collective authorship, I would like to suggest an alternative way of thinking of the film-editor: as a ‘collaborative *auteur*’, a montage effect between two opposing paradigms. Therefore, far from considering the film-editor either as an invisible collaborator or as an Author-king, I propose to name him/her, and by acknowledging his/her presence, I would like to trace his/her authorial voice, and in so doing, identify his/her contribution to the work of adapting Shakespeare to film. By shifting the emphasis from *mise en scène* to montage — this final and determining process of film-making — my intent is to expose other possibilities, other points ‘where contradictions are resolved, where the incompatible elements can be shown to relate to one another or to cohere around a fundamental and originating contradiction’.⁶¹ Because of the polymorphous nature of film-editing that can require the work of a single artist, the exclusive work of the director, the shared work of several film-editors or the collaboration between the director and the editor, I propose to use a selection of Shakespearean films which illuminates and illustrates, in their own particular ways, these different modes of editorial authoring.

Since Orson Welles was enshrined in the pantheon of director-*auteurs* by the likes of André Bazin after his unprecedented success with *Citizen Kane* in 1941, and because he is without doubt the *auteur* figure *par excellence*, chapter one will offer a discussion of Welles’s authorial agency through a reading of his Shakespearean films (*Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Chimes at Midnight*). Characterised by a colossal appetite for work and an inextinguishable desire for perfection, Welles would very often preside over all the different creative stages of film-making, from the script-writing to the editing, thereby marking his films all over with his stamp, with his authorial signature.

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, p. 287-288.

But while most of the studies of his Shakespearean screen adaptations focus on his directorial persona as well as on the circumstances surrounding the productions of these films, I would like to question these classically *auteurist* approaches. Rather, by offering an analysis of one particular aspect of Welles's editorial practices — his manipulations of filmic time and rhythm — I would like to argue that it is mainly in the editing process that resides his authorial agency, and therefore that it is in the cutting room that his Shakespearean films acquired their definitive significance.

Examining the work of another recognised director-*auteur*, chapter two approaches the question of editorial authorship in Akira Kurosawa's Shakespearean triptych: *Throne of Blood*, *The Bad Sleep Well*, and *Ran*. In this chapter, through a close reading of the relationship between characters and space, a comparative study of the battle scenes in *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*, as well as an analysis of how Kurosawa's editing strategies co-exist with his use of the dramatic style of the Noh in his modern adaptation of *Hamlet*, it is my purpose to map out the circulation and functioning of Kurosawa's authorial voice. Although Kurosawa is particularly renowned for his authoritarian or even tyrannical style as a director — his uncompromising character earned him the nickname of 'the emperor', one too often forgets that he was also a strong supporter of collaborative work and that, most of the time, he was working with the same small group of collaborators. In fact, Kurosawa's attitude to authorship was rather ambivalent as on the one hand he needed to share the anxiety of the creative work of script-writing with a small team of close friends, while on the other he was very much the embodiment of the independent *auteur* when he was filming and editing. Accordingly, I would like to argue that it is this ambivalence that shaped and defined his Shakespearean films.

Moving forward in time, chapter three will propose a reading of Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard* from the vantage point of (a collective work of) film-editing. Given the specific nature of this adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, which Pacino himself defines as a docu-drama, it would seem particularly inappropriate to discuss it within the context of *auteur* theory. Indeed, how could a film based on collaborative work and dedicated to the ordinary invisible process of location-scouting, interviewing, readthroughs, and costume rehearsals during which external consultants, actors, director, and producers work together toward a common vision of the Shakespearean play, be the object of a purely *auteurist* inquiry? And within this plurality of authorial voices that shapes the fragmented structure and nature of *Looking for Richard*, where can we locate Pacino's own authorial signature? As well as attempting to answer these questions, my intention in this chapter is to provide a discussion of the dis-location of Pacino's *auteur* desire within an essentially collaborative mode of production and post-production.

With the study of Julie Taymor's *Titus*, chapter four will take the idea of editing quite literally, thereby exploring the latent metaphor of dissection and dismemberment that is implicit in the practice of film-editing. By drawing an analogy between the early modern culture of anatomization and the cinematic activities of *découpage* (cutting) and montage (splicing), I am particularly interested in the filmic performative body and the way Julie Taymor, with the collaboration of her editor Françoise Bonnot, has used *mise en scène* and film-editing to adapt the Renaissance narratives of *Titus Andronicus* to the cinema and to translate and interpret its thematic content within a violent postmodern context. While Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* derives its iconography from the early modern culture of dissection, literary device of the blazon, and classical literature (namely Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and Seneca's *Thyestes*), Taymor's *Titus* reinvents these

Renaissance images in terms of cinematic form. Indeed, I would suggest that the plethora of bodily fragmentation and transformation — Titus's physical and psychological reduction, his sons' death, or Lavinia's mutilations — that comes to materialise the main themes of the play (notably the dangers of political extremism and the fear of racial invasion), seems to have inspired the structural composition and artistic strategies of Taymor's adaptation.

Finally, as a coda to this thesis, chapter five will examine the questions of authorship and film-editing in relation to Shakespeare films from a more cognitive angle. By using Michael Almereyda's millennial *Hamlet* as a case study, I propose to discuss the supplementary and artificial nature of the film-editing process. Based on Jacques Derrida's analysis of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Les Confessions* and on the latter's attitude vis-à-vis the act of writing, I would like to read the editorial activities of both Almereyda and his Hamlet, in and out of the film-text, as the critical response to a situation of distress. Interpreted as an act of resistance, I would like to argue that the editing is the compensatory process through which Almereyda reclaims his authorial presence and that Ethan Hawke's Hamlet expresses his inability to 'cope' either with the loss of his father or with the assertion of his own self as the heir apparent to the throne. It is therefore, I will also suggest, through a destructive system of editorial substitutions that this Hamlet will attempt to edit himself toward perfection, cutting out all his faults and flaws along the way.

1

Orson Welles and the Politics of Temporal Representation

I wrote the script and directed it.

My name is Orson Welles.

This is a Mercury Production.¹

One might think that Michel Foucault had Orson Welles in mind when he questioned the interdependence of the notions of ‘author’ and ‘*oeuvre*’, and defiantly asked: ‘What matters who’s speaking?’² The above statement of authorship that ends *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) clearly answers Foucault’s question: for Welles, it does indeed matter who is speaking or more exactly, it does matter who is *not* speaking. By naming himself in such a metadiegetic and tongue-in-cheek manner, Welles achieves three objectives: he first makes his role clear in the creation of *Ambersons*, he then asserts his artistic ownership of the film thereby transforming it into a possession and a commercial product, and he finally suppresses any other authorial voices that intervened in the film-making process by simply denying them a place in the credits. The fact that Welles narrates the credits only adds to the establishment (or even the enforcement) of his status as sole figure of authority in the *Ambersons* film-text, which, in the light of what happened during the last stages of the film’s post-production, has taken on a very ironic dimension. This episode is now a well-known part of Welles’s cinematic history which is worth recounting again for the purpose of this chapter.

¹ This is an excerpt from Welles’s narration of the credits at the end of *The Magnificent Ambersons*. Dir. Orson Welles. Mercury Production, RKO Radio Pictures. 1942.

² Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?”, *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 282-290 (p. 290).

If indeed Orson Welles — as he claims in the film — wrote the script and directed *The Magnificent Ambersons*, his involvement in the editing (he had obtained the final cut in his contract) of the film was suddenly interrupted when he had to travel to South America in order to make a film-documentary on (amongst some other subjects) the Rio Carnival. This was during the Second World War and this trip was meant to be Welles's contribution to the construction of a strong alliance between North and South America. Although he was compelled to leave Hollywood before the completion of *Ambersons's* editing, Welles was determined, by hook or by crook, to edit it from Rio through cable, letters, and phone calls in the hope of retaining his authority on the film.

According to Peter Bogdanovich, things began to go awry after the first preview of the film. The test-audience's negative response set off a wind of panic amongst the RKO executives who hastily decided to recut *Ambersons*. From Rio, Welles sent many suggestions to RKO in an attempt to protect his work and as Bogdanovich explains, 'many of his instructions were not incorporated. He even sent the text for a couple of new scenes to be made, as well as instructions for how they were to be shot — all in a desperate attempt to retain the shape and substance of the film'.³ After too many discussions among the RKO executives, and because of the little faith they had in Welles's final cut, they decided to 'save what could be saved' of the film by filming new scenes, suppressing the last sequence, and reducing the duration of the film by approximately forty four minutes.⁴ What followed was a last failed legal appeal from Welles, and in the latter's words, the 'mangling'⁵ of *Ambersons*. In this particular case, the final cut of the film was a repressive act that subdued Welles's authorial agency.

³ Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p. 119.

⁴ The original running time of *The Magnificent Ambersons* was 132 minutes and the running time of the released film was 88 minutes.

⁵ Orson Welles, *This is Orson Welles*, p.150.

Welles was certainly a man committed to his art who went through enormous efforts to make his voice heard and acknowledged. Three years after *The Magnificent Ambersons* ‘incident’, Welles wrote a letter to Bogdanovich in which he gave his side of the story and made the following comment:

Even if I’d stayed I would have had to make compromises on the edition, but these would have been mine and not the fruit of confused and often semi-hysterical committees. If I had been there myself I would have found my own solutions and saved the picture in a form which would have carried the stamp of my own effort.⁶

It is particularly significant that Welles chose to use the word ‘stamp’ to characterise the mark of his authorship for the stamp is probably the most figurative and oldest mark of ownership, approval, and completion. Thus, despite the self-assertive credits at the end of *The Magnificent Ambersons*, the modified version that was released in 1942 has little to do with Welles’s original film, so much so that Welles could not even bear looking at it:

In a Beverly Hills hotel suite, Orson was flipping the TV dial as usual when he happened on an early scene from *Ambersons*. Almost before it was visible, he quickly switched channels, but I noticed it and asked him to leave it on. He loudly refused, but everyone in the room started badgering him to let us see the film and finally, exasperated, he turned back to the channel and stalked out of the room.

Now we all felt terrible, and called to him to come back; he yelled in jokingly that he was going into the ‘soundproof room’. We watched for a while, and pretty soon Orson appeared in the doorway, leaning against the door, looking at the TV unhappily. We all pretended not to notice and went on watching the picture. A few minutes went by. Orson casually made his way across the room and sat on the very edge of a sofa, and looked at the TV intently, but with a kind of desperation combined with a terrible anxiety.

The film went on, and Orson loudly announced the loss of certain truncated scenes. Several minutes later, he stood up and, turning his back to us, went to the window and began fiddling with the venetian blinds. The rest of us exchanged looks. We’d all noticed there were tears in his eyes.⁷

The fact that the spectacle of his mutilated film could bring Welles to tears and anxiety is yet another sign of where the filmmaker considered his authorial agency to reside,

⁶ Orson Welles, *This is Orson Welles*, p.150

⁷ Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles*, p. 131-132.

that is in the cutting room. As far as Orson Welles's films are concerned, the issue of authorship is indeed more tightly connected with the process of film-editing than anything else, perhaps because this is when the film acquires its 'final' shape, when the author can finally write 'The End'. Such a strong emotional response would certainly suggest that in taking away Welles's right to the final cut of *Ambersons*, RKO executives (namely George Schaefer and Charles W. Koerner) erased the stamp of Welles's authorship and simply de-authorised *Ambersons*, thereby making it alien territory for its director. This is the final irony of *Ambersons*: Welles claims an authorship in the credits of the film that is not even his anymore.

In this view, Pauline Kael's attack on Welles's authorship in *Citizen Kane* (1941) seems particularly misplaced. In her now well-known essay called 'Raising Kane' that was first published in 1971 (during the heydays of *auteurism*) in *The New Yorker*, Kael contends that the script of *Kane* was entirely written by Herman J. Mankiewicz without the collaboration of Orson Welles, and maintains that Mankiewicz was blackmailed into sharing the script credit with Welles. With this essay, Pauline Kael who was then an active and notorious 'anti-*auteurism*', intended to demystify the cult of the director-*auteur* initiated by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics by proving once and for all that the director is not the author of a film. This essay fuelled a great amount of literature on both sides and a lot of words were exchanged between Kael and Peter Bogdanovich, but what is interesting is the fact that in placing Mankiewicz in the position of sole author of the script, Kael did indeed undermine the *auteur* status of the director but she did not criticise or question the concept of *auteurism*. She only shifted the authorial agency from one person to another, from the director to the scriptwriter. And if we suppose, as it is my contention, that Welles's authorial agency mainly lies in his editing work, Kael's attack was merely a *coup dans l'eau*. Perhaps it does indeed

matter 'who is speaking' and even more so for the persons involved in the creative process. It is difficult to deny the pleasure we take in knowing who is responsible for a particular effect (actor, scriptwriter, director, editor, cinematographer...) or in recognising the 'stamp' of an artist. The dialectical relationship between artist and audience is such that while the artist enjoys being recognised, the audience takes pleasure in the recognition of the artist's name and craftsmanship. Michel Foucault contends that the author's name 'is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to new groups of discourse' and he also adds that 'the function of an author is to characterise the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society'.⁸ As far as Orson Welles is concerned, his name and the totality of discourses (or to borrow Genette's terminology, paratextuality⁹) attached to it over the years have amply contributed to the legend of the precocious genius who reached the summit of his career with *Citizen Kane* and went disappointedly downhill after this point. Moreover, with his name so tightly associated with the romantic notion of the *auteur*, a large part of the critical work produced on his Shakespearean films post-*Macbeth* (1948) insists in presenting textual analysis of his films exclusively influenced and centred on Welles's 'large, theatrical personality'.¹⁰ Welles's name is indeed at the crossroads of so many different discourses and myths around his personality and his life that this public image continues 'to steal the show' of his own productions. The works of critics like Roger Manvell, Anthony Davies, André Bazin, Jack J. Jorgens, and even Pauline Kael belong to such a literature based on this notion

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 123.

⁹ In *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), Genette calls paratextuality the relation, within the totality of a literary work, between the text proper and its 'paratext', i.e. the other texts that spring from it.

¹⁰ Roger Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1971), p.62.

of author-as-personality. It seems that the ghost of *Citizen Kane* still haunts and even contaminates these critical texts with ‘outside noises’ of either undeserved praise or spiteful slandering. Either way, these criticisms match perfectly with Welles’s monumental persona. The undeniable appeal of Orson Welles’s uncommon, adventurous, and stirring enterprises has given rise to a large number of biographies or biographically based critical essays on his work. Unfortunately, Welles’s overwhelming charisma or genius, as it was often proclaimed by André Bazin and Jean Cocteau, either overshadows his major artistic creations or puts too much emphasis on his minor productions. On the other hand, the connection between an artist and its work is so tight that analysing them independently (when the possibility to do otherwise does exist) from one another would be a complete denial of the status of the *auteur*. As Robert Stam states it:

For Truffaut, the new film would resemble the person who made it, not so much through autobiographical content but rather through the style, which impregnates the film with the personality of its director. Intrinsically strong directors, *auteur* theory argued, will exhibit over the years a recognisable stylistic and thematic personality, even when they work in Hollywood studios.¹¹

Situated outside this pro-*auteur* and anti-*auteur* debate, Michael Anderegg has brought a fresh approach to the Wellesian Shakespeare films by repositioning Orson Welles as a ‘performer who moved comfortably between “highbrow” culture and “lowbrow” entertainment’.¹² Drawing on Welles’s working patterns on paper, stage, and radio, Anderegg maintains that ‘the suggestion of *bricolage*, of cobbling things together, characteristic of so many of Welles’s activities over the years, affects the Shakespeare texts as well’.¹³ This tendency to ‘recycle, revise, and reshape’¹⁴ that he demonstrated in

¹¹ Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), p. 84.

¹² Michael Anderegg, *Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and popular culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p.3.

¹³ Michael Anderegg, p. 40.

¹⁴ Michael Anderegg, p.41.

the co-edition and recordings of *Everybody's Shakespeare* — a series of play-texts he designed in collaboration with his former teacher, Roger Hill — is also to be found in the makings of *Macbeth*, *Othello* (1952), and *Chimes at Midnight* (1967).

In his fascinating book, Anderegg describes an Orson Welles who was less confident in his artistic decisions than what the *auteurist* critics would let us believe. Instead of focussing his study on the legendary genius, Anderegg brings a different understanding of Welles's creative process by contextualising his Shakespearean films within the spectrum of his literary, radio, and theatrical activities. By demonstrating that Welles spent most of his life working again and again on the same Shakespearean projects, Anderegg finally suggests that 'like Shakespeare's plays, Welles's films will always be works in progress, open to change, to alteration, even to desecration'.¹⁵

This is particularly true as far as the editing of his Shakespearean films is concerned. As the different versions of these films would suggest, Welles saw films not as fixed pieces of art but as very fluid and flexible compositions, the editing of which reflects the film-maker's sense of improvisation. Most critics acknowledge that Welles's Shakespearean films are 'flawed', lacking in structure, in visual coherence, in synchronisation between sound and image, in the quality of the performances... Interestingly enough, none of these films has ever received an unequivocally positive review. His Shakespearean films share the same 'first-draft', unfinished quality that leaves the viewers hungry for more or better. *Macbeth* was particularly criticised for its B series looks, *Othello* for the poor quality of its soundtrack and editing, and *Chimes at Midnight* for being too elegiac. Is that their strength or their weakness? Or does it matter at all? What did matter for Welles was to make films and to be free to make them in the way he wanted. This freedom that inspired his work is fully apparent in the

¹⁵ Michael Anderegg, p.122.

unconventionality and flexibility of his *mise en scène* and editing. Within such a context of ‘work in progress’, what I am particularly interested in this chapter, is an examination of Welles’s creation of meaning through his manipulations of the filmic time.

In *Still in Movement*, Lorne Buchman devoted a whole chapter to Welles’s *Othello*, and especially to the film’s temporal dynamics. Buchman acknowledges that ‘the question of the [Shakespeare’s] plays as a product of filmic time (...) is a subtler and slightly more difficult one to address than that of space’,¹⁶ before she moves on to a study of the temporal relations underlying both the film and the play-text. In basing her analysis on G. Wilson Knight’s and Jack J. Jorgens’s assumptions that Iago and Othello are characterised by two antagonistic musical and compositional styles, Buchman argues that in the same way, Iago and Othello are also divided in terms of temporal styles:

Because Iago has destroyed his [Othello’s] sense of constancy and eternity, it follows that Othello responds with vows of revenge that are associated with disintegration. Welles echoes these images of fragmentation in his film through montage, a quick-moving camera, and the contrasting rhythms of the soundtrack.¹⁷

Although Buchman makes some interesting comments, she does not develop them, and only remains at the entrance of Welles’s labyrinthine *Othello*. What I propose is to take her analysis one step further, and perhaps in another direction, by putting more emphasis on Welles’s use of editing in his Shakespearean triptych — *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Chimes at Midnight* — because these three films represent three different methods of realising the plays’ thematic substance through three distinct temporal fabrics. On this matter, Pudovkin contends that:

¹⁶ Lorne Buchman, *Still in Movement: Shakespeare on Screen* (Oxford: University Press, 1991), p. 107.

¹⁷Buchman, p. 141.

Created by the camera, obedient to the will of the director — after the cutting and joining of the separate pieces of celluloid — there arises a new *filmic* time; not that real time embraced by the phenomenon as it takes place before the camera, but a new *filmic* time, conditioned only by the speed of perception and controlled by the number and duration of the separate elements selected for filmic representation of the action.¹⁸

In this chapter I am particularly interested in getting a clearer view on how the rhythmic and temporal organisations of the films created by Welles's editing strategies shape both the structural and thematic textures of these three Shakespearean films and our responses to them. Finally, this study will also be concerned with the dynamics of authorship that surround Welles's Shakespearean adaptations and that have exercised so much influence on their critical receptions. In taking into account Welles's particular position as actor, director, editor, producer, and scriptwriter, and drawing on Michael Anderegg's argument that Welles's attitude toward film-making is one of fragmentation and experimentation, I would like to argue that too much attention has been given to Welles's status as director-*auteur* and that it is mainly in his activities as a film-editor that resides his authorial agency.

1.1 *Macbeth*: 'the future in an instant' (1.5.57-58)

Of all the existing filmic versions of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Welles's has been considered one of the best because of its stylistic and interpretative achievements, and one of the worst because of its technical weaknesses (preposterous cardboard décor, faked Scottish accents, anachronistic costumes, ill-conceived properties...). The first impression one experiences after viewing Welles's *Macbeth* is one of intense oppression and incongruous theatricality. Eerily, the film seems to unfold in stasis; moving slowly but inexorably towards the death of the protagonists, and yet forever

¹⁸V. I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, trans. Ivor Montagu (London: Vision Press Ltd, 1954), p. 59.

suspended in time. This feeling of oppression is both spatial and temporal: not only does the dark, prominent cardboard and papier-mâché setting prevent any sense of openness and three-dimensionality, but also the slow pace of the editing resists the constant flow of shots (and time) that characterises standard (Hollywood) films. This is a film that, had the conditions of production been different, could have been much more visually impressive but as it is, *Macbeth* looks like the first draft of itself. Nevertheless, what Orson Welles created with his interpretation of the play is an audacious stylistic essay.

The fact that *Macbeth* is the cinematic outcome of two previous stage productions partly accounts for the theatricality of the film's designs. Welles first staged the play in April 1936 at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem with an all black cast. The Roosevelt administration which had set up the Works Progress Administration in order to keep the actors employed financed Welles's production and thereby gave him the opportunity to reinvent Shakespeare on stage by breaking away from the theatrical legacy of the nineteenth century. This *Macbeth* was set in the *Créole* culture of Haiti in which the Scottish warrior finds himself the victim of three Voodoo witches. As Peter Bogdanovich recounts:

The idea of doing the tragedy with a coloured cast was suggested by Mrs Welles. Because Christophe, the famous black emperor of Haiti, had been a man after Macbeth's own heart, the action was transferred from Scotland to Haiti. The Birnam Wood that came to Dunsinane was a jungle of palms and bananas. The three weird women were translated into sixty black witch doctors.¹⁹

This production received a very positive and enthusiastic critical reception, so much so that Welles reused some of his designs when he re-staged the Shakespearean tragedy in Salt Lake City, at the Utah Centennial Drama Festival, a few months before he started shooting the Republic *Macbeth* in July 1947. As can be seen in black and white

¹⁹ Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles*, p. 334

photographs of this production, Welles had kept the imposing staircase that was the principal element of the décor in his all black *Macbeth*, and that is also incorporated in the film. This is one perfect example of the Wellesian preoccupation with recycling and revisions described by Anderegg.

The Salt Lake City production was meant to be a big-scale rehearsal for the film that would allow Welles to comply with the three-weeks shooting time that Republic Pictures allotted him. As Welles explains in an interview with Peter Bogdanovich, his actors pre-recorded the dialogue and lip-synched during the photography: ‘that meant the technicians could be roaring out instructions about where the crane went, and clattering and howling away off camera, while we were busy getting on with the filming. A foolish way to work, but on that schedule it was the only way we could have got it made’.²⁰ This rehearsal did indeed allowed for a shorter filming period but it also imposed a theatricality on the film’s aesthetics — the style which drew so much adverse criticism. As for the lip synchronisation of the dialogue, although the result is quite satisfying, it is nevertheless clearly visible. One cannot help noticing that we sometimes continue to hear Welles’s voice declaiming his lines while his lips have stopped moving. This disconnection between sound and image, which also occurs in *Othello*, was also accentuated by the fact that the film had to be partly redubbed. The reason for this was that on the original soundtrack, Welles had insisted in having his actors speak their lines with a Scottish accent which the Republic executives found particularly incongruous. Repeating the history of *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Welles had no other choice but to comply to the redubbing of *Macbeth* without the Scottish burr. As Michael Anderegg contends, the redubbing proved to be significantly damaging to the film’s overall aesthetics: ‘Welles was quite conscious of the fact that redubbing, even

²⁰ Orson Welles, *This is Orson Welles*, p.209.

by the same actor, is not merely a matter a lip synchronisation, but that it affects, in terms of rhythm, pace, emphasis, tone, and so forth, the entire shape of an actor's performance'.²¹ In other words, the actors act Scottish but do not sound Scottish. This is the kind of inconsistency that makes Welles's *Macbeth* a flawed but not failed attempt, for this is also the stamp of Welles's persistence in his struggle to make things happen.

Flexibility is a key word as far as Welles's post-*Magnificent Ambersons* career is concerned. Being limited, as we have seen, in shooting time (only 23 days), sets, and costumes, Welles had no choice but make the best use of what little means he had. In an interview with Peter Bogdanovich, the (bitter) account he gives for the designs he used in *Macbeth* sounds very much like a justification — or even an apology that asks for our sympathy:

My own designs turned out, at the last minute, to be just a bit beyond our means, so what was left to photograph was cheesy cardboard. We did shoot in the old salt mine that the cowboys always used to get lost in — that became the great hall of the castle. Our costumes, lamentably, were all rented from Western Costumes, except for Mr. and Mrs. Macbeth. Mine should have been sent back, because I looked like the Statue of Liberty in it. But there was no dough for another, and nothing in stock at Western would fit me, so I was stuck with it.²²

In spite of the numerous setbacks Welles experienced during this production, he nevertheless succeeded in making the most out of these limitations by developing a bold and elaborate *mise en scène* and editing that was quite unorthodox for a Shakespearean film of that period. Anthony Davies even contends that *Macbeth* 'asserts for cinema an autonomous artistic claim for a valid expression and presentation of Shakespearean material in terms of a predominant spatial concept, and in so doing, it is the starting point of that line of approach which culminates in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* on the one hand, and in Kozintsev's two masterpieces *Hamlet* (1964) and *King*

²¹ Michael Anderegg, *Orson Welles, Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, p. 93.

²² Orson Welles, *This is Orson Welles*, p. 207.

Lear (1971) on the other'.²³ Although the spatial composition designed by Welles is particularly innovative, these papier-mâché rocks and cardboard walls are so 'expressionistic' (as Davies sympathetically describes them) or rather so conspicuously fake that they change Macbeth into the petty king of a paper castle. In spite of Welles's efforts, the 'poverty' and incongruity of the set ostensibly diminish the significance of the political and moral foundations that are at stake in Shakespeare's play. Although the décor was not meant to be realistic, it is sometimes difficult to believe that Welles's Macbeth sacrifices everything he has — his friends, king, and life — to become the king of a forsaken kingdom of painted backdrops. In this context, when Shakespeare's Macbeth coldly resolves that:

By the worst means, the worst. For mine own good,
All causes shall give way: I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er²⁴ (3.4.134-137),

Welles's voice rings helplessly hollow. In fact, the extremely restricted number of sets seems to have considerably limited Welles's choice in terms of *mise en scène* and editing. Compared with *Othello* and *Chimes at Midnight*, Welles's selection of camera movements and placements in *Macbeth* is significantly restrained as if the limited space of the Republic studio held back his camera and his taste for experimentation and *bricolage*. His usually flamboyant style is somewhat subdued and only comes to the surface in the more spectacular scenes of the film such as the execution of the Thane of Cawdor, the murder of Duncan or the Banquet scene. In those instances, 'camera

²³ Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's play: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook, and Akira Kurosawa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 83-84.

²⁴ William Shakespeare, 'Macbeth', *The Arden Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1998), p. 786. Quotations of all other Shakespeare plays follow the same Arden edition.

movement, when it does manifest itself, comes as a refreshing spatial resource²⁵ that distracts us from the non-realism of the western-like location.

From *Citizen Kane* to *Filming Othello* (the last film he completed), Welles remained faithful to his characteristic combinations of extreme low and high angles shots, to his use of wide angle shots that compresses characters and space, and to his extraordinary way of breaking the continuity system either by decentering the characters within the frame or by making an extensive use of varying perspectives and viewpoints. In fact, his consistent use of abrupt camera movements that cut the scenes and follow the characters' dashing movements off screen, as well as his fondness for extremely varied cutting rhythms from one sequence to another are the trademarks of his art. As far as *Macbeth* is concerned, Welles partly made up for his lack of shooting time and designs with his technical and stylistic skills. Indeed, with its papier-mâché setting and shoddy costumes unfortunately veering toward the grotesque (especially the notorious Statue of Liberty costume worn by Welles), only his directorial and editorial inventiveness prevented this *Macbeth* from becoming a filmed play or a very mediocre B movie.

The issues of control and authorship being closely interdependent, the limited control that Welles enjoyed over the choice of costumes, sets, camera placements, and over the shooting of *Macbeth* in general, impairs substantially his authorial agency as far as his directorial work is concerned. On the other hand, although the Republic executives had both the Scottish accent and the first two reels of the film removed, Welles was nevertheless able to maintain his authority on the editing of the film. As he explains in another interview with Bogdanovich, 'they [the studio executives] asked me to take out two reels and I did — but *I* cut out the two reels, and they didn't. I thought

²⁵ Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays*, p. 93.

they shouldn't have been cut out, but I'm the one who cut it. Not some idiot back at home [Welles refers here to the re-editing of *The Magnificent Ambersons*].²⁶ Therefore, by taking full responsibility for the editing of *Macbeth*, Welles also asserts his authorship — not as the director but as the editor — over the 'final product'.

In the same way as the financial restraints conditioned the spatial style of *Macbeth*, so did they influence its temporal composition. Because *Macbeth* is the shortest of Shakespeare's tragedies, it is often staged without any intermission, thereby compressing the passing of time between Macbeth's access to the throne and his subsequent downfall. The fateful prophecy of the witches leads the characters, hastily and inexorably, to their purposeless ends. The disastrous outcome that is announced at the onset of the play is already taking place when Macbeth and Banquo first meet the Weird Sisters after the battle. The following outburst of betrayals and bloodshed happens very quickly with only very brief moments of repose in between them. In *Macbeth* as in all Shakespeare plays, the question of time is constantly brought up by the protagonists. For them, time is rarely neutral in their struggle for power, love, sanity, or revenge: it is either their enemy or their ally, holding their fears and hopes. In Welles's film, the question of time is first brought up by Lady Macbeth, who, when she is reunited to her husband, tells him: 'I feel now/The future in the instant' (1.5.57-58). Having been informed by Macbeth's letter, she knows the Weird Sisters have prophesied Macbeth's access to the highest summit of power, and it is this knowledge (or power) that already confuses her perception of time. To live in hope is not to know what the future holds, and what Lady Macbeth experiences is the exciting feeling of living the future in a present that no longer merits consideration. In the scene that shows Macbeth dictating the letter to his wife, and in the following sequences where he rides

²⁶ Orson Welles, *This is Orson Welles*, p. 217.

towards Dunsinane while Lady Macbeth reads the letter in her *femme fatale* style boudoir, both husband and wife look deeply intoxicated or even spellbound. Propitious to the temporal suspension that Lady Macbeth senses so fully, a series of slow dissolves connects these scenes in a very organic and dreamlike fashion which illustrates Anthony Davies's remark that 'the function of the montage is not only to give narrative continuity a dynamic pace, but, more importantly, to achieve a level of dramatic complexity through the shifting of perspective'.²⁷

As it has been often noted by critics like Michael Anderegg, Anthony Davies, André Bazin, and Joseph McBride, the film unfolds through a series of long takes - - some of them being as long as a reel — that defines the temporal aesthetics of the film. These sequence shots tend to precede moments charged with intense dramatic tension and spectacular flourishes, and the murder of King Duncan is such a defining moment. In terms of cinematic rendering, the cutting rhythm of the sequences following the execution of the Thane of Cawdor and preceding the discovery of Duncan's body marks a significant *decrecendo*. Significantly, the duration of the shots increases steadily until the moment when Macduff discovers the assassinated body of the King. This rhythmic build-up reaches its apex with the last shot of the sequence which is also — being thirteen minutes in duration — the longest of the film:

- Shot 1: long shot in straight angle of the door leading to King Duncan's apartments.
- Shot 2: medium shot in straight angle of Lady Macbeth seizing the daggers of King Duncan's guards whom she had drugged.
- Shot 3: medium long shot in high angle of Lady Macbeth's shadow hovering over a sleeping and defenceless King Duncan.

²⁷ Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's plays*, p. 91.

- Shot 4: medium long shot in low angle of Macbeth, standing in the courtyard outside Duncan's apartments. Macbeth comments on the night in voice-over 'Now over the one half world/Nature seems dead...' (2.1.49-56); and he then delivers the opening lines of the same speech 'Is this a dagger I see before me...' (2.1.33-47) as several 'skip-frames' (see below) show a series of Macbeth's hallucinatory visions: images of the witches' voodoo doll and of a dagger hovering in front of him, the camera zooming on and away from him.
- Shot 5: medium shot in low angle of Lady Macbeth who walks out of a corridor.
- Shot 6: long take; the shot begins with a long shot in low angle of Lady Macbeth walking down the stairs and telling her husband that 'the doors are opened' for him to commit the regicide. At this point, Macbeth expresses his doubts while looking away from her: 'We will proceed no further in this business' (1.7.31). She urges him to summon up his courage and his manliness, and execute their plan. The church bells and thunder resound ominously in the background as Macbeth gets up the stairs hesitantly. The camera in low angle now follows Lady Macbeth waiting anxiously for her husband and terrified by the shriek of an owl. A noise coming from the castle is heard; she walks to the stairs, dreading that the guards have woken up before the terrible deed has been done. Macbeth finally comes back with two bloody daggers in his hands and a vacant expression in his eyes. As he refuses to put the daggers back at the murder scene, Lady Macbeth takes them from him and places them in the dead guards' hands. The camera photographs Macbeth in low angle as we hear someone knocking at the main door. Lady Macbeth, with her hands covered in blood, entreats her husband to put on his night-shirt and wash his bloody hands

before she leaves the scene. He also leaves while we still hear the sound of the knocking in the background. The porter finally arrives, his speech being reduced to a mere 'Knock, knock' (2.3.1-21), and he opens the door to Macduff and Lennox who are met by Macbeth. While Lennox reports to Macbeth the ominous portents of the night, Macduff discovers the King's assassination.

Long takes such as shots 4 and 6 are also to be found in *Othello* and *Chimes at Midnight*, as well as in his non-Shakespearean films like *Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *Touch of Evil* or *Mr Arkadin*, and are significant elements of Orson Welles's cinema. He himself maintained on several occasions that the sequence shot was one of his favourite cinematic devices because it allowed him to create specific feelings: '[Claustrophobia is] one of the things that you cannot do no matter how you cut — claustrophobia does require the long take (...) and it does build up when you don't cut — you must lose [the effect] in cutting'.²⁸ And this is precisely these feelings of claustrophobia and uneasiness that are developed by the long takes of this *Macbeth*. As Anderegg rightly comments, 'the longer the take continues, the more we become conscious of its unusualness (unusual, that is, in terms of our cinematic expectations) and the more intense it becomes'.²⁹ Welles deliberately keeps his audience waiting for the cut — a wait of thirteen long minutes — and instead of cutting, as one could expect, on a close-up of the bloody daggers in Macbeth's hands as he comes back from the king's apartment, he continues with the take and with the action, thereby increasing the tension of the scene. There is no pause, no respite, and no relief for Macbeth. Because there are no cuts to dissociate the plotting of the king's assassination from the actual deed and its aftermath, these movements appear not as a series of narrative effects but as a whole, so that *Macbeth*, in terms of editorial rhetoric, cannot escape from his

²⁸ Welles and Bogdanovich, p. 309.

²⁹ Michael Anderegg, *Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and Popular Culture*, p. 82.

transgressive deed and his guilt since he finds himself caught up in the moment of the regicide without being able to 'move on'.

Unlike a standard sequence which is composed of several shots, the long take is characterised by its absence of cuts. The action is perceived through a single point of view and unfolds within the spatio-temporal limits of the shot. By varying the perspectives of space and time within a standard sequence, we perceive space and time as the open and fluid environment that contains the characters' actions. On the other hand, the sequence shot (shot 6 in the above shot by shot analysis) is 'a complete unit in time and space'.³⁰ Although the camera can zoom in, zoom out, dolly, pan or tilt, the action is still restricted by the actual dimensions of 'real' space and time (the boundaries of the shooting set and of the reel), thereby generating this static sense of claustrophobia praised by Welles, and also characteristic of the *film noir* style. And as it has been often noted, the oppressive atmosphere in *Macbeth* is particularly bleak and *noir*. Lady Macbeth herself (Jeanette Nolan) is the archetypal *femme fatale* with her 1940s hairstyle, well fitted dresses, and poses. Jean Cocteau found the *mot juste* when he described her as 'almost a woman in modern dress (...), reclining on a fur-covered divan beside the telephone'³¹ for she could well be talking on the telephone with her husband instead of reading his letter. In fact her *femme fatale* appearance is made even more anachronistic by the zip at the back of the dress which gives the *film noir* connection a rather comical pre-postmodern ironical twist.

To come back to shot 6, it is interesting to note that even though there is no cutting *per se* within the thirteen minutes of its duration, and therefore no spatio-temporal escape from the situation described, Welles succeeded in conferring a

³⁰ André Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View* (Venice, CA: First Acrobat Books, 1991), p. 68.

³¹ Jean Cocteau, 'Profile of Orson Welles', *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, p. 29.

sort of rhythm to the entire sequence simply by varying camera movements and angles, and by creating a specific positioning within the frame for each ‘encounter’ between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth — what André Bazin defines as ‘*découpage* in depth’.³² What Bazin means by this is a particular way of placing the camera, sets, and actors within a single shot in order to impart a sense of realism to the narrative:

A realism that is in a certain sense ontological, restoring to the object and the décor their existential density, the weight of their presence; a dramatic realism which refuses to separate the actor from the décor, the foreground from the background; a psychological realism which brings the spectator back to the real conditions of perception, a perception which is never completely determined a priori.³³

Although montage asks for the spectator’s attention in a way that the long take does not, in the case of shot 6, the ‘*découpage* in depth’ (this alternates between what we see in the background and the foreground) actively directs the spectator’s eyes onto specific objects such as the staircase and the daggers. According to Noel Burch, the act of viewing a film has to do not so much with the process of ‘looking’, but of ‘seeing’, and therefore does not position the viewer into an active process of selection. As Burch contends,

To “look” has to do with a mental process, whereas to “see” has to do with the physiology of the eye. And when we view a film, as when we view a painting or a photograph, seeing is no longer dependent on looking, as is nearly always the case in a real-life situation; the selectivity involved in looking no longer affects the nonselectivity involved in seeing in the slightest.³⁴

Burch’s postulate is based on the assumption that the viewing process is totally subordinated to the subjectivity of the camera (i.e. the director) and that meaning is a construct mainly produced by the manipulation of a film’s structure or to put it

³² Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, p. 80.

³³ Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, p. 80.

³⁴ Noel Burch, ‘Editing as a Plastic Art’, in *Defining Cinema*, ed. Peter Lehman (London: Athlone Press, 1999), pp. 145-148 (p. 147).

differently, ‘film form reworks our perception from the bottom up and rekindles our propensity to see (rather than to look)’.³⁵ Burch also asserts that:

Everything projected on a screen has exactly the same intrinsic “reality”, the same “presence”.... Because the screen has only two dimensions ... any shape projected on it is equally “present”, just as much “before our eyes” as any other shape. Even the parts of the image that are out of focus are perceived as quite distinct, visible, tangible entities, as what might be called “clumps of fuzziness”. ... When we view a screen we see everything at once; every form and every contour seems equally prominent visually. ... All the elements in any given film image are perceived as equal in importance.³⁶

Although this contention places Burch on the same grounds as Bazin’s realism, it leads him to consider the filmed image and film-editing (understood as the shot transition) as a ‘function of the total composition of each successive shots’,³⁷ concrete visual — but not necessarily visible — phenomena that need to be analysed in their entirety.

Even though shot 6 is not cut into specific units of time, Welles has nevertheless created a spatio-temporal structure in this long take. It is the organised series of actions that generates the inner rhythm of the sequence. The length of the shot is merely the time given to the spectator. Montage necessarily compresses (or less frequently extends) time as it is a selection of moments in a given scene, whereas the long shot faithfully reproduces a scene as it is performed. In fact I would suggest that the experience of watching the Macbeth couple plotting the death of their King and going through with it in continuity determines our perception of the whole scene. As far as temporality is concerned, the absence of editing within the sequence subdues the feeling of the passing of time usually created by a chronological chain of shots. Indeed, we perceive this sequence as if it was happening in ‘suspended’ or even ‘extended’ time, as if the duration of the action was longer than it really is. Our subjective perception of the

³⁵ Edward Branigan, ‘To Zero and Beyond: Noël Burch’s *Theory of Film Practice*’, in *Defining Cinema*, ed. Peter Lehman (London: Athlone Press, 1999), pp. 149-168 (p. 153).

³⁶ Burch, pp. 145-148 (p. 146-147).

³⁷ Burch, pp. 145-148 (p. 148).

temporality of the sequence can be regarded as distinct from the objective cinematic time. As a result of this modification of our temporal perception between a 'normatively' edited sequence and this long take, the dramatic tension of shot 6 is considerably increased. Orson Welles certainly enjoyed the power to manipulate a film audience that he had discovered with *Citizen Kane* through the combination of the various cinematic techniques. As far as shot 4 is concerned, the 'skip-framing' device that creates these accelerated and flashing zooms on a dagger and on a Voodoo doll that seem to be floating in front of Macbeth, is also a recurrent motif in Welles's films. He explains this stylistic figure as 'a zoom with frames pulled' which 'should happen so fast that you hardly know you've moved in'.³⁸ This simple visual trick allows him to put into image Macbeth's words 'Is this a dagger which I see before me' (2.1.33-47), thereby enabling the viewers to see Macbeth's hallucinatory visions in a kind of subjective camera style.

Had Orson Welles chosen to cut this scene into several shots and perhaps show us Macbeth in the act of the regicide, or Lady Macbeth putting back the daggers in the guards' hands, an important aspect of Macbeth's character would have remained unexpressed. By filming the sequence in continuity and from the same point of view which is from the bottom of the stairs outside the King's apartments, we get a sense of Macbeth's doubts, of his hesitations and fears that make him sweat, lose his bearings, and that finally give way to distress, shame, and regret. When, haggard, he staggers down the stairs with the bloody daggers in his hands and is urged by his wife to put back the weapons in the crime scene, he looks up at the door leading to the King's apartment in fear, for what he has done is an unnatural sin — in the following scene, the Holy Father will emphasise the moral and religious transgression of the regicide.

³⁸ Welles, *This is Orson Welles*, p. 309.

Within this sequence shot, the place of the murder acquires a Bazinian realism that supports the ‘reality’ of Macbeth’s guilt. As Macbeth shies away from his deed, so does the camera. By refusing to put back the daggers, Macbeth chooses not to face his crime and to simply ignore it. It is as if what happens in the castle during that night is so dreadful that the camera draws back from it. It stays away from the killing during the whole shot thereby keeping us away from it too. In other words, Welles chose to accentuate the weaknesses of his Macbeth, especially his edginess and cowardly inclination, by matching the camerawork with his behaviour.

Rhythm is an essential element of Welles’s editorial intentions in *Macbeth*. Indeed, the whole film is punctuated by sound motifs that inscribe the characters in enclosed patterns. These motifs reassert the impression of claustrophobia created by the use of long takes and the spatial designs of the film. The repetition of three distinctive sound rhythms are positioned at three key moments in the film: the beating of drums when Macbeth becomes Thane of Cawdor, the knocks on the castle’s door after the murder of King Duncan, and the church bells before the final battle. These toll-like rhythms put the stress on the fatefulness of Macbeth’s tragedy by acting like temporal markers, or more exactly like diegetic indicators that announce the defining moments of the tragedy. Such a moment occurs in the first part of the film, as Macbeth gallops towards the castle to meet his wife. In the meantime, while the Holy Father (a character inserted by Welles) and his followers arrive at the castle with Cawdor in tow, we see two men beating huge drums with a precise regularity. Welles develops these three lines of actions simultaneously by cross-cutting between the three of them:

- Shot 1: close-up in high angle of drummers pounding their instruments in rhythm.
- Shot 2: long shot in straight angle of two drummers among a crowd.

- Shot 3: long shot in straight angle of King Duncan and his men riding through the gate of the castle.
- Shot 4: medium long shot in high angle of Cawdor at the bottom of the steps closely surrounded by soldiers.
- Shot 5: medium long shot in low angle of the Holy Father walking past a line of soldiers with the shadows of the drummers on the rocky wall of the background.
- Shot 6: long shot in high angle of Cawdor forced up the rocky stairs by the soldiers with the Holy Father following them.
- Shot 7: medium close-up in low angle of one of the drummers.
- Shot 8: medium shot in low angle of the Holy Father and a soldier (probably the executioner) standing by a block.
- Shot 9: long shot in straight angle of Macbeth galloping towards the castle.
- Shot 10: long shot in extreme high angle (bird's-eye view) of Macbeth dismounting from his horse.
- Shot 11: medium shot in low angle of Cawdor being led to the block.
- Shot 12: long shot in straight angle of Macbeth walking past the gallows and being greeted and kissed by Lady Macbeth.
- Shot 13: medium shot in low angle of the line of soldiers with the shadow of the drummers in the background.
- Shot 14: medium close-up in low angle of one of the drummers.
- Shot 15: medium shot in low angle of the Holy Father blessing Cawdor.
- Shot 16: medium long shot in low angle of a soldier forcing Cawdor to put his head on the block. The executioner raises his axe and strikes Cawdor's head.

- Shot 17: medium close-up in low angle of one of the drummers.

During the sequence we hear the drums beating continuously and regularly like a dirge. This monotone rhythm accompanies the execution of Cawdor as well as announces the similar fate that awaits Macbeth and his wife. Compared with the long take of Duncan's murder, time in this sequence is considerably accelerated by the montage of shots showing simultaneous actions that are combined by the beating of drums. Macbeth's ascent happens so quickly and through such violence that it foreshadows his similarly quick downfall — he even shares Cawdor's fate since he also ends up beheaded.

The scene ends on a matching cut between the stroke of the executioner's axe and the drummer's last stroke on his drum. Future and present are closely mingled at that point in the film, and when Lady Macbeth tells her husband that she 'feels now the future in an instant' (1.5.57-58), this is also what is expressed by the editing of the sequence. Welles repeats this rhythmic motif once more after Duncan's death when, in the background, we hear Macduff and Lennox knocking insistently at the door while Macbeth behaves like a guilty murderer. The last time we hear the motif is when the church bells ring before the battle that will seal Macbeth's fate. These cataphoric sound rhythms occur before every step that brings him closer to his ruin and to his death. They announce, precipitate, and amplify the scope of the events that seem to be provoked by the Weird Sisters in order to heap miseries after miseries on this easily manipulated, pitiful, and even grotesque (especially with his Statue of Liberty attire) Macbeth.

With this limited spatial composition that reveals Welles's strenuous efforts to keep a hold on the form and structure of his *Macbeth*, it is only through his thematic use of rhythm and duration that Welles makes the film meaningful. He puts the stamp of his authorship on *Macbeth* by using the previous experiences of his stage productions in Harlem and Salt Lake City, and by adapting to the screen some of the strategies he had

then developed. If the atmosphere of stasis imposed by the long takes seems to be a direct adaptation of Welles's precedent stage productions of 1936 and 1947, the sound and visual patterns he created through his manipulation of the cutting rhythm as well as of the camera movements clearly grounds his *Macbeth* into the aesthetics of the cinema.

1.2 *Othello*: A 'Variation on Shakespeare's Theme'³⁹

In the long list of artists who have contributed to adapting Shakespeare to the cinematic medium, Orson Welles stands out as one of the boldest and most radically innovative as far as editing strategies and spatio-temporal compositions are concerned. Welles's exuberant and charismatic personality that led him (against his will) to a life off the beaten track and outside the hold of the Hollywood apparatus, has often been regarded as one of the main influences on his work. His lifelong and now legendary struggle to raise the funds necessary to produce the films his wild creative drive spurred him to make, is in fact the other much discussed aspect of Welles's Shakespearean cinematic adaptations. Welles himself put a great emphasis on the strenuous working methods and conditions he encountered all along his career. In the ninety minutes of his (last) filmed essay entitled *Filming Othello* (1978), he gives us an invaluable insight into the hidden mechanics of his 1952 *Othello*. While Welles describes (in his usual falsely modest way) the way he had to move from one location to another over the months and even the years in order to shoot some scenes of the Shakespearean tragedy while he was working on other projects to earn the money to finance it, he also tries to make sense of how all these constraints determined the structure of the film:

Iago steps from the portico of a church in Torcello, an island in the Venetian lagoon, into a Portuguese cistern off the coast of Africa. He is across the world and moved between two continents in the middle of a single spoken phrase. That happened all the time. A Tuscan stairway and a Moorish battlement are

³⁹ Welles and Bogdanovich, p. 228.

both parts of, what in the film, is a single room. Roderigo kicks Cassio in Massaga and gets punched back in Orgete, a thousand miles away. Pieces were separated not just by plane trips, but by breaks in time. Nothing was in continuity. I had no script girl. There was no way for the jigsaw picture to be put together, except in my mind. Over a span of sometimes months, I had to keep all the details in my memory. Not just from sequence to sequence, but from cut to cut. And I had no cutter! I had a whole series of cameramen, because of delays while I went searching for money, or took on jobs to earn it. Meanwhile the cameramen themselves found work, so I'd be picking up in the middle of a scene, even a sentence, with a new cameraman, who had seen nothing of what had been done before. Well, of course all that was bound to have affected the shape and form and stylistic substance of the film.⁴⁰

It is indeed very probable that having to film *Othello* pieces by pieces may have triggered a snowball effect on the last stages of its postproduction. The forced fragmented state of the shooting finds its inevitable equivalent in the overall fragmented state of the film's editing and overall structure. Could it yet be also possible that *Othello*'s jagged editing style is the result of a deliberate editorial choice? This could also be very probable. In any case, it is Welles's ability to incorporate all the unplanned incidents that happened in the course of the shooting of *Othello*, without upsetting its dramatic unity, that makes his second Shakespearean adaptation such an instance of editorial bravura.

In the same way as Welles's *Macbeth* was the logical continuation of his stage productions of the play, so was his *Othello*. Although the shooting of *Othello* began in June 1949, Welles staged the play in London in October 1951 — which was almost eight months before the first release of the film in May 1952 — while he must have been still busy with the editing of the film. According to a review of the production by Kenneth Tynan, its designs and spatio-temporal structures must have been rather similar to the film's:

⁴⁰ *Filming Othello* (1978), written and directed by Orson Welles, produced by Klaus Hellwig and Juergen Hellwig, edited by Marty Roth, with Orson Welles, Hilton Edwards, and Michael MacLiammoir, transcription of the film written by Lawrence French in 'Filming Othello' <<http://film.tierranet.com/directors/o.wells/fothelloe.html>> [accessed 16 February 2000].

Welles the producer gave us a new vista (based on five permanent golden pillars) for every scene; he used a russet traverse-curtain to wipe away each setting in the same manner that the film would use a dissolve; he sprinkled the action with striking background music and realistic recordings — in fact, he sacrificed much to give us a credible reading for a play which bristles with illogicalities. The presentation was visually flawless ... The St. James' stage seemed as big as a field.⁴¹

While the golden pillars evoke the strong vertical lines and labyrinthine patterns created by the large amount of columns and towers that saturates the spatial aesthetics of the film, the use of a traverse-curtain that 'wiped away' the scenes is a direct reference to the feelings of fragmentation, urgency, and restlessness generated by the frantic rhythm of the cutting. On stage, the effect produced by the manipulations of the traverse-curtain must have been quite spectacular, and the variety of settings as well as their fluid succession very astonishing indeed: the theatrical equivalent of Erwin Panofsky's cinematic concepts of 'dynamisation of space and 'spatialisation of time'.⁴² Welles kept these visualisations of the temporal dimension in his cinematic version of the play through an intensive use of fast cutting rhythm and temporal ellipses.

By translating the scene transitions into gestures that interrupted the performance in such a physical and visual manner, Welles seems to have staged Shakespeare's *Othello* in the tradition of Brecht's epic theatre.⁴³ The use or rather adaptation of cinematic techniques in a theatrical environment would have certainly contributed to the creation of such Brechtian alienation (*verfremdung*) effects, thereby illustrating Walter Benjamin's formulation that 'the art of the epic theatre consists in

⁴¹ Kenneth Tynan, quoted by Peter Bogdanovich in *This is Orson Welles*, pp. 409-410.

⁴² Erwin Panofsky, 'Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures', *Film Theory and Criticism*, eds. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp 243-263.

⁴³ In *This is Orson Welles*, Peter Bogdanovich mentions that Brecht himself regarded Welles's art with much admiration. As he recounts, 'Bertold Brecht attended a matinee of the stage production [Around the World in 80 days] during its Boston tryout (spring 1946), and according to Richard Wilson — an eyewitness — he came backstage afterward to tell Welles it was the greatest American theatre he had ever seen', p. 112.

producing astonishment rather than empathy' and that 'instead of identifying with the characters, the audience should be educated to be astonished at the circumstances under which they function'.⁴⁴ By drawing the spectators' attention to the mechanics of his stage production, Welles clearly imposed a distance and a certain critical attitude on his audience. Similarly, the abruptness and sheer visibility of the editing in his film of *Othello* not only demand our uttermost attention but also lead us to a Brechtian 'active watching' of the film in a way that is unequalled in his *Macbeth* and *Chimes at Midnight*.

With his habit of staging a play before putting it on screen, Welles had the possibility, or even the privilege, of experimenting with his designs and concepts on a grand scale. By using these stage productions as rehearsals and 'previews' for his films, Welles was also able to evaluate the audience's response. One can easily imagine that a particularly positive response to a specific effect would have encouraged Welles to adapt and incorporate it in his film version. Reciprocally, an element that would have failed to arouse the interest of the public would have favoured its removal from the film. Once again, as Michael Anderegg suggests, these 'big-scale rehearsal practices' made his cinematic productions 'works in progress'⁴⁵ that evolved through time and experience.

While *Macbeth* is characterised by its slow cutting rhythm and extremely long takes, *Othello* is a masterpiece of rapid montage. With its approximately two thousand shots (according to André Bazin⁴⁶), Welles's second Shakespearean cinematic adaptation looks like a gigantic mosaic, the harmony of which depends on its stylistic coherence and consistency. More than any other Shakespeare film, *Othello* took shape

⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), p.147.

⁴⁵ Michael Anderegg, p. 122.

⁴⁶ Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, p. 17.

in the editing room because Welles could not afford continuity: there was no possibility for him to shoot all the scenes in one go over a single period of time (the film was shot in three instalments). *Othello* is a visual paradox born from the association of a desire for unity and a tendency toward chaos, a wish for continuity and an inevitable inclination toward discontinuity. Underneath the appearance of a unified aesthetic composition, Welles's film is a fragmented work composed of bits and pieces assembled with great precision and artistry. While the camera placements and movements are in constant motion, so that it sometimes seems as though we look at the characters from a boat caught on a billowing sea, the cutting also challenges our perception of the film's spatial and temporal dynamics. It is indeed the omnipresence and singularity of *Othello*'s editing style that prompted Roger Manvell to comment that 'the film is at its best when this restlessness is broken and a certain degree of concentration is allowed'.⁴⁷ Welles's 'editorial patchwork' also failed to convince other critics like André Bazin and Anthony Davies who found that the film's editing is 'carried to such a degree that this stylistic idiosyncrasy becomes a tiresome device'.⁴⁸ And yet, intentional or not, it is through this frantic cutting that Welles decided to create his own interpretation of *Othello*, and in many ways, as Michael Anderegge puts it, 'any appreciation of Welles's film requires a recognition of its fragmentary essence that it is a film, in a sense, about fragmentation'.⁴⁹

If time had a significant influence on the making of *Othello*, it is also a central issue in the film. In her study of Welles's *Othello*, Lorne Buchman reminds us of Iago emerging as 'the master of time in the film' and that 'the success of his scheme relates to his ability to manipulate, not only the objective force of time, but also Othello's

⁴⁷ Roger Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film*, p. 63.

⁴⁸ André Bazin, quoted by Anthony Davies in *Filming Shakespeare's plays*, p.118.

⁴⁹ Michael Anderegge, *Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and Popular Culture*, p. 121.

relationship to that force'.⁵⁰ Iago is the one who affirms that: 'There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered' (1.3.371). Time is the productive element of the play and to gain control over it is to control the other characters' actions. Present inside and outside the fabric of *Othello*, the temporal relations governing the characters, narratives, and aesthetics of the film are determined by the arrangement of the shots together. Welles's eloquence is at its best when he speaks about the editing process:

Editing is essential for the director; it's the only time he has complete control over the form of his film. When I shoot, the sun dictates certain things that I can't fight against, the actor makes certain things happen that I have to adapt to, and the story does this as well; I only concentrate on mastering what I can. The one place where I exercise absolute control is in the editing room; it is only then that the director has the power of a true artist ... I search for the precise rhythm between one shot and the next. It's a question of the ear: editing is the moment when the film involves a sense of hearing ... I work very slowly at the editing table, which always has the effect of incurring the wrath of the producers who snatch the film from my hands. I don't know why it takes me so long; I could work forever on the editing of a film. What interests me is that the strip of celluloid is performed like a musical score, and this performance is determined by the editing, just as one conductor will interpret a piece of music completely in *rubato*, another will play it in a very dry and academic way, still another will do it very romantically, and so on. The images themselves aren't enough; they are always very important, but they are only images. The essential thing is the duration of each image, what follows each image; it's the whole eloquence of cinema that one is putting together in an editing room.⁵¹

Significantly, this is a very romantic and *auteurist* conception of the film director, or more precisely the film editor, that Welles exposes here, a conception that contradicts Pauline Kael's vision of Welles as the director-*auteur par excellence*. As always, it is the issue of control that matters, and for a director like Welles who experienced so many difficulties in financing and shooting his films, the editing represented the process through which he could exert his full and indisputable authority and feel in control like a true *auteur*.

⁵⁰ Lorne Buchman, p. 129.

⁵¹ Orson Welles, quoted by André Bazin in *Orson Welles: A Critical View* (Venice, CA: First Acrobat Books, 1991), p. 110-111.

As far as the temporal relationships in *Othello* are concerned, Welles's editorial strategy differs significantly from the one he used in *Macbeth*. While *Macbeth* is characteristically composed of a series of long takes interconnected by rather classically edited sequences, *Othello* is built as a succession of discontinuous shots and sequences. With a different editing approach to his second Shakespearean film adaptation, the versatility of the American director established itself as a determining factor in the exploration of *Othello*'s thematic content. But before moving on to the analysis of *Othello*'s temporal arrangements, it is necessary to establish a few principles. First, narrative time in films is presented both visually and aurally: visually because narrative time unfolds through narrative space and aurally because it is represented by the development of the sound material. Time is inherent in the cinematic medium: it becomes very much visual as it is imprinted on the strips of celluloid film. Time and space are closely connected by the images in motion. This concept of 'spatialisation of time'⁵² as described by Erwin Panofsky is fundamental to the understanding of the temporal and thematic dialectics in Welles's *Othello* because the 'principle of coexpressibility'⁵³ governs narrative presentation and progression in films.

Second, temporal manipulations are linked with three main elements: order (the temporal order of events), duration (the different degrees of the passage of time), and frequency (the number of times an event occurs). We have seen earlier how Welles created feelings of tension and claustrophobia in his *Macbeth* by slowing down the cutting rhythm and favouring the long take and the '*découpage* in depth' over montage, that is to say by controlling the duration of each sequence. With *Othello*, the impression of urgency dominates the film-text. The events follow each other at a dizzying pace

⁵² Erwin Panofsky, 'Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures', *Film Theory and Criticism*, eds. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 243-263 (p. 249).

⁵³ Panofsky, pp. 233-248 (p. 237).

before they bring the characters to their pointless tragedy — the death of Othello and Desdemona.

The proleptic first sequence, that shows the funeral procession for Othello and Desdemona (inspired by the style of Venetian Renaissance painter Vittore Carpaccio) while Iago is caged as a punishment for his crimes, denies any temporal opening to the film. *Othello* is sealed from the onset. What happens in between the brackets of the first and last sequences is simply Othello's fall from grace as he hurls himself into Iago's snare. Even Desdemona's elopement and the couple's romantic moments in Venice are represented hastily. If there was time for guilt and regrets in Welles's *Macbeth*, there is none for romance in his *Othello*. In fact, this Othello has only rare words of love for his Desdemona. With even rarer loving gestures or looks between the couple, Welles fails to express the consuming passion that burns in Shakespeare's Othello and that leads him to the folly of murdering his wife out of jealousy. As Welles often said, Othello is 'one of those damned people that I like to play and make movies about'.⁵⁴ In fact, he liked it so much that his *Othello* is significantly centred on the tragic hero, leaving little space on the reel for anything or anybody else.

The first scenes in Venice show us a tremendous amount of activity: everything happens quickly, from the lovers' elopement, their secret wedding, the news of the war in Cyprus, through to the wedding's consummation. They run from one place to another: running up and down the stairs, up and down the corridors and alleys, gliding through the canals... There is no time or space for Othello and Desdemona's love. Othello has merely 'an hour of love to spend with' Desdemona, and he insists that they 'must obey time' (1.3.298-300). There is a sense in these Venetian sequences that their love and union are only temporary, subjected to the fragmentary state of Welles's

⁵⁴ Orson Welles, *This is Orson Welles*, p.51.

temporal strategy, as if their time together was as fleeting as this low angle shot of Venetian men crossing a bridge and birds flying away in a clouded sky. The impression of danger is omnipresent — a strong component of those Venetian scenes — especially with Iago always lurking in the background, following Othello and watching his every movements. Following the titles ‘The Tragedy of Othello, a Motion Picture Adaptation of the play by William Shakespeare’, a brief expository summary (in the once-upon-a-time style of fairy tales) of the story appears on screen and is thus delivered in voice-over by Welles himself, with the corresponding images that illustrate it:

- Shot 1: long shot in straight angle of Iago walking towards a canal and spying on Othello who drifts away on a gondola; the shot dissolves into
- Shot 2: long shot in high angle of the gondola.
- Shot 3: medium long shot in low angle of Desdemona rushing to her balcony to see if Othello has arrived.
- Shot 4: long shot in low angle of Desdemona looking down from her balcony.
- Shot 5: long shot in straight angle of Desdemona running down a spiral staircase.
- Shot 6: long shot in straight angle of Desdemona hurrying through a large hall.
- Shot 7: medium long shot in straight of Desdemona behind strong iron railings with Othello’s gondola in the background.
- Shot 8: long shot in high angle of Desdemona finally arriving at the palace’s embankment where Othello is waiting for her.
- Shot 9: long shot in high angle of Iago watching the couple from the other side of the canal, the shot dissolves into a:

- Shot 10: superimposition of a medium shot in low angle of Iago bending over a bridge with a shot the canal's calm but cloudy waters.

These shots that show the elopement of Othello and Desdemona mainly emphasise the perils — Iago and his mind games — that await the tragic couple. When Desdemona runs down the stairs and through the large halls of her palace to meet her Othello, it seems that she is running more out of the fear of being caught by her father rather than out of the impatience to meet her lover. In this sequence, Welles accentuates the feeling of urgency and danger of the couple's situation by recurring to temporal ellipsis and to a very fast cutting rhythm. Time clearly works against Othello and Desdemona while it favours Iago's evil scheming.

Narrative time is also dramatically compressed in this sequence: only the rushing and hiding of the lovers have been edited into the film. Welles does not even include a romantic shot of Othello and Desdemona in each other's arms before the wedding scene. In fact, given that the editing process is based upon practices of shot selection and arrangement, we could even say that the shots that Welles did not film or select are as significant as the ones he edited because they reveal another aspect of his authorial and interpretative intentions. The pace imposed on Othello and Desdemona (particularly on their encounters) in this first Venetian sequence is developed and increased throughout the rest of the film to the point when the tension becomes unbearable and brings both their lives and relationship to the breaking point. The Venetian part of the film ends with the newlyweds kissing in their bedroom. The image then fades into black and then into a stormy, thunderous sky that marks the beginning of the Cyprian narrative.

In Cyprus, rare are the moments that Othello and Desdemona spend together in perfect harmony. In fact, much attention is given to Iago who becomes the focal point

of most of the scenes while each encounter of the tragic couple marks a gradual widening of the gap between them. This is visually rendered by a gradually more and more chaotic editing and camerawork style. There is nothing peaceful in their first reunion in Cyprus. Lightning over a surging sea accompanies Othello's ship. The strong winds batter the ramparts of the citadel, the clouds fly by in the sky, the sound of the cannon resonates against the shrieks of seagulls, while subjective shots from Othello's ship reveals swaying perspectives of the stronghold and the sky. When Othello finally sets foot on the island and walks up to the top of the ramparts where Desdemona waits for him anxiously, the couple barely make eye contact. Being photographed in low angle with the shadows of swirling flags behind her, Desdemona is objectified as a trophy, the symbol of Othello's proud victory over the Turks:

- Shot 1: medium shot in high angle of Othello walking up a spiral staircase.
- Shot 2: medium long shot in low angle of Desdemona standing by Iago and a small boy.
- Shot 3: medium shot in low angle of Desdemona moving towards Othello, with the shadows of flags behind her.
- Shot 4: medium shot in high angle of Othello reaching the top of the stairs.
- Shot 5: medium shot in low angle of Desdemona smiling at Othello.
- Shot 6: medium shot in high angle of Othello looking at Desdemona in devotion.
- Shot 7: medium long shot in low angle of the couple, photographed on the right hand side of the screen, Desdemona looks up at her husband while he looks at his soldiers.

Photographed in low angle and draped in a long, white, seemingly Greek dress, Welles's Desdemona is presented both as an alabaster statue of a saint for Othello to

worship but also as one of the devoted servants and soldiers of the Moor. With the shadows of the flags swirling proudly behind Desdemona, she seems to be on a pedestal, remote and inaccessible like the statue of a Greek goddess. Although this image is very fleeting in the sequence, lasting only a split second, it leaves a strong impression because of its cold alienation effect. It is also a subjective shot of Desdemona from Othello's perspective that represents the way he sees his wife: at the same time triumphant, pure, inaccessible, and almost unearthly. This perfect image of Desdemona that Othello has created has no place in time, only in his imagination, and this is exactly what Iago will attempt to destroy.

The sense of urgency that dominates the Venetian part of the film is even intensified when the action is moved to Cyprus (Mogador). Instead of lingering on intimate shots of the newlyweds' reunion that could reassert the loving bond between them (this is the case in Oliver Parker's *Othello*), Welles quickly cross-cuts between an anxious Desdemona and a proud and magnificent Othello, thereby moving the ephemeral and thwarted nature of their relationship to the foreground. In fact, it is interesting to notice that this sequence shares many similarities with the one mentioned earlier. Both sequences present the same stylistic patterns in showing the reunion of Othello and Desdemona. First, there is a distinctive parallel between the way Othello and Desdemona move toward each other: both movements are expressed through a quick cross-cutting between the lovers. Second, both sequences rely on a very fast editing rhythm that creates an impression of danger and precariousness. Third, the same expression of worry and hope is written in Desdemona's face, while she is photographed in low angle. Finally, the narrative time in both sequences is greatly compressed so that what should be feelings of (supposedly) joyous expectation built up by the cross-cuttings are transformed into apprehension. Such a thorough analogy is not

fortuitous; Welles certainly intended to present the relationship between Othello and Desdemona as being extremely uncertain, subjected to the judgements of the Venetian people, to the wrath of Brabantio, to the dangers of the war with the Turks, and above all to the malicious schemes of Iago. The odds are clearly against them: this Shakespearean-Wellesian couple is doomed from the beginning.

Later in the film, the tension between Othello and Desdemona increases steadily through each of their encounters until it reaches the climax of act 4, scene 2 when Othello hits his wife in front of the messengers of the Venetian government. Following the much discussed travelling shot that shows Iago planting the first seeds of jealousy in Othello's mind as both men walk in a synchronised pace on the rampart, Desdemona comes across her husband in one of the empty rooms of the citadel. She finds him seated on the ground, his face streaming with sweat, and looking deeply worried and confused:

- Shot 1: close-up in high angle of Othello's face as he leans against a wall.
- Shot 2: medium shot in straight angle of Desdemona smiling at her husband and greeting him while Iago stands in the background.
- Shot 3: close-up in high angle of Othello who looks down as if to avoid Desdemona's eyes.
- Shot 4: medium shot in straight angle of Desdemona as Iago leaves the room.
- Shot 5: close-up in high angle of Othello who looks very preoccupied.
- Shot 6: medium shot in straight angle of Desdemona who asks Othello the reason for his trouble.
- Shot 7: close-up in high angle of Othello who remains vague about his concerns. Desdemona's hands enter the frame as she tries to apply her handkerchief on Othello's forehead but he pushes her away with anger.

- Shot 8: medium shot in low angle of Othello walking away quickly from a distressed Desdemona.
- Shot 9: close-up in high angle of Othello's foot treading Desdemona's handkerchief.
- Shot 10: medium shot in low angle of Othello leaving the room as Desdemona walks after him.
- Shot 11: medium shot in low angle of Othello quickly crossing the frame.
- Shot 12: close-up in straight angle of Othello looking at his reflection in a mirror.

This sequence is the first of the series of heated confrontations between the couple. In this *Othello*, events seem to happen by chance because Welles leaves no pause, no temporal transitions between them so that they seem to override or even collide into each other. The sustained rhythm Welles imposes on Shakespeare's play almost erases the sense of passing of time. Indeed, there is no impression of elapsed time in Welles's film, only the sense of a juxtaposition or even superposition of the events. The film seems to develop vertically, that is to say not along a temporal (horizontal) axis but along an axis (vertical) of circumstances and emotional tensions.

No sooner Iago has fed Othello with jealous doubts that Desdemona happens to meet her husband. This confrontation, like all the others, lasts only a brief moment on screen. Desdemona does not get the opportunity to speak to Othello or even look into his eyes as he avoids the conversation by running away from her at the end of the sequence. The time they spend together is extremely limited and Welles manipulates our perception of it by increasing the editing rhythm, using fast motion (some shots are barely visible), and making an extensive use of temporal ellipses. We jump from shots of Othello seated on the ground to shots of him walking away, crossing the frame, and

of his foot stepping on Desdemona's handkerchief. The visual tension of the sequence clearly relies on the rapidity of the editing and on the temporal discontinuity of the actions. Movements and bodies are interrupted, broken up into small fragments, and pieced together in a way that reminds us very much of cubist techniques. Welles deconstructs Othello and Desdemona both physically and psychologically, and it is through the disruption of the temporal dimension that he suggests the breaking up of the couple's relationship.

About the aesthetic composition of *Othello*, Anthony Davies asserts that 'Welles's intention is to move away from the conventional narrative flow to dissect dramatic action', and 'to present visual relationships rather than to visualise narrative connections'.⁵⁵ If indeed narrative continuity is not the main objective of Welles's editing strategy, the jagged aspect of *Othello* (which others have explained by the financial difficulties encountered during the whole production) is purely intentional — the result of the director's artistic choices. In most of his interviews, Welles repeatedly claimed that he could not explain why he made films the way he did. While he was particularly articulate when telling stories and anecdotes, he would find himself paradoxically lost for words to account for his own directorial and editorial decisions, as if by lack of self-confidence or out of sheer modesty. Once Peter Bogdanovich asked him: 'Why did you decide to begin *Othello* with the funeral?' And Welles answered: 'Peter. I'm no good at this sort of stuff. I either go cryptic or philistine. All I can say is, I thought it was a good idea; whether you get me in the morning or the evening, I'm always going to say that'.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook, and Akira Kurosawa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 102.

⁵⁶ Welles and Bogdanovich, pp. 229-230.

To come back to Welles's use of time in the treatment of Othello and Desdemona's heated scenes, the last of these sequences that ends with the death of Desdemona is also characterised by the quick tempo of all the preceding ones. The shots rarely last more than four seconds and shrink down to a few fractions of a second when Othello is about to strangle his wife. Desdemona desperately begs Othello to let her live that night and to concede her one more day but to no avail: he covers her face with a sheet and strangles her. Her sentence is irrevocable and her death is quick, almost in the instant as Welles cuts out most of her pleading. In the shots that show Desdemona asleep and immobile, future and present mingle eerily, time seems to dissolve into the close-up on the innocent sleeping face of Othello's wife. Time is running out for her. The series of shots and reaction shots between the couple as Desdemona tries to defend herself against her husband's accusations is particularly abrupt and fast-flowing. The rhythm of the cutting increases quickly during the sequence so that the more Desdemona seems to understand the reality of her situation and gets panic-stricken, the faster the editing gets, as if to match her heartbeat. The parallel between these two elements is clearly the mainspring of the murder scene. There is no melodramatic accent in this scene. Instead, with his elaborate montage of carefully selected shots that oscillates between symbolism and realism, Welles managed to remain in the realm of pure aesthetics and style while being able to flirt with the sensational. Akira Kurosawa has often said that film-editing is 'a process of breathing life into the work'⁵⁷ and this is exactly what it does in this scene: we can almost sense Desdemona's racing heartbeat in the rhythm of the cuts and this is where the pathos of her last instants resides.

⁵⁷ Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*, trans. Audie E. Bock (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 104.

Welles's *Macbeth* and *Othello* differ considerably as far as their temporal strategies are concerned. While *Macbeth* is a fixed and bulky monument of evil and hatred, an emblem of the eponymous couple's wickedness, *Othello* represents a wild and continuous journey within the darkest recesses of Othello's psyche in a way that Kurosawa could have described as 'this flow of short shots that looks calm and ordinary at first glance then reveals itself to be like a deep river with a quiet surface disguising a fast-raging current underneath'.⁵⁸ In order to create two different moods for these two Shakespearean adaptations, Welles has used two distinctive methods of temporal continuity. By favouring the long take and a rather slow cutting pace in *Macbeth*, Welles imposed a static and oppressive atmosphere to his film so that his characters seem to be trapped within a never-ending moment — the long night of the murder of King Duncan. Welles has concentrated all the dramatic tension of the play in this scene (the longest uninterrupted take of the film): the moment when Macbeth can still choose to ignore or listen to what his conscience tells him to do is the pivot of the whole adaptation. Being uncut, the sequence's narrative time coincides with actual time and each second weighs on each one of Macbeth's hesitations and on the dreadful moment of Duncan's murder. Time stands still in that particular sequence and it does considerably set the tone for the entire film.

With *Othello*, Welles turned to a completely different strategy: fast editing rhythm and temporal ellipsis which shaped Shakespeare's tragedy of jealousy into an almost surrealistic accumulation of grotesque and unromantic domestic squabbles. Each confrontation between Othello and Desdemona has the rapidity, abruptness, and violence of a flash of light. Most of these scenes end with Othello dashing out of the frame as if the camera cannot keep up with him, and with Desdemona remaining alone

⁵⁸ Akira Kurosawa, p. 113.

on screen. Time in *Othello* does not find its expression in chronology (the film does not communicate any real sense of the passing of time in spite of the chasm between the Venetian and Cypriot narratives) but rather in the repetition of movements and rhythms. Welles's suppression of temporality as chronology suggests a flattened, distorted perspective of the play which presents the characters trapped not only in the isolating spatial structures of the Cypriot fortress but also in the condensed and fragmented temporal elements that confer very few moments of respite to the tragic couple.

In Welles's adaptation, as well as being the victims of an enigmatic Iago, Othello and Desdemona are also the victims of time that breaks them down furiously and imprisons them in repetitive patterns. The Wellesian universe is sealed, filled with characters deprived of free will and drawn towards inevitable deeds. Several of his films (*Citizen Kane*, *Mr Arkadin*, *Chimes at Midnight*) start with a flash-forward that announces the outcome of the story, and this is also true with his *Othello*. Othello and Desdemona are dead and Iago is being imprisoned into a cage when the film starts, so that everything is finished before it has actually begun. In fact, not only Welles's editing compresses the temporal dimension of the film, but as Michael Anderegg rightly puts it, 'the story proper does not merely fill an imaginary time warp between two nearly contiguous events or moments; rather, the narrative occupies negative time, as it were, slipped in during the brief moment it takes to reverse the film for several dozen frames'.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Michael Anderegg, *Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and Popular Culture*, p.104.

1.3 *Chimes at Midnight* or Another Fall from Grace

Welles's interest in the loss of innocence and in the examination of power, which, from *Citizen Kane* to *Filming Othello*, are recurrent themes in his cinematic *oeuvre*, finds another expression in *Chimes at Midnight* (also known as *Campanadas a Medianoche* and *Falstaff*) which was shot in 1966 and which was also in black and white (In Welles's words: 'Faces in colour tend to look like meat'.⁶⁰). This last instalment of his Shakespearean trilogy is a loose version of five Shakespeare plays: *Henry IV* parts I and II, *Henry V*, *Richard II*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Because Orson Welles tended to use the same creative methods from one project to another, *Chimes*, just like his *Macbeth* and *Othello*, originated on stage and retained most of its visual and narrative style from the 1939 production of *Five Kings* which first opened in Boston at the Colonial Theatre and was later played in Washington and Philadelphia. *Five Kings* knew another revival in 1960 when it was staged in Belfast (Dublin Gate Theatre) under the title *Chimes at Midnight*. With Orson Welles as Falstaff and Keith Baxter already playing Hal, this production was, in Welles's words, 'a sort of tryout for the movie'.⁶¹

As we have seen earlier, Welles had made a habit of exploring and reworking the same literary materials over and over again without ever being able to come to term with them in any definitive way (Although he started filming his *Don Quixote* in 1955, he was still talking about finishing it months before his death in 1985). In fact, *Chimes* seems to be no more finished or completed than his *Macbeth* and *Othello*; its sound track and sound levels are as uneven and erratic, and the visual quality of its sequences is also particularly inconsistent. Interestingly, it was this roughly hewn style that contributed to Welles's categorisation (mainly by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* reviewers) as a *cinéaste*, an *auteur* in the European sense of the word, while some critics like Roger

⁶⁰ Welles and Bogdanovich, p. 250.

⁶¹ Welles and Bogdanovich, p. 259.

Manvell saw ‘obscurities in the story continuity and incessant over-indulgence in purely visual beauty’.⁶² Jack J. Jorgens went as far as asserting that ‘between scenes of true genius — the battle of Shrewsbury, the rejection of Falstaff, the scenes with Falstaff and Shallow, Henry’s two death scenes, and the conclusion — are sketchy, rushed-through, and patched-together scenes that bewilder and bore’.⁶³ Yet, with *Chimes at Midnight*, Welles produced one of his most down-to-earth and humanist films, and certainly the most humanist and insightful of his Shakespearean triptych.

As in *Macbeth* and *Othello*, the characters are photographed in low angles, distorted through a wide-angle lens, and magnified with the sky in the background. However, even though these characters are depicted in direct relation to their environments as Anthony Davies has demonstrated in his thorough study of the film (the stony, mineral world of King Henry IV in contrast with the wooden, organic world of the Boar’s Head tavern which characterises Falstaff), they are also portrayed in relation to one another, as members of a community that shows a certain degree of circulation and exchanges within its social groups. In fact, most of the critical literature that has been written on *Chimes* tends to be focussed on the spatial dynamics of the film and therefore on the establishment and circulation of the characters’s personalities through Welles’s binary opposition between the world of the castle and that of the tavern. If it is true that Welles has composed, through his precise use of locale, a particularly eloquent depiction of the imperatives of power politics and history embodied in Prince Hal, he has also, and perhaps more successfully, created a very honest and touching characterisation of Sir John Falstaff. In an interview with Peter

⁶² Roger Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film*, p. 70.

⁶³ Jack J. Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film* (London: University Press of America, 1991), p. 115.

Bogdanovich, Welles admitted that his attitude toward the sprightly and ribald old man evolved considerably from the first time he played the part:

The closer I thought I was getting to Falstaff, the less funny he seemed to me. When I'd played him before, in the theatre, he seemed more witty than comical. And bringing him to the screen, I found him only occasionally, and then deliberately, a clown. That last, great scene was the very centre of our film, and all the "comedy" had to be played in that perspective.⁶⁴

As such a comment indicates, it is clear that for Welles it was the centrality and omnipresence of Falstaff that dictated the logic of the film's editing and consequently shaped the spatio-temporal structures of the film. Significantly, Welles compares his Falstaff to a clown, a deeply sensitive man who knows the ways of the world, the good and the bad, and who forces himself into action, into being mirthful and entertaining in order to bring the affection of Hal, Poins, Justice Shallow, Doll Tearsheet and of the rest of his small court to himself: Welles's Falstaff's is a clown not by choice but by obligation. Welles has composed and expressed Falstaff's character by keeping a strict control of the cutting rhythm and the narrative chronology so that the film alternates between moments of sad contemplation and moments of almost over-expressed joy and playfulness, from Falstaff and Shallow looking back on their past glories with melancholy and nostalgia to the explosion of laughter and activity that characterises 'the play within the play' in the tavern. Accordingly, I would like to argue that the fact that Welles has articulated his adaptation around the psychology of Sir John Falstaff becomes particularly apparent in the temporal dynamics of *Chimes at Midnight*, that is in the editing rhythm as well as in the chronology of the film.

The film starts with a long shot of two silhouettes trying to make their way through the snow and the slippery slope of a wintry and desolate landscape. This is quite a small entrance for such a boisterous character as John Falstaff. In true Wellesian

⁶⁴ Orson Welles, *This is Orson Welles*, p. 261.

style and in keeping with *Othello*'s narrative structure, this first shot of Falstaff is a proleptic assertion of his death and a foreshadowing of his last shot. In fact there is something essentially dignified and undramatic about the last time we see the fat old man: after the 'rejection scene', he slowly and humbly walks out of the frame in long shot, in the same way as he first made his entrance. As Michael Anderegg rightly puts it, Welles barely prepares us for his crucial finale: one moment Falstaff is alive, if crushed; the next moment he is dead'.⁶⁵

As the film starts, with the camera regularly closing in on the two silhouettes in the snowy landscape, we come to recognise the two men as Falstaff and Master Justice Shallow who keeps on repeating with his quavering voice: 'Jesu, the days that we have seen!'. The two men shelter from the wintery cold in Shallow's dwelling where they find a glowing and comforting fire to sit by. As they get warmer the camera moves into a close-up of the old and wrinkly Shallow and of the round, father-Christmas face of Falstaff who continues to ponder on the merry times of the past with nostalgia: 'We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow'. With its slow cutting rhythm and its combination of extreme long shots and close-ups, this first scene is emblematic of Welles's temporal strategy as far as the editing of Falstaff is concerned. By slowly moving from long shot to close-up, Falstaff's physicality — this exuberant bodily presence — establishes and even imposes itself not only within the spatial field of the frame, but also within the temporal realm of the film. As suggested by Panofsky, filmic time and filmic space *are* subjective so that it is not so much that Falstaff is granted more screening time than the other characters that makes his presence so overwhelming, but the more he is photographed in close-up and extreme close-up, the longer he seems to be on screen.

⁶⁵ Michael Anderegg, p. 136.

While this first sequence is imbued with the bittersweet melancholy and mellowness that is sometimes associated with old age, the second scene is dominated by Ralph Richardson's neutral and formal narration (from Holinshed's *Chronicles*) of the political and historical situation, which will see the rise of prince Hal and the decline and last adventures of Sir John Falstaff. The influence of Welles's radio days is apparent in the way he uses narrations in many of his films (*Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Mr Arkadin*, the unfinished *Don Quixote*). By narrating part of the stories of his films and therefore assuming the function of a chorus, Welles found a way to establish all his characters in the first minutes of the film and at the same time to reach his audience beyond the screen in a more direct, intimate, but also authoritative manner. He thus became a true charismatic and popular *conteur* who endowed his stories with mythical and larger than life qualities. To some extent, the narrative chronology of *Chimes at Midnight* is established by the three narrations that punctuate the film-text. As we have seen, the first narration presents the general context of the film while it briefly introduces the characters. The second follows the renowned sequence of the 'Battle of Shrewsbury', and the third concludes the film and comments on the new situation. As it has been often noted, it is with grim irony that, as a long shot in high angle follows the coffin of Falstaff being wheeled out of the Boar's Head tavern, we hear Richardson telling us that:

This Henry was a captain of such a prudence and such a policy that he never enterprised anything before he had forecast the main chances it might happen. So humane withal, he left no offence unpunished nor friendship unrewarded. For conclusion, a majesty was he that both lived and died a pattern in principle, a lodestar in honour, and famous to the world always.

It also has often been claimed that *Chimes at Midnight* is a 'difficult film to come to terms with'⁶⁶ plagued with 'obscurities in the story continuity'⁶⁷ because the film

⁶⁶ Michael Anderegg, p.126.

⁶⁷ Roger Manvell, p. 70.

possesses this labyrinthine quality that Welles appreciated so much. Unlike his *Othello*, the narrative structure of *Chimes* is not strictly composed of a binary pattern of oppositions. As the film unfolds, Welles adopts a complex tertiary structure that complicates significantly the rhythmic, temporal, spatial, and also emotional dynamics of *Chimes*. The film alternates between scenes of mournful, past-oriented stasis (such as the introductory sequence) that reveal the true and humane character of Jack Falstaff, scenes of intense activity where the fat knight plays the fool and displays his talents as an entertainer for his prince and his followers, and finally scenes of a more formal and critical content that present a Henry IV who, albeit in full command of his political power, finds himself powerless vis-à-vis his uncertain *pérennité*. And Welles further complicated this composition by including the lengthy sequence (approximately ten minutes) of the ‘Battle of Shrewsbury’ which, because of its central position in the film, divides the narrative into two distinct periods. There is a before the battle when Falstaff and Hal enjoy a life of childlike mischief, leisure, and amusements, and an after the battle when Hal decides to become an adult and therefore to reject Falstaff and his childhood in order to follow in his father’s footsteps.

The battle sequence is commonly thought of as the most technically accomplished portion of the film. In fact, most critics tend to measure the quality of the whole film in relation to this particular sequence. In Anderegg’s words, the battle of Shrewsbury is ‘the most remarkable sequence in *Chimes at Midnight*’ in which ‘Welles presents us with another kind of history — a history stripped of all rhetoric, denuded of language, and at the same time supremely eloquent’.⁶⁸ If the battle sequence stands out so distinctly in the film, it is mainly because its editing style and cosmic dimension have no equivalent in the other sequences. In an interview recorded on the Spanish

⁶⁸ Michael Anderegg, p. 131-132.

DVD edition of *Campanadas a Medianoche*, Edmond Richard, Welles's director of photography in *Chimes*, gives an invaluable account of the way Welles worked on this battle of Shrewsbury. Richard recounts with much admiration how Welles cut this sequence as he was viewing the rushes on his movieola, running them at forty eight pictures per second, knowing that the normal viewing frequency is twenty four pictures per second. Richard maintains that he has never seen another film director able to edit a film running at fast motion as Welles did: 'Welles took a white pen and quickly marked down the cuts. He had a better perception of the movements at forty eight pictures per second because this way he had a better overview of the film's dynamics'.⁶⁹ While this is a comment that certainly contributes to the mystique of the American director, to his status as legendary genius and prodigy, it also reinforces my assumption that Welles's authority and creative *élan* mainly resided in his editing practices.

With its precise control of rhythm and movement through the temporal and spatial fields of the frame, the battle of Shrewsbury is indeed visually impressive. In fact, it is the urgency and the precision with which Welles did the montage of the sequence that shaped its ferocious and unrelenting style. At times, the cutting rhythm is so fast that the flow of images becomes almost unbearable. The ruthlessness of the hand-to-hand combats, the ruthlessness of the blows given and received, but also the futility and pointlessness of all these deaths are expressed by the extraordinary accumulation and repetition of those hundreds of violent shots. Akira Kurosawa was to use the same kind of editing strategy when in 1985 he composed his own battle sequence for the attack of Hidetora and his followers at the Third Castle in *Ran*. But while Kurosawa used several cameras to capture different views and angles of the action at the same time, Welles, because of his very limited budget, had to film his

⁶⁹ Edmond Richard, in an interview included on *Campanadas a Medianoche* on DVD-ROM, dir. Orson Welles, Suevia Films. 1966.

battle scene with only one camera. In order to compensate for the lack of variety in point of views and camera angles, Welles fragmented the reels and reorganised the images in time and space to create the illusion of diversity and non-linearity. Interestingly, it was when confronted with the constraints and limitations of the production that Welles would come up with his most visually assertive images and most eloquent editing, e.g. the long take of King Duncan's murder in *Macbeth*, the 'Turkish bath' sequence in *Othello*, or the battle of Shrewsbury in *Chimes*. It was on these occasions that Welles was able to make sense out of sheer confusion and urgency. And yet, it is quite paradoxical that such a practitioner of *bricolage*⁷⁰ (as Michael Anderegg mentions in his fascinating book) was able to plan, rehearse, and recycle his Shakespearean productions over long periods of time. It is indeed this contradictory combination of careful preparation and spontaneous improvisation that characterises Welles's approach to Shakespeare and that endowed his film adaptations with such dramatic tension from one scene to another or even from one shot to another, as it is the case with the battle of Shrewsbury.

After the battle, Falstaff's days are numbered. It is with a mixture of disbelief and sadness that the fat knight sees Hal literally turning his back on him as he offers him a cup of wine to celebrate their victory over the rebels. The happy times of carefree jest and irreverent behaviour — which was also the age of innocence — coming to an end, Falstaff finds himself silenced, forced to remain in the background. In *Chimes*, Welles has associated a rapid cutting rhythm, as far as Falstaff is concerned, with moments of intense activity, mirth, and hopefulness. After the battle, the pace of the editing in the sequences that feature Falstaff slows down dramatically. The 'trip to Gloucester' sequence is particularly significant. The scene takes place in Master Justice

⁷⁰ Michael Anderegg, p. 40.

Shallow's dwelling which Welles had designed as a very spacious room made of wood and stone. Falstaff is visiting his old friends Shallow and Silence who, having drunk heavily, dance and sing until they fall on the floor. The sequence being shot in very low angle with the camera almost placed on the ground, the room looks uncomfortably large, empty, and utterly inhospitable. This is a space that isolates the characters. Earlier in the chapter, we have seen how Welles used the long take to create feelings of claustrophobia that he reinforced by favouring low angles. Faithful to his cinematic style, this is exactly the same filming pattern that he employed here. In spite of the drunken songs and the senile jest of Master Shallow, the atmosphere is clearly oppressive. With no cut to move from one perspective to another and from one character to another, Welles developed his action within space, having recourse to a '*découpage* in depth' that isolates Falstaff even more. The absence of editing not only isolates the characters in space, it also creates a temporal stasis that encloses them in this moment of expectation. While Shallow and Silence are situated in mid-distance, the old knight is merely visible — merely there — as he is sitting on a wooden chair at the far end of the room. Falstaff is fading in the background literally and figuratively until he hears the news of the death of Henry IV. As soon as he realises what he has just heard and what it could mean to him, Falstaff springs up from his sit and moves into action and into the foreground, so close to the camera that he fills the frame completely. As James Naremore has rightly noted, 'In one temporally unified shot, Falstaff has moved from dejection to joy, his steady progress forward in the frame marking his lifted emotion, the wide-angle lens making him seem a dot at the beginning and colossus at the end'.⁷¹ He becomes this huge mountain of flesh again, seems regenerated or even

⁷¹ James Naremore, *The Magic World of Orson Welles*, New and revised edn (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), p.278.

rejuvenated, and ready to take his chances again. In fact, this will be the last *instant de gloire* of Jack Falstaff's before the inevitable rejection scene and his subsequent death.

With his *Chimes at Midnight*, it is with nostalgia that Welles recounts the end of an idealistic society in which Princes and rogues would associate in festive comradeship. This time of mirth lives with Falstaff and dies with him when, on the way to his coronation, Hal disavows the old man and severs all links that attached him to all that Falstaff represented. Compared with *Macbeth* and *Othello* in which time is represented as a force that fixes the characters in their errors or precipitates them to their misfortune, in *Chimes at Midnight*, time brings change. The film is a journey; the journey of a prince from the carefree life of childhood to the responsibilities of adulthood, and also the last journey of an old man and entertainer. Time is more chronological than circumstantial insofar as the viewer is constantly aware of the film's narrative continuity, especially thanks to the three extra-diegetic comments from Holinshed's *Chronicles*. The gradual changes in the triangular relationship between Hal, King Henry IV, and Falstaff, in the political situation, and in the King's health are as many temporal landmarks that pave the way to the pivotal scene of the film which is also its dénouement: the last scene between Hal and Falstaff. The whole temporal structure of *Chimes at Midnight* moves the story toward this last moving scene of a son rejecting a father, and of the end of an age of innocence. It seems that Welles finally came to a closure with his last Shakespearean film adaptation. But who knows what this persistent and imaginative director would have accomplished with the adaptation of *King Lear* that he was planning before his death... In examining Welles's Shakespearean film productions, what is certain is that his authoring practices reveal an acute awareness of the issues of control and agency that dominates the cinematic (and mass media) apparatus. In fact, one can easily imagine Welles borrowing Michael

Curtiz's caustic observation that 'a right director cuts on the set, instead of in the cutting room. His individuality should be on the film, not the individuality of the cutter'.⁷²

⁷² Michael Curtiz, quoted by James C. Robertson in *The Casablanca Man* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 139.

2

Shakespeare in the Spatial Field of Akira Kurosawa's**Cinema**

In this chapter, I am especially interested in exploring the work of another director-editor whose authorial signature — acknowledged by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics — is also particularly distinguishable. I shall therefore focus my attention on the cinema of a film-maker who devoted his entire career (and even life) to his art and who — like Welles — showed a lifelong interest in Shakespeare's *oeuvre* by adapting it (more or less faithfully) to the screen on three occasions. It has often been argued that the films of Akira Kurosawa have little to do with Shakespeare because, unlike most film adaptations, nothing remains of the words of the Elizabethan playwright. For instance, although Roger Manvell — as well as other critics like Donald Richie, Stephen Prince, Noel Burch, James Goodwin, and Neil Forsyth — talks enthusiastically of *Throne of Blood* (1957) in terms of transmutation of the Shakespearean tragedy and praises it as a 'distillation of the *Macbeth* theme' which is 'by far the most complete and satisfying of its kind' and 'unique'.¹ Anthony Davies does not really share this enthusiasm and his opinion is much more reserved. In his discussion of Kurosawa's films in *Filming Shakespeare's Plays*, Davies completely ignores *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) and discounts *Ran* (1985) from his list of Shakespearean adaptations on the grounds that '*Ran* depends much more than did *Throne of Blood* upon substance which lies outside the centre of Shakespeare's play'.² As we have seen earlier, this

¹ Roger Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1971), p. 107.

² Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook, and Akira Kurosawa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 153.

fundamental debate regarding whether or not a film can be assessed as a Shakespearean adaptation and whether or not certain films should be left aside, has fuelled many controversies among Shakespearean scholars and has been a recurrent preoccupation in critical discussions. This preoccupation with 'faithfulness' being clearly on the decline in the realm of critical practice, we can now see the forest as well as the trees and study these films for what they are and not for what they should have been.

Because, since the success of *Rashomon*³ (1950) in Europe, Kurosawa has been regarded as a pure *auteur* who was able to control his films from the scriptwriting to the editing and whose films are imbued with a characteristic 'vision', his cinematic style and themes have been thoroughly examined and discussed by critics such as Donald Richie, Anthony Davies, Stephen Prince, Noel Burch, and James Goodwin. For instance, while Goodwin argues that the rich intertextuality of Kurosawa's cinema has been consistently fashioned by intercultural (mainly from the West) dynamics and exchanges, Richie's invaluable study of Kurosawa's cinema is based on the assumption that his whole work has been shaped by his lifelong dedication to a certain *art de vivre* instilled by his father's traditional and quasi-martial education based on the code of the samurai or *bushido*. In fact, although Kurosawa's education was quite strict, it was also quite liberal. Some passages from his autobiography suggest that his reliance on spartan settings, refined imagery, and stylised gestures was partly nourished by his childhood memories of watching silent films with his family: 'I think my father's attitude toward films reinforced my own inclinations and encouraged me to become what I am today. He was a strict man of military background, but at a time when the idea of watching movies was hardly well received in educators' circles, he took his whole family to the movies regularly'.⁴ Prince expands Richie's focus by moving the discussion onto more

³ The film was sent to the 1951 film festival in Venice where it won the first prize.

⁴ Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*, trans. Audie E. Bock (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 6.

political and widely cultural ground and by drawing analogies with the overtly politically committed works of Bertolt Brecht and Sergei Eisenstein. From another point of view, Noel Burch regards Kurosawa's cinematic creativity as a pure product of his Japanese identity and his use of space and time as direct artefacts of Japanese aesthetics and culture. Significantly, theatre being an essential part of Japanese culture, one of the major influences that contributed to shape Kurosawa's distinctive film-making style is the Noh theatre and its medieval theorist and actor Ze-Ami. Ze-Ami's quest for *hana* (meaning literally 'charm of the performance') is indeed pervasive throughout Kurosawa's films, especially as far as *Throne of Blood* and *Ran* are concerned,⁵ and manifests itself in the aesthetically refined composition of his *mise en scène* and editing. And although Kurosawa was considered to be the most 'westernised' of the Japanese film-makers of his generation, it is certain that his Japanese cultural heritage deeply informed his cinematic work. Kurosawa, André Bazin writes in 1957 in *Cahiers du Cinéma*,

is evidently very much influenced by Western cinema of the thirties, and perhaps even more by American films than by neo-realism. [...] But this is not a passive influence. What matters for him is not just absorbing it; his intention is to use it to transmit back to us an image of Japanese tradition and culture that we can assimilate visually and mentally.⁶

'Most Japanese', Donald Richie maintains, 'and Kurosawa is no exception, think of films as being divided into major categories: the *jidai-geki*, or period-pictures, and the *gendai-mono*, or modern-story films — an attitude we share in our conception of the crime-film, the thriller, and the Western'.⁷ Very much influenced by this generic approach to films, the Japanese director adapted *Macbeth* (*Throne of Blood*, 1957) and

⁵ We will see later that, although to a lesser degree, the conventions of representation of the Noh drama influenced Kurosawa's loose version of *Hamlet*.

⁶ André Bazin, 'On Kurosawa's *Living*', *Cahiers du Cinéma, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, trans. Liz Heron, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 261-263 (p. 261).

⁷ Donald Richie, p. 115.

King Lear (Ran, 1985) in the *jidai-geki* fashion (contemporary Japanese film genre: period drama set before the abolition of feudal Japan in 1868, also known as samurai films). In fact, *jidai-geki* films emerged around 1925 and significantly thrived during the Second World War when the Japanese government compelled film-makers to produce war propaganda films showing Japanese military prowess in battle. Even though directors like Mizoguchi, Ozu, and Kurosawa tried to avoid militaristic themes, they were forced to take part in this propagandist enterprise. Like many Japanese film-makers of the 1940s and 1950s, Kurosawa alternated between *jidai-geki* and *gendai-mono* so that, following a string of films such as *Drunken Angel* (1948), *Ikiru* (1952), and *The Lower Depths* (1957), he chose to use *Hamlet* (*The Bad Sleep Well*, 1960) as the pretext for a ‘movie of some social significance’⁸ within the *gendai-mono* genre, a *diatribe* on the corruption that, for Kurosawa, plagued the highest levels of the Japanese public and political systems.

As Jack J. Jorgens rightly maintains,

Because the artist has chosen to work with Shakespeare and knows his audience will come to his new work with knowledge of the earlier one, there must be important points of contact between Shakespeare’s vision and his own, some resonance when the two works are juxtaposed, lest adaptation become travesty.⁹

I would like to argue that such ‘points of contact’ between Shakespeare and Kurosawa become fully apparent not only through the ‘emperor’s’¹⁰ highly stylised *mise en scène* but also within the flow of his symbolical montage. In this chapter, I thus propose to examine these points of contact between Kurosawa’s films and their Shakespearean sources, and by studying how the Shakespearean text is deconstructed and reorganised

⁸ Akira Kurosawa quoted by Donald Richie in *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 3rd edn (London: University of California Press, 1998), p.140.

⁹ Jack J. Jorgens, ‘Realising Shakespeare on Film’, *Shakespeare on Film: Contemporary Critical essays*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), p. 24.

¹⁰Kurosawa was nicknamed ‘the emperor’ because he was known for being an extremely demanding and even tyrannical director.

within the spatial dynamics of Kurosawa's cinema, I intend to explore and re-locate his authorial signature through the editorial practices of the director's hermeneutics. I am especially interested in examining the dialectical relations between figurative space and characters, and more particularly, in analysing how the Shakespearean narratives of *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet* are transformed within the spatial compositions of Kurosawa's editing. To do so, I would like to devote a first part to the ambivalent and sometimes Eisensteinian correlation between the characters and the spatial field encompassing their tragedies. Drawing on Kurosawa's contention that 'when [he] finally photographs something, it is merely to get something to edit',¹¹ I would like to argue that it is mainly in the cutting room that Kurosawa becomes an *auteur* in the romantic sense of the word as defined by Jacques Rivette: 'someone who speaks in the first person'.¹² A second section will present a comparative study of battle scenes from *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*, since it is in the chaos of combats and in the open spaces that Kurosawa demonstrates the full scope of his virtuosity, eloquence, and creativity. In a third part, I would like to analyse the politics of gender attribution in both *Ran* and *Throne of Blood* as far as elements of filmic space are concerned, and the degree to which this gender marking shapes and defines Shakespeare's tragedies. Finally, in keeping with the *auteurist* approach of Kurosawa-as-editor, I would like to examine how Kurosawa's editing patterns co-exist with his Noh-like and ceremony-based *mise en scène* style and ultimately co-define as well as codify this modern, *gendai-mono* 'transmutation' of Shakespeare's *Hamlet: The Bad Sleep Well*.

¹¹ Akira Kurosawa quoted by Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 3rd edn (London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 233.

¹² Jacques Rivette, quoted by André Bazin, 'De la Politique des Auteurs', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 70, (April 1957), p. 2-11.

2.1 The 'Place' is the Film: A Journey Through Heaven and Hell

As Pudovkin states it:

The theatrical producer works with real actuality, which, though he may always remould, yet forces him to remain bound by the laws of real space and real time. The film director, on the other hand, has as his material the finished, recorded celluloid. This material from which his final work is composed consists not of living men or real landscapes, not of real, actual stage-sets, but only of their images, recorded on separate strips that can be shortened, altered, and assembled according to his will. The elements of reality are fixed on these pieces; by combining them in his selected sequence, shortening and lengthening them according to his desire, the director builds up his own 'filmic' time and 'filmic' space. He does not adapt reality, but uses it for the creation of a new reality, and the most characteristic and important aspect of this process is that, in it, laws of space and time invariable and inescapable in work with actuality become tractable and obedient.¹³

Pudovkin's analysis of cinematic space and time is particularly relevant to Kurosawa's cinema. Indeed, Kurosawa's training as a painter is clearly visible in the way he works with his cinematic material: he always organises his narrative material within well-defined and carefully selected and structured spatio-temporal frames. Experimentations on space and rhythm are central to his cinema, and *Throne of Blood* (1957) and *Ran* (1985) are the results of two distinctive periods of his career. Indeed, in these two Shakespearean *jidai-geki* adaptations, Kurosawa experimented with two distinctive styles of editing to shape his own visions of Shakespeare's world. We could say that in the spectrum of Kurosawa's works, these two films are the epitome of his aspiration for aesthetic perfection or *hana*. It seems that in most of his films, space and time are constructed not only in a way to meet the requirements of the narrative but above all to create *hana*. The search for beauty for beauty's sake can be a sterile enterprise and Kurosawa's Shakespearean adaptations would have been rather meaningless if beauty had been his only preoccupation. On the contrary, his constant modesty and perseverance in the development of his artistic style enabled him to

¹³Vsevolod I. Pudovkin, *Film technique and Film Acting*, trans. Ivor Montagu (London: Vision Press Ltd, 1954), pp. 61-62.

question his work and be always innovative. Aestheticism was always subject to his critical scrutiny.

Even though Kurosawa's versions of the two tragedies differ in mood — *Throne of Blood* leans towards the fantastic whereas *Ran* is strongly anchored in realism — his use of space in both films seems to be based on the insignificance of human existence within a time and space without limit. Kurosawa transposes Shakespeare's narratives into extraordinary worlds, where the characters' actions, filmed through wide angles and long focal length lenses, take on superhuman dimensions. In these two films, the physical environment is extremely present and operates actively on its inhabitants. We always get the feeling that his characters fill a space that would have an existence of its own without them. As Stephen Prince contends:

Narrative exists for Kurosawa as a field of spatial energy, and the act of narration is synonymous with the charging of this field. The unfolding of a narrative in Kurosawa's cinema entails the translation of time into space. Narrative time becomes spatialized, and temporal dislocations, as from scene to scene, exponentially increase the visual energy on-screen.¹⁴

Prince's statement on Kurosawa's translation of time into space has to be understood in terms of cutting rhythm. This technique is clearly perceptible in the Cobweb forest sequence at the beginning of *Throne of Blood* in which Washizu and Miki, under the spell of a witch, become lost while riding. The extraordinary succession of travelling shots which shows the two samurai riding through the misty forest nullifies the time of their ride and converts it into their spatial environment. In other words, it is the repetition of similar shots of Washizu and Miki riding through the forest that transforms the sequence into a painting — the time the two samurai spend in the forest becomes irrelevant. The rapid cutting rhythm of the sequence as well as the extensive use of

¹⁴Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 63.

wipes forcefully convey the claustrophobic impression that the two men are entrapped in the forest, that narrative time dissolves itself into narrative space.

But before we move on to a discussion of the opening and final sequences of *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*, we might pause to consider Kurosawa's rather paradoxical relation to authorship. From a director who was well known for being extremely demanding on the set and who would not compromise when his artistic decisions were at stake, it can come as a surprise that he favoured a collaborative and even symbiotic mode of production during the scriptwriting and shooting of his films. In fact, Kurosawa always used to work with the same small group of collaborators. As described by Donald Richie, the process of collaborative writing is more familial than anything else: 'He [Kurosawa] gathers his script writers about (Shinobu Hashimoto, Hideo Oguni, Ryuso Kikushima, Eijiro Hisaita, Masato Ide) and goes off to a hot-springs hotel, or more recently, begins work in his garden-house. They sit together around a large table, writing, comparing, correcting until everyone is satisfied'.¹⁵ Richie also adds that 'Kurosawa's personal relationship to his writers is both intimate and strong' and that 'they, and a few actors, a few technicians, are the only friends he has'.¹⁶ Kurosawa himself conceded: 'I do not trust myself to write a script alone. It is that simple. I need people who can give me perspective'.¹⁷ This type of collective scriptwriting seems to be very deeply rooted in the playwriting practices to be found in the *modus operandi* of the Japanese theatrical apparatus, Noh and Kabuki alike. 'Each theatre', A. C. Scott explains, 'would have a leading *kyogen sakusha*¹⁸ with several assistants working for him, and it became the practice when a new play was being devised to share the writing of it among them'.¹⁹ These assistants usually work in

¹⁵ Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, p. 230.

¹⁶ Donald Richie, p.230.

¹⁷ Akira Kurosawa quoted by Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, p.230.

¹⁸ The chief playwright.

¹⁹ A. C. Scott, *The Kabuki Theatre of Japan* (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1999),

groups of five or six, just as in Kurosawa's team, and are responsible for creating good entertainment for the public. In this context, collective authorship clearly remains subordinate to the message and committed to the public's enjoyment. This is a very hierarchical system of production that Scott describes, and it is significantly akin with Kurosawa's working methods.

Although the Japanese director's agency lay, at least partially, in the collaborative process, when the Japanese director moved into post-production, all the team work that preceded suddenly gave way to the most solitary activity. He then enjoyed a total control over his films and he would 'shut himself up in the editing room, week after week, he tried this and that, he experimented with various combinations and it was only after repeated polishings that life was finally breathed into this work — the kind of life he wanted and that only editing can give'.²⁰ The metaphor Richie uses to describe Kurosawa's editing work is particularly significant here: he speaks of Kurosawa as breathing life into his films in a very biblical — and indeed *auteurist* — way, thereby associating the act of creation with the activity of film-editing. In this respect, Kurosawa-as-editor is the archetype of the romantic, modernist, and pre-structuralist (pre-death-of-the-author) *auteur* which whom we spectators so enjoy identifying. All in all, we might say that the plurality of authorial voices that comes to shape the scripts and *mise en scène* of Kurosawa's films is ultimately unified, concealed, and even cannibalised during his editing process so that what remains apparent over the smoothed out surface of the films is Kurosawa's authorial voice. This is particularly true as far as *Throne of Blood* is concerned since it is through Kurosawa's montage that the symbolic loci of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* get actualised and re-defined.

p. 201.

²⁰ Donald Richie, p. 239.

Kurosawa's comprehension of and work on cinematic space and time in postproduction is one of the principal transforming factors in his experimentation with Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. An understanding of the first sequence of both films is necessary to comprehend how Kurosawa integrates the Shakespearean narratives within the space-time of his editorial *mise en scène*. With its symmetrically similar opening and closing sequences, *Throne of Blood*'s circular pattern encloses its characters within a completely sealed realm of endless desolation and death. The film begins and ends with images of sterile, fog-swept, and murky lands, the bleakness of which is accentuated by the black and white film stock. As Donald Richie rightly notes, 'there has rarely been a blacker and a whiter black and white film.'²¹ At the onset of the film, as the camera pans clinically through the barren landscape, an invisible chorus of male voices starts chanting the argument of the narrative:

A proud castle stood in this desolate place
 Its destiny wedded to a mortal's lust for power.
 Here lived a warrior strong yet weakened by a woman,
 Driven to add his tribute to the throne of blood.
 The devil's path will always lead to doom.

The first eight shots of *Throne of Blood* depict a hellish and hopeless world that crushes human existence and weighs heavily on human destiny by enclosing it in an impassible overpowering space saturated with strong geometrical structures:

- Shot 1: extreme long shot in straight angle of foggy mountains stylised in horizontal lines and a hue of greys.
- Shot 2: long shot in straight angle of the same foggy mountains, the camera has now moved closer.
- Shot 3: long shot in straight angle of the foggy mountains, the camera pans to the left to reveal walls in ruin.

²¹Donald Richie, *The films of Akira Kurosawa*, 3rd edn (London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 120.

- Shot 4: extreme long shot in straight angle, the diagonal of a mountain cuts the screen in two parts, the camera pans left and tilts down on the ruins of Cobweb Castle.
- Shot 5: long shot in high angle of a pillar at the centre of the ruins while the fog sweeps over the lands.
- Shot 6: close-up in straight angle of the pillar, the camera tracks down to bring the following inscription to view: 'The Site of Cobweb Castle',
- Shot 7: extreme long shot in straight angle of a foggy chain of mountains, the colours of which range from black to white.
- Shot 8: long shot in straight angle of a land covered by a thick fog which slowly fades away to reveal a castle, towards the gates of which a horseman approaches hurriedly.

The arrangement of these first shots, combined with the dirge-like rhythm of the Noh-like chant, follows a specific pattern that creates an unearthly atmosphere of hypnotic numbness. The oppressive heaviness of the black and grey landscape shrouded in fog in the lingering first shot repeats itself ominously in the subsequent images. The sequence is composed of three segments: a movement towards the ruins of Cobweb (Kumonosu) Castle, a movement away from them, and a movement back onto the site of the castle, and also back in time. With an average duration of thirty seconds per shot in the first movement, the moment when the camera finally discovers the forlorn traces of human presence is carefully procrastinated. Not knowing and almost apprehending what is about to be unveiled, the viewer is kept in uneasy expectation. And, after a series of three shots characterised by Eisensteinian discontinuity and broken designs (e.g. horizontal lines versus oblique lines, black areas versus white areas) stating that this world is 'out of joint', the camera slowly pans to the left, finally revealing the ruins

of the long gone Cobweb Castle. In shots 4, 5, and 6, the camera gets closer and closer to the ruins, from an extreme long shot to a close-up on a kind of commemorative column. The camera movement from right to left is a recurrent motif in Kurosawa's cinema (as well as the wipe) and is a direct reference to a Japanese stage convention which usually consists of a performer drawing a curtain onto the stage from right to left at the end of an action. Significantly, Kurosawa used this convention to signal and punctuate the closure of the first movement of *Throne of Blood*.

Shots 5 and 6 provide us with the information retained until then: the desolate place marked by a pillar is the ruins of Cobweb Castle. The move from an extreme long shot in shot 1 to a close-up in shot 6 builds up the climax of this first sequence and visually states what the chorus has announced in shots 1 and 2: that this place was the scene of unnatural, demonic events that will repeat themselves endlessly. By choosing to situate the story of *Throne of Blood* in immemorial times, Kurosawa displaced Shakespeare's Scottish medieval tragedy onto an open realm of warriors' fantasy, thereby making the presence of supernatural characters such as the spinner-witch plausible. As Kurosawa explains in an interview with the Japanese critic Tadao Sato: 'In the case of the witch in the wood, I planned to replace it with an equivalent to the hag that appears in the Noh play named *Kurokuza*. The hag is a monster that occasionally eats human beings. I realised if we were to search for an image that resembles the witch of the West, nothing exists in Japan other than this'.²² In the same way, the foggy lands of Scotland which inspired Shakespeare have found an echo on the fog-swept black volcanic slopes of Mount Fujiyama that spurred Kurosawa's imagination and which appears in ghostly form in shot 7.

²² Akira Kurosawa quoted by Roger Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1971), p.102.

This circular editing that cuts from lofty views of the scenery to a view of the ruins, and back to the foggy mountains, generates a powerful feeling of ensnarement as if this space had confined, crushed, and finally eradicated human presence. The flowing fog, like an evil force lurking all around the castle and moving from shot to shot, is the unifying element that holds the sequence together. Finally, in the same way as the camera moved closer to the ruins, the camera moves away from them, taking us back to the same landscape we saw previously in shot 1. Shot 8 takes us through the fog of time back to the *incipit* of the history of Cobweb Castle. In the screenplay co-written by Kurosawa, the castle is described as a hellish place: ‘The stronghold of Kumonosu Castle towering among mountains. Viewed from outside, activity in the castle cannot be perceived. The architecture of the castle, the “Black Style”, profoundly depresses all who see it’.²³ This is not a castle, this is a fortress. There are no empty or passive spaces in *Throne of Blood*. Kurosawa clearly intended to use space not as a passive container for Shakespeare’s narrative but as an abstract, polymorphous, and overpowering force — a manifestation of fate, gods, evil? — that actively affects the characters’ motives and actions. Although it is not entirely appropriate, the term anthropocentric comes to mind here for *Throne of Blood*’s physical environment does possess ambiguous human-related attributes (this becomes more conspicuous as the film unfolds) despite the director’s efforts to construct it as the representation of a supernatural, perhaps malevolent presence.

In the circular logic of the film, after Washizu has met his death from arrows shot by his own soldiers, the final sequence mirrors the opening sequence as a panoramic shot shows the desolate silhouette of Cobweb Castle while the chorus chants the epilogue:

²³Akira Kurosawa, *Seven Samurai and Other Screenplays*, trans. Donald Richie (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 229.

The attacking force were none other than the rustling reeds in the breeze.
 The war cries were none other than a breeze in the pine tree.
 The ruins show the fate of demonic men with treacherous desire.
 Life is the same now as in ancient times.²⁴

With its four shots, the ending of *Throne of Blood* condenses the *incipit* into a brief ninety seconds sequence:

- Shot 1: extreme long shot in straight angle of Cobweb Castle which slowly disappears behind a thick screen of fog.
- Shot 2: medium long shot in straight angle of the memorial pillar appearing through the fog and marking the location of the castle.
- Shot 3: extreme long shot in straight angle of fog-swept mountains.
- Shot 4: a white Japanese calligraphy (meaning ‘the end’) on a black background.

By moving towards the ruins and away from them, these shots repeat the structural motif of the first sequence, thereby reasserting the film’s thematic substance. Form and content are tightly intertwined; Washizu and Asaji’s endemic (Washizu’s lord had also killed his shogun to take possession of Cobweb Castle) and self-destructive behaviour expresses itself in the circular, repetitive style of the editing. Drawing on Macbeth’s words ‘To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow’ (5.5.19), Kurosawa has inscribed Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* into a pattern of endless and futile repetition where there is no way out other than death. The Japanese director did bring out *Macbeth*’s blackest, gloomiest, and most tragic side. Like Macbeth, Washizu usurped a throne that was not meant to be his and dies from his mad thirst for power and from persisting in his mistake. The film ends without closure since there is no visual statement of Washizu’s succession, and the last sequences provide no explanation of what caused the ultimate

²⁴ Akira Kurosawa, *Seven Samurai and Other Screenplays*, p. 229.

destruction of the castle. The spectator can only assume that Washizu's death has not put an end to the cycle of terror and bloodshed prophesied by the spinner-witch.

The 'coming to life' of space we observe in *Throne of Blood* is a recurrent motif in Kurosawa's cinema and is also to be found in his epic version of *King Lear*, *Ran*, but this time in a much subtler and more static way. The introductory sequence of the film can be divided into two movements while the credits run on the screen. The entrance into the world of *Ran* is mediated by the presence of characters: a series of eleven shots ranging from extreme long shots to medium long shots representing groups of horsemen on the watch, positioned at set places across wind-swept mountains covered by deep green grasslands. These shots exemplify perfectly Stephen Prince's comment that Kurosawa 'situates his characters within a fluid, shifting space'²⁵ for it is quite impossible for the viewer to mentally draw a map of the scene. Kurosawa does not resort to a classical continuous editing (i.e. respecting the axis of action) that leads the viewer smoothly within a defined space. On the contrary, he is more interested in creating an atmosphere than in establishing the narrative within a stabilised space. We can even go as far as saying that his opening sequence is more picturesque and painterly than cinematic, and certainly more impressionistic than descriptive. The samurai seem frozen in the landscape, waiting for something to happen, but unlike the atmosphere of uncertain threat and confinement conveyed in the first sequence of *Throne of Blood*, these first eleven shots of horsemen and green mountains achieve a contrasting effect: they give off a feeling of intense serenity, openness, and freedom. Here, space is represented neither as a demonic presence nor as a passive container. There seems to be a harmony, a symbiotic relationship between space and characters (as if they were one and the same thing), and what Kurosawa has achieved in these introductory shots is to

²⁵ Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 152.

capture his conceptualisation of 'life' as well as *hana*. Each shot is a moving, living picture in which space is brimming with life, barely contained within the limits of the frame, and as in *Throne of Blood*, the use of long focal length lenses that reduce the depth of field increases the picturesque quality of his images. This distinctive style is characteristic of the traditional pictures of Japan where the lack of perspective and 'the composition of leaving a large area white and drawing persons and things only within a limited section of the space'²⁶ suggest a dialectical relationship between nature and human beings.

If the first movement of the first sequence of *Ran* is dominated by an aesthetic of stasis, the second counterpoises it with an explosion of motion:

- Shot 1: medium shot in low angle of a boar in the grass.
- Shot 2: medium shot in low angle of the boar hunted by a group of horsemen in the background.
- Shot 3: medium long shot in low angle of Lord Hidetora on horseback, holding a bow and arrows and chasing the boar.
- Shot 4: medium long shot in low angle of the hunters chasing the boar.
- Shot 5: medium shot in low angle of boars fleeing through the grass and crossing the frame from right to left.
- Shot 6: medium long shot in low angle of the horses moving swiftly across the frame.
- Shot 7: medium shot in low angle of the boars running away from the horsemen.
- Shot 8: tracking medium long shot in straight angle of Lord Hidetora and his men riding through the prairie from right to left.

²⁶ Akira Kurosawa quoted by Roger Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1971), p. 104.

- Shot 9: medium long shot in straight angle of the hunting party continuing the chase, Lord Hidetora is about to shoot an arrow.
- Shot 10: tracking medium shot in straight angle of Lord Hidetora aiming at his prey while still galloping.
- Shot 11: tracking close-up in straight angle of Lord Hidetora in the same posture.
- Shot 12: a red Japanese character calligraphy meaning 'chaos' on a black background.

This movement, which runs for forty five seconds, is mainly characterised by frenzied human activity expressed by quick shots, rapid camera movements, as well as swift movements within the frames which are interrupted by rough and conspicuous cuts. The effect achieved is one of intense liveliness concentrated on men and animals. With the use of medium and medium long shots, the hunters and their preys fill up the major part of the frames so that space and space's influence are considerably reduced. Even time is subjected to alterations in this second movement. Time is compressed as the action accelerates suddenly through the cutting rhythm, the omission of most of the hunting, and the motions within the shots. The shock between the two opposite movements is finally exposed in the last shot of the sequence: the red calligraphy of the 'chaos' character. This brief introductory sequence contains some of the structural elements that build *Ran*: the moment of stillness preceding the explosion of movements, the expansion and reduction of the spatial and temporal dimensions, and the Eisensteinian collisions of images through editing discontinuities.

In *Ran*, Kurosawa weaves a quasi-organic relation between space and characters. *Ran*'s environment has lost the threatening tensions established in *Throne of Blood*. Space is no longer a representation of hell, a malignant presence crushing the

characters' life (e.g. Washizu's and Miki's encounter with the spinner-witch in the Cobweb Forest), but an expression of life, and of its infinite nature that encompasses all things. Kurosawa has inserted glimpses of such majestic, boundless, and peaceful wilderness throughout his film so that the sum of all these shots constitutes a parallel diegesis to the main narrative that brings the latter into a Brechtian distancing perspective. In so doing, the viewer is constantly kept at a distance, constantly prevented from empathising with the downfall of the Ichimonji's house, Hidetora's collapse into madness, and the hopeless situation of the blind, forsaken, and lost Tsurumaru (Lady Sué's Gloucester-like brother). The main narrative being subjected to micro-interruptions during the whole film, the spectators are always aware of the fictitiousness of what they are watching, and are therefore always (subtly) compelled to remain critical observers to the drama. In one of the last sequences of the film, the Japanese director uses such an extra-diegetic shot to depict a vision of heaven through a series of subjective shots from Hidetora's point of view. The old Lord, having lost his reason, runs away from his attendants and gets lost in a plain battered with strong winds. When his righteous son Saburo finds him, Hidetora desperately tries to escape by digging a hole in the ground with his bare hands before falling into a catatonic state:

- Shot 1: medium long shot in high angle of Hidetora lying unconscious on the ground as Saburo tries to bring him round.
- Shot 2: medium shot in high angle of the same scene, then Hidetora slowly sits up while keeping his eyes riveted onto the sky.
- Shot 3: extreme long shot in low angle of clouds drifting in the sky.
- Shot 4: medium shot in high angle of Saburo who tries to establish a contact with his father.

- Shot 5: medium close-up in straight angle of Hidetora recognising Saburo as his son.

‘Am I in the other world? Is this paradise?’ asks Hidetora as he contemplates the sky. In his delirium, he seems so overwhelmed by the surreal, unemotional beauty of his environment that he questions the very nature of his own existence. This shot arrangement is an instance, among many others in the film, of Kurosawa’s relativist approach to Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. In his detailed biography, Stuart Galbraith contends that Kurosawa ‘depicts human events as viewed from the heavens, as if to show gods weeping and angry at the senseless violence they witness’.²⁷ I would rather argue that throughout *Ran*, these extra-diegetic, ‘heavenly’ shots emphasise the insignificance of the protagonists’ life and sufferings by reminding the spectator that space and time are two immutable, impassible elements granting them no kind of support or empathy whatsoever. In his cinema, Kurosawa adopts a much more ambiguous attitude towards space than the one of his ‘illustrious master’²⁸ John Ford, even though both directors share the same interest in the creation of filmic topoi. Ford’s influence on Kurosawa is clearly visible in the aestheticism of space we observe in *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*: it is surprisingly reminiscent of Westerns such as *Stagecoach* (1939), *Fort Apache* (1948), and *The Searchers* (1956). Kurosawa was obviously inspired by the American director’s adventures of modern mythical heroes fighting for the weak in an untamed, majestic, and awe-inspiring environment. In his essay on Ford’s interpretation and representation of Monument Valley, Edward Buscombe argues that ‘in Hollywood cinema, and in the Western in particular, mountain scenery could be said to function as a substitute for religion, a way of introducing a secular

²⁷ Stuart Galbraith IV, *The Emperor and the Wolf: The Lives and Films of Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002), p. 579.

²⁸ Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*, p. xii.

spiritual dimension'.²⁹ This comment is particularly appropriate as far as the very last shots of *Ran* are concerned:

- Shot 1: extreme long shot in straight angle of a tiny figure standing in the sunset on the edge of a cliff.
- Shot 2: extreme long shot in straight angle, the camera zooms in on the same tiny figure.
- Shot 3: long shot in low angle, the camera zooms in again of Tsurumaru bathed in a soft pink and yellow light, holding a scroll and feeling his way with a cane towards the cliff.
- Shot 4: medium shot in low angle of Tsurumaru who loses his balance and almost falls in the precipice, thereby dropping the scroll his sister Sué had given him.
- Shot 5: long shot in low angle, the camera zooms out on Tsurumaru who moves away.
- Shot 6: close-up in straight angle of the scroll that represents the Buddha Amida (Buddha of Boundless Light who guides the believers into paradise³⁰).
- Shot 7: extreme close-up in straight angle of Buddha's illuminated and smiling face.

²⁹Edward Buscombe, 'Inventing Monumental Valley: Nineteenth-Century Landscape Photography and the Western Film', *The Western Reader*, ed. Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman (New York: Limelight Editions, 1998), pp. 115-130 (p. 118).

³⁰ As Paul Varley puts it:

With the coming of *Mappō* [the end of the Buddhist Law in 1052], many Buddhists lost confidence in their ability to save themselves from worldly suffering through *jiriki*, 'self-power'. They believed that from this time on they would be obliged to seek the help of another: to rely on *tariki*, 'other-power'. This belief led to the establishment of new salvationist sects of Buddhism, the most prominent of which was the Pure Land (*Jōdo*) school, based on the vow of the Buddha Amida to save all beings who places their faith in him by transporting them, upon death, to a Pure Land paradise in the western realm of the universe. In *Warriors of Japan as Portrayed in the War Tales* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), p. 86.

- Shot 8: long shot in low angle of Tsurumaru standing still on the edge of the cliff.
- Shot 9: extreme long shot in straight angle of Tsurumaru, barely visible in the warm yellow and orange light.
- Shot 10: extreme long shot in straight angle of the same scene, the camera zooms out again, Tsurumaru is now but a dot lost in space.

Many speculations have been put forward in order to make sense of the final sequence of *Ran*. Stephen Prince, in particular, comes to the conclusion that Kurosawa depicts ‘life as a wheel of endless suffering’ and adds that ‘rather than the spectacle of undeserved suffering that Shakespeare offered, Kurosawa presents, as in *Throne of Blood*, a world of bleak landscape and repetitive violence from which no one escapes condemnation. The characters are villains all, or else are victims’.³¹ James Goodwin offers the same kind of interpretation. He understands Tsurumaru’s abandonment in terms of existential tragedy:

The world that the survivor Tsurumaru blindly faces is not graced by Buddha’s enlightenment or a promise of deliverance to paradise. The situation is a final indication that human suffering has entirely human origins. There is no other worldly cause, answer, or meaning to suffering.³²

Ran’s printed script sums it up with the single word ‘wretchedness’. There is no coincidence in the fact that *Ran*’s ending matches *Throne of Blood*’s. Both sequences are built on the same pattern of camera movements and they both focus on the precariousness and insignificance of human existence and human suffering. It is also true that Kurosawa’s approach to Shakespeare’s tragedies is characterised by a sharp pragmatism that does not allow for soothing empathy.

³¹ Stephen Prince, p. 287.

³² James Goodwin, *Akira Kurosawa and Intertextual Cinema* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press Ltd, 1994), p. 216.

From *Throne of Blood* to *Ran*, Kurosawa's use of space undergoes a fundamental change that strongly affects the overall structure and thematic content of both adaptations. Indeed, if space becomes animate in both films, the intrinsic properties Kurosawa ascribes to it stem from two antagonistic doctrines: active predestination and passive nihilism. In *Throne of Blood*, space is the sphere of the divine within which Washizu, Lady Asaji, Miki, and the other protagonists find themselves trapped and manipulated like puppets, whereas *Ran*'s spatial field seems completely devoid of divine, supernatural presence, and does not interfere with the characters' actions. Kurosawa's change of attitude vis-à-vis religion is the cornerstone of his Shakespearean diptych. There is no doubt that the apparent pessimism and cynicism of *Ran* have their foundations in Kurosawa's life for it was during the shooting of *Ran* that, after four months of agony, his wife Yoko finally died in February 1985. Immediately after her death (he actually took a single day off to attend the funeral), Kurosawa immersed himself in the postproduction of his tragedy, which makes *Ran* one of his most personal films. Kurosawa hovered between pessimism and optimism throughout his career, and if *Drunken Angel* is pervaded with a sense of post-war hope and humanism, *Throne of Blood* and *Ran* are clearly the products of two of the most unhappy periods of his life.

2.2 Chaos on the Battle Field

What make Kurosawa's Shakespearean adaptations particularly memorable is the dreadful goriness and the vivid aestheticism of violence of the battle scenes: a most representative, performative, and textual feature of Shakespeare's tragedies. With Orson Welles's 'battle of Shrewsbury', the battle scene most commented on is undoubtedly *Ran*'s 'silent' slaughter scene: Taro and Jiro's joined attack on the Third Castle where Hidetora's retinue and samurai have sought refuge. In spite of the musical

accompaniment, the prolonged absence of sound effects during the killings forces the viewers to focus their attention uniquely on the visual elements of the scene so that the images are imbued with an almost unbearable intensity. In his autobiography, Kurosawa recounts a childhood anecdote that made a vivid impression on him. The incident occurred on a morning as he was on his way to school. As he was walking back from his Kendo session, he found himself 'ambushed by students from another primary school'.³³ He had the choice between running away and continuing on his way, but since he 'had taken on the airs of a boy swordsman', he decided to 'put on a blasé expression',³⁴ and walked on past the boys. Kurosawa's description of what happened next is particularly revealing in regard to his treatment of the sequence mentioned above:

Immediately afterwards I felt something whizzing dangerously near my head. Just as I moved my hand to touch my head, I was hit. Swinging around, I saw a hail of rocks coming at me. The group of children remained silent, but all of them were heaving stones in my direction. It was their silence that terrified me.³⁵

It is quite clear that for Kurosawa, the feeling of intense fear is linked with recollections of violence and silence. The terror he felt when the children threw stones at him without uttering a word was mostly a visual experience, and he used this experience to shape the style and pace of the sequence showing the massive destruction of Hidetora's forces.

The montage of this battle scene is characterised by the straight cut, a sustained rhythm of forty shots per minute, and a wide variety of camera angles, distances, and movements so that we witness the crushing of Hidetora's men in a gradual progression of casualties as Taro and Jiro's armies invade the fortress. Kurosawa's montage forcefully assails the viewers with a multitude of shots saturated with more and more gruesome acts of violence. As the sequence runs for almost fifteen minutes and

³³ Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*, p. 28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

comprises perhaps more than five hundred shots, it would be inappropriate to give a shot by shot description of the entire battle scene. Instead I shall concentrate on key moments and features of the scene. The whole sequence (which is a fantastic editorial tour de force) is built upon three main governing concepts. First, the unnatural character of the attack — two sons fighting their father — finds its expression in the extraordinary number of horrible deaths and much ultra-red blood shed on the black soil of Mount Fuji. Second, the visual motif of hunting, which is introduced in the first sequence of the film when Hidetora hunts a wild boar with his sons, is an essential and recurrent component of this sequence and of the whole film. The third and last theme is a development of the spatial conceptualisation we have seen earlier.

Kurosawa used his experience as a painter³⁶ to create a horrific picture out of the hundreds of images he shot during the filming of this battle scene, and the eerie absence of sound effects and dialogue reinforces the pictorial and nightmarish quality of the sequence. Other than the haunting music composed by Toru Takemitsu (inspired by Mahler's first symphony), nothing interferes between the viewer and the nightmarish footage so that only the aesthetic of the images remains: the soldiers die silently, the arrows pierce the air without a whistle, the bullets are shot with no detonation, and the doors are smashed in without a crack. As Donald Richie comments: 'the Mahleresque music speaks of the misery of all people, the hopelessness of human race'.³⁷ Kurosawa's montage is essentially didactic and the viewing experience conveyed by these 'silent' images of killings and destruction is indeed one of moral judgement very similar to the one that Welles created in his vision of the battle of Shrewsbury.

³⁶ Kurosawa enrolled at the Doshusha School of Western Painting in 1927. Although he was successful enough to be selected for the Nitten art exhibition, he could never live off his art and had to choose a more economically rewarding career.

³⁷ Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 3rd ed. (London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 218.

In his very detailed biography of Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune, Stuart Galbraith contends that ‘in contrast to the cameras placed amid hoofs of the charging bandits in *Seven Samurai*, Kurosawa purposely keeps his distance, with more painterly compositions’.³⁸ The cutting skilfully directs our gaze to all the different details of the composition by bringing the spectator gradually closer to the tragedy of this parricidal war. By taking us from one element to another, by zooming in onto a dying, mutilated soldier, two of Hidetora’s concubines stabbing each other and collapsing in each other’s arms, the wooden construction of the castle attacked by the flames or a platoon of samurai manoeuvring their way into the castle, and by using a series of shots with similar patterns of movement or graphic arrangements, Kurosawa reproduces the way one looks at a painting: an apprehension of the general structure, of the various patterns or repetitions of movements, directions, colours, textures, and shapes. Kurosawa’s control of the viewer’s gaze is indeed central to his editorial strategy as far as this particular sequence is concerned.

Furthermore, his parsimonious use of colours contributes very much to the scene’s atmosphere of despair, horror, and fear. Whereas bright hues are spread throughout the whole film, this battle sequence stands out by virtue of its black and white tones. Kurosawa’s fondness for silent films reveals itself in the arrangement of colours: vermilion blood gushes out of greyish bodies and flows over a black soil, as the red and yellow pennons of Taro and Jiro’s soldiers spread through the fortress while strong gusts of wind undo Hidetora’s white hair and white kimono. As he slowly walks down the steep and immense stairs of his stronghold, the whiteness of Hidetora’s face enhances the fixed expression of his eyes so that he is transformed into the likeness of a haggard man, the *jō-men*³⁹ of Noh drama. Noh masks perform a specific function: by

³⁸ Stuart Galbraith IV, *The Emperor and the Wolf: the Lives and Films of Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002), p. 579.

³⁹ Inoura Yoshinobu, *A History of Japanese Theater*, 2 vols (Yokohama: General

wearing them, the actors actually become what the masks symbolise, thereby transforming the actors themselves into archetypes or even symbols. As Kurosawa explains, 'drama in the West takes its characters from the psychology of men or circumstances; the Noh is different. First of all, the Noh has the mask, and while staring at it, the actor becomes the man whom the mask represents. [...] the actor becomes possessed'.⁴⁰ As he walks out of the third castle, surrounded by his sons and their samurai, Hidetora's face is as rigid and white as the mask (*omote*) of the Noh *jō-men*. In becoming the mask of a haggard man, Hidetora is finally deprived of his personality and individuality, the last stage of his downfall.

This battle sequence is the turning point of the film: Kurosawa reverses the hunting motif he established at the beginning of *Ran* by transforming his King Lear figure from a fierce and ruthless hunter into a trapped insane old man at bay. The closing door imagery fully participates in the representation of Hidetora as a hunted animal. The first half of the film is saturated with shots of closure that cut Kurosawa's King Lear from his past, his family, his former authority and prestige, and from his reason. One of the most conspicuous instances of such shots occurs when, after Hidetora has been rejected by his eldest son Taro, he suffers a second rejection from his other son Jiro in the second castle:

- Shot 1: long shot in straight angle of Hidetora standing within the castle and facing the closed wooden gate; he orders Jiro's soldiers to open it for him to leave.
- Shot 2: extreme long shot in high angle from outside the castle of the immense doors that are being opened; Hidetora crosses the threshold and is saluted by his samurai.

- Shot 3: medium long shot in straight angle of Hidetora and Jiro, both facing the camera but standing on each side of the gate; the soldiers close the doors and Hidetora is left alone on screen with only the closed gate behind him.
- Shot 4: extreme long shot in high angle of Hidetora who almost loses his balance; on both sides of the frame, his men make a move so as to help him but freeze suddenly.
- Shot 5: close-up of the sun in the middle of a blue sky.

Such shots create a deep feeling of ensnarement and isolation, and a part of Hidetora's sanity is taken away from him every time a door closes on him. Space does not just grow narrow on him: it expands around him so that he suddenly finds himself 'trapped' in a boundless space within which he loses all his bearings. Hidetora no longer controls his surroundings as he used to in the first sequence of the film. He no longer is the active clan leader who inscribed his mark on space by burning down enemy castles. When Hidetora decided to hand over the commandment of the Ichimonji house to Taro, he lost his authority over the members of his clan and this surrender finds an expression in his loss of control over his surroundings. The final shot of the battle sequence reasserts this point as Hidetora, now reduced to a weak and mad old man, reels his way along the rampart of the third castle, moving forward into the fog like a sleepwalker. At the very end of the last shot of the sequence, Kurosawa's King Lear is but a lost shadow or even a ghost wandering through an unsympathetic space: a most desolate and Shakespearean vision.

Surprisingly, Kurosawa did not choose to include epic battle scenes like those of *Ran* in his adaptation of *Macbeth*. Had he wanted to, he could have found many opportunities in Shakespeare's tragedy to set up the titanic and heroic confrontations that are the trademarks of his cinematic style. But there are no heroes in *Throne of*

Blood and it seems that Kurosawa denied his ‘unheroic’ characters who do not live by the code of the *Bushido*, the honour of a proper battle or of a noble death. Instead of granting his Macbeth (Lord Washizu) the honourable death Shakespeare had designed for him (killed in a duel), Kurosawa submitted him to a most disgraceful end. As we have seen in the analysis of *Ran*’s major battle scene, the last moments of Washizu in *Throne of Blood* have been carefully orchestrated in order to bring a long final climax to the narrative. The antagonistic combination of discontinuous, quickly cut sequences, and of static, more restrained actions that generates the raw and sharp dynamic of the whole film is finally associated in Washizu’s execution scene. These structural designs are again intensified by the relative lack of sound effects of the sequence. It seems that the soldiers’ deathly silence as they shoot arrows at their lord is one of Kurosawa’s first attempts at using his personal experiences (in this case the childhood memory of his silent confrontation with a group of hostile children) in his artistic creations — the mark of his authorship. With the examples of *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*,⁴¹ we can assert that in Kurosawa’s cinema the silent execution is a recurrent motif that reaches its finest and boldest achievement in *Ran*’s ruthless destruction of the third castle.

As far as *Throne of Blood*’s ‘silent execution sequence’ is concerned, the fact that Kurosawa focused it exclusively on Washizu and organised it as an oxymoronic open-air *huis clos* by means of close-ups and frontal framing, creates a feeling of claustrophobia that repeats the spatial dynamics governing the film’s narrative. Before proceeding to the substantial analysis of the sequence, a sample of it will help us to visualise the specific stylistic effects of Kurosawa’s editing:

⁴¹ Kurosawa also uses the absence of sound effects in the presentation of Watanabe in the opening scenes of *Ikiru* (1952) as well as when the grandmother runs into the storm in the last sequence of *Rhapsody in August* (1991).

- Shot 1: medium close-up in straight angle of Washizu being shot by several arrows, one of which touches him on the side; he steps back against the wall in an attempt to escape them.
- Shot 2: reverse shot, medium close-up in straight angle of Washizu who moves to another side of the rampart walk, still holding to the wall pierced by more and more arrows, some of them hurting Washizu.
- Shot 3: medium shot in straight angle of Washizu trying to escape the arrows by moving alongside the wall.
- Shot 4: reverse shot in straight angle of Washizu from behind, with arrows blocking the way behind and in front of him.
- Shot 5: long shot in low angle travelling of a group of soldiers running after him up the rampart walk.
- Shot 6: medium close-up in straight angle of Washizu about to run down the stairs where the soldiers shoot at him.
- Shot 7: long shot in high angle of the soldiers shooting at him from down the stairs.
- Shot 8: close-up in straight angle of Washizu forced to step back again against the wall, where several arrows get stuck close to his head; he crushes his way through them.
- Shot 9: reverse shot, medium close-up in straight angle of Washizu pressed in a corner and screaming in terror, another flight of arrows pierce the wall near his head and once again he crushes them to move forward against the wall.
- Shot 10: close-up in straight angle of Washizu from behind.
- Shot 11: reverse shot, close-up in straight angle of Washizu facing the camera, more arrows get stuck in front of him.

- Shot 12: reverse shot, close-up in straight angle of Washizu trying to step back but arrows whistle past his ears and block the way behind him.
- Shot 13: reverse shot, close-up in straight angle of Washizu who desperately tries to free himself by crushing the arrows on his left, the camera frames him behind a screen of arrows as he gets shot, he then turns to the right facing the camera and sweeps the arrows with his arms.
- Shot 14: reverse shot, close-up in straight angle of Washizu screaming as arrows literally rain on him.
- Shot 15: reverse shot, medium close-up in straight angle of Washizu still being stung by arrows and trying to free himself from this ordeal.
- Shot 16: reverse shot, close-up in straight angle of Washizu who gets more and more wounded.
- Shot 17: travelling long shot in straight angle of Washizu pressed against the wall who receives another flight of arrows and who moves with difficulty to a ladder.
- Shot 18: medium close-up in straight angle of Washizu who struggles his way up the ladder with many arrows piercing his body.
- Shot 19: close-up in straight angle of Washizu, the camera faces him as he gets shot by an arrow, this blow prevents him from climbing up the ladder, he staggers back.
- Shot 20: medium close-up in straight angle of Washizu as an arrow runs through his neck that almost immobilises him.

The sequence is undoubtedly imbued with images of ensnarement, savagery, and terror. When Washizu stares helplessly at the Cobweb forest moving (photographed in slow motion) and approaching menacingly toward his fortress, he is suddenly struck by terror

as he realises that the prediction of the spinner-witch has finally come true. Although he makes a last attempt to regain some authority over his samurai, the latter defy his authority by refusing to obey his orders, thereby repeating the cycle of treason and violence in which he has found himself trapped. Washizu then understands what is about to happen to him as the first arrow whistles through the air and strikes him. Kurosawa did not grant his pitiful Macbeth a quick and honourable death on the battlefield. Instead, the long and highly stylised agony Washizu suffers not only strips him of the power he had tasted and which had intoxicated and blinded him, but of his humanity since he is put to death like a mere beast. As regards Kurosawa's recurrent stylistic devices, Stephen Prince asserts that 'the camera constrains the characters' freedom of action by patterns of movement that confine them in a narrow and malignant space'.⁴² Prince's comment is particularly appropriate to this specific sequence in as far as the camera keeps getting closer and closer to Washizu thereby enclosing him within smaller and smaller frames. The accumulation of medium close-ups, close-ups, and of reverse shots, as well as the absence of shots showing the soldiers that could have opened up the spatial field of the sequence, creates an intense feeling of ensnarement. This accumulation of close-ups, combined with the constant change of camera positions from his left to his right, imprisons Washizu within an extremely restricted framing as if space crushes down on him. The film's close homology between space and death, conveyed in the first sequence by the threatening, desolate, and fog-swept mountains, reaches a climax in the very last moments of the ambitious warlord. The narrowed perspective through which Kurosawa's Macbeth is shot concentrates our attention on the core of his pain and terror so that the whole frame is saturated with Washizu's terror and agonising suffering. Through these ruthless shots, his wide-open, screaming mouth

⁴² Stephen Prince, p. 81.

within an oppressive confining frame becomes a synecdoche of terror and despair (shot 14).

The graphic patterns, formed by the arrows within the frames, cage Washizu, and through the cuts from one shot to another, also contribute to creating the claustrophobic effect of the sequence. Indeed, the arrows circling Washizu cross the frames horizontally, thereby taking the shape of and acting like prison bars. Built on elaborate designs, this montage of strong lines and reverse shots bears the mark of Eisenstein's influence and, to borrow Eisenstein's phrase, Kurosawa's treatment of Washizu's execution is 'a graphic flourish in space'.⁴³ As tension builds up from shot to shot, the number of arrows battering him increases dramatically so that Washizu is nothing but a carapace bristling with spikes, crawling for a hideaway that does not exist. If Shakespeare granted his Macbeth a moment of self-awareness and an honourable death that gave him the status of tragic hero, Kurosawa chose to strip his Washizu of dignity, honour, and humanity. There is no redemption for him, only the dreadful prospect of a never-ending damnation that is foreshadowed in the film's first fifteen minutes ending with the scene featuring the androgynous 'weird sister' with her spinning-wheel. The multiple framing of this pivotal scene epitomises the film's global structure and sustains its directing argument. The spinner seems to control everything: space, time, and human lives. The mysterious witch is represented seated inside a frail cabin, shrouded in fog at the centre of the Cobweb Forest, and it is within this succession of enclosed spaces that Washizu and Miki are entrapped. Significantly, Neil Forsyth compares Kurosawa's framing devices with the aesthetics of Georges Méliès's frontal proscenium long shots and magical tricks:

The two warriors quickly become spectators of a magic show, frontally presented as in the Méliès films, rather than from a constantly shifting viewing

⁴³ Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein Rediscovered*, ed. Ian Christie and Richard Taylor (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 152.

position in what became the classical style, to absorb the spectator into the film-space. Indeed, arguably the scene combines Lumière and Méliès traditions but keeps them distinct: the watching warriors framing the screen still belong to the outside or Lumière world of history — battle, horses, rushing messengers, and feudal hierarchies — even though they are momentarily lost in this strange forest which is now revealing its secret.⁴⁴

What Kurosawa achieved in *Throne of Blood* through a calculated use of circular macro-editing and an extremely controlling micro-editing is to inscribe Shakespeare's Macbeth into an unbreakable circle of evils. Indeed, the deep feeling of oppression emanating from most of the film's sequences (whether they be static or explosions of movements) is created by Kurosawa's systematic use of geometric patterns within the frames and over the shots, combined with an acute sense of spatial framing. This is particularly true as far as the indoor scenes are concerned: the characters find themselves enclosed within a series of structures and the strict conventions of the Noh that restrain their freedom of action and imprison them into their own vicious circle. As Washizu and Lady Asaji spiral into evil and as they acquire more and more power and authority thanks to their schemes of murder and treachery, they also move from the First Fort to the North Castle, and finally to Kumonosu (Cobweb) Castle. Through this movement from one spatial field to another, space reduces itself around the bloodthirsty couple until Asaji is brought down to a pair of rubbing hands in a small basin, itself contained in a small room, while the petrified rictus of her husband's gaping mouth fills the frame. But this process of reduction is not just confined to the spatial field. It also extends to speech, this primordial mode of expression, for what is left of Macbeth's nihilistic conclusion that life 'is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/Signifying nothing' (5.5.26-28), is Washizu's one-word interjection 'Fool!'. This drastic compression is the epitome of one of Kurosawa's characteristic attempts at

⁴⁴ Neil Forsyth, 'Shakespeare the Illusionist: Filming the Supernatural', *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 274-294 (p. 288).

finding visual rather than linguistic equivalents for a playwright like Shakespeare who defines his world essentially in terms of speech.

2.3 The World is Topsy-turvy: The Aestheticisation of Gender in *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*

We have just seen how Kurosawa transports Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *King Lear* into realms of spatial and temporal chaos that put the characters to the test, both physically and psychologically. The Japanese director treats space and time as the equivalent of classical deities in epic tragedies that have a direct impact on the human characters whose tragedy resides in their powerlessness to control their own destiny. However, chaos does not only surround the characters; chaos is also amongst and within themselves. *Ran* depicts a society torn apart by internecine wars, feuds that run through the generations and take their roots in hatred, ambition, and jealousy. By portraying his King Lear figure as a cold-hearted, tyrannical villain hungry for power, Kurosawa identified Lord Hidetora Ichimonji as the source of all this evil. In building his epic tale, Kurosawa felt the need to provide the history of Hidetora in order to make the circular structure of the film meaningful — this pattern of endless repetition to be found in *Throne of Blood*, characteristic of the Buddhist doctrine — and also to encompass it within a wider perspective of causes and consequences: 'How did Lear acquire the power that, as an old man, he abuses with such disastrous effects? Without knowing his past, I have never really understood the ferocity of his daughters' response to Lear's feeble attempts to shed his royal power'.⁴⁵ Such a comment reveals how patterns, plans, and motives were absolutely essential to Kurosawa, and this is the reason why looking

⁴⁵ Akira Kurosawa quoted by James Goodwin in *Akira Kurosawa and Intertextual Cinema*, p. 197.

for and comprehending such patterns, plans, and motives enables us to get a clearer insight into his films.

As far as the gender dynamics of *Throne of Blood* and *Ran* are concerned, it could come as a surprise that the two most powerful (and evil) figures of both films are women (Lady Asaji and Lady Kaede), considering that very few *jidai-geki* feature strong female characters and that Kurosawa himself did rarely direct films with colourful female parts. Japanese culture and history is popularly reputed to be patriarchal and phallogentric, and it is necessary to bear that observation in mind when examining the gender relations at stake in Kurosawa's Shakespearean adaptations. If it is true that Kurosawa's cinema contains few female characters, those are particularly flamboyant and memorable. It has been said that Kurosawa is the *cinéaste* of excess: this is especially relevant when it comes to his own representations of gender dynamics — there is no half-measure with his images. What is fascinating about *Throne of Blood* and *Ran* is the way the Japanese director uses a dialectic of stasis and motion in his editing style in order to define gender relations and stylise characterisation. Stephen Prince is quite right when he maintains that 'Kurosawa's cinema is a world of men',⁴⁶ and yet I do not agree with his other assumption that 'Kurosawa's interests are not piqued by the sexuality or the psychology of men and women in relation to each other'.⁴⁷ On the contrary, either in *Throne of Blood* with Lady Asaji and Lord Washizu, in *Ran* with Lady Kaede and her two husbands, or in *The Bad Sleep Well* with Kieko and Koichi Nishi, the questions of sexuality and mental behaviours are central to Kurosawa. He deals with them in the same way as he works with space and time, and therefore his characters' behaviour seems exaggeratedly disproportionate through the distorting eye of his camera. If his protagonists seem to overreact it is only because they

⁴⁶ Prince, p. 78.

⁴⁷ Prince, p. 78.

react proportionally to the contextual aestheticism of his films, which is directly influenced by the style and conventions of the Noh and Kabuki.

Lady Asaji and Lady Kaede are such figures of excess (to the point of caricatures). They are very similar in as far as both women share the same fiery temper hidden behind restrained gestures and a disturbing facial stillness. They also share the same determination to achieve their goal, and the same physical appearance and restraint. Kurosawa chose to give the same facial expression to both characters: the completely impassible countenance of the *Oto-no-men* (the Noh mask of a young woman). The art of representation, of being on display, is the essence of their nature, and Kurosawa's *mise en scène* and editorial style are directly linked to the acting processes of revealing and concealing. As in Shakespeare's plays, private and public scenes alternate regularly throughout the films so that we get to see the different facets of each protagonist. The banquet scene of *Throne of Blood* is one of these public scenes that bring the characters' ability to perform their roles to the limit. The scene takes place in the Grand Hall of Kumonosu Castle. Washizu and Lady Asaji are giving a banquet to which all the generals have been invited, including General Miki and his son:

- Shot 1: establishing shot, medium long shot in straight angle of one of the generals who is performing a dance, the camera follows him as he moves towards Lady Asaji and Lord Washizu.
- Shot 2: medium long shot in straight angle of Washizu, seated on a thick tatami and drinking sake while he looks angrily to his left.
- Shot 3: medium long shot in slightly high angle, subjective shot from Washizu's point of view of two unoccupied tatamis.

- Shot 4: medium long shot in straight angle of Washizu who goes of drinking sake and scanning his guests.
- Shot 5: medium long shot in slightly high angle, subjective shot from Washizu's point of view of two generals who look particularly worried.
- Shot 6: medium shot in straight angle of Lady Asaji and Washizu in the background as the general dances and chants the following song:

Mark our words, a spirit of the dead.

In olden times there was also such an instance.

The devil who served a traitor called Chikata before he met with his own destruction.

It was Heaven's justice on him for having revolted against kingship.⁴⁸

- Shot 7: medium long shot in straight angle of Washizu who drinks furiously from his cup.
- Shot 8: medium long shot in straight angle of Lady Asaji, checking discreetly on her husband.
- Shot 9: medium shot in straight angle of the dancing general who is abruptly interrupted by Washizu.
- Shot 10: medium close-up in high angle of the general who kneels down in apology, he then goes back to his tatami among the other guests.
- Shot 11: medium long shot in slightly high angle of the two unoccupied tatamis which should have been occupied by Miki and his son.
- Shot 12: close-up in straight angle of Washizu, drinking more and more sake as he looks angrily at the two tatamis.
- Shot 13: medium long shot in slightly high angle, subjective shot from Washizu's point of view of the two unoccupied tatamis.

⁴⁸ Kurosawa, *Seven Samurai and Other Screenplays*, p. 253.

- Shot 14: close-up in straight angle of Washizu, drinking more and more sake as he looks angrily at the two tatamis.
- Shot 15: reaction shot, medium long shot in straight angle of Washizu from the first unoccupied tatami; the camera zooms in on Washizu who stops drinking, looks back at the tatami, and drops his cup with an expression of terror on his face. The camera zooms out to reveal a white ghostly figure (Miki) seated on the tatami; Washizu gets up in dismay and staggers through the room with the camera following him. Lady Asaji intervenes to calm him down and reassure the guests. Washizu finally sits back on his tatami and the camera reveals that the white figure has vanished.
- Shot 16: close-up in straight angle of Washizu who looks embarrassed as he scans all the guests.
- Shot 17: long shot in straight angle of the generals who look suspiciously at Washizu and Lady Asaji; they slowly resume their places.
- Shot 18: medium close-up in straight angle of Washizu who asks his guests to drink ('why so sober? drink!').
- Shot 19: long shot in straight angle of Washizu and Lady Asaji from the left hand side of the room, a woman refills Washizu's cup.
- Shot 20: long shot in straight angle of Lady Asaji who stays completely still on her tatami; she tries to fuel the conversation by mentioning Miki's delay.

Such are the first twenty shots of this very formal public scene. Kurosawa builds the tension of the scene from a coherent *collage* of subjective shots that suggest the nerve-racking anticipation of an outburst of violence. The spectator sees the details of the banquet from the point of view of each member of the assembly as both hosts and guests observe each other closely. Something is going to happen, and they all seem to

fear for their lives. The guests interpret the absence of Miki and his son as an insult to Washizu (a general says to another one sat next to him: ‘Why the absence of our guests of honour? It’s unbecoming to General Miki.’), while the latter’s sidelong glances at the vacant tatamis are as many telltale signs of his clouded mind. The tension becomes extreme. By choosing to transpose the entrance of Miki’s (Shakespeare’s Banquo) murderer after the banquet scene, Kurosawa upsets the balance of forces between Washizu and Lady Asaji.

In the Shakespearean playtext, the banquet has already started when one of Banquo’s murderers appears on stage. The stage directions indicate: ‘*Enter First Murderer, to the door*’ (3.4.8-9). Macbeth notices him and goes to the door, so that he knows about Banquo’s death *before* seeing his ghost. Although Macbeth’s knowledge of the situation does not really prepare him to face Banquo’s ghost, and his own conscience, it still places him in a ‘better’ position than Washizu’s. Indeed, by postponing the entrance of the murderer until after the end of the banquet and the appearance of Miki’s ghost, Kurosawa increases the *effet de surprise* that the apparition can have on the spectators, increases Washizu’s emotional response, and finally weakens his Macbeth in such a way that in comparison, Lady Asaji emerges as the strong character of the couple. While Shakespeare decided to confer Macbeth a full awareness of Banquo’s murder so that he appears as ruthless as his wife, Kurosawa preferred to show a deeply worried and destabilised Washizu. The numerous medium long shots and close-ups (shots 2, 4, 7, 12,14,15, and 18) of the latter glancing in terror at Miki’s vacant tatami reveal the pangs of his conscience (and not at all his grudge against Miki for not being there as the guests and the viewers might have supposed). This is a key scene in *Throne of Blood* that allows us to get an insight into Washizu’s psychology. What appears here is a conscience-stricken man that has betrayed his best

friend (Miki's earlier comment that 'We must have faith in our friends' is all the more ironic), his companion in arms, and above all the sacred code of the *bushido* without which a samurai is nothing. From a Japanese point of view, Washizu's downfall is directly linked with his failure to live by the *bushido*, to his lack of honour, and to his weakness toward his wife.

Lady Asaji is always lurking in the background, waiting for the moment to strike like an animal of prey (in *Ran*, Lady Kaede is significantly associated with the fox). In the sequence we are closely examining, she is only seen in five shots (8, 15, 17, 19, and 20), albeit she is the instigator of Miki's murder. Kurosawa's Lady Macbeth does not conform to the rules of classical occidental female representations in as far as the sexual side of her character remains completely untouched. She does not really become a stereotype like the *femme fatale* (Jeanette Nolan) of Orson Welles's *Macbeth* or the sensual woman (Francesca Annis) of Roman Polansky's. Lady Asaji is not characterised by her body and her bodily seductive powers. The camera does not focus on her as a sexual object by zooming on specific body parts; on the contrary, most of the time she is shot in her entirety, with her body covered up by the numerous layers of her kimono. In fact, one could say that Kurosawa has a very 'masculine' way of filming her as he strictly applies the same shooting style he uses for Washizu.

As a result of this unique way of filming the Macbeth couple, Lady Asaji takes on some of the (Japanese) masculine attributes (endurance, a freedom from any emotional involvement, and strong determination) of her husband, and vice versa, Washizu takes on some of the (Japanese) feminine attributes (submission, loyalty to the spouse, a certain mental frailty) of his wife. Derived from the dances and postures of the Noh drama, Lady Asaji is characterised by moments of perfect stillness and furious motion, as we can see in the banquet sequence. Shots 8 and 15 show Washizu's wife in

her two opposite states: in the first instance she slowly and imperceptibly turns her expressionless face towards Washizu in order to keep an eye on him, whereas in shot 15 she quickly reacts to her husband's disturbing behaviour and manages to take control of the situation. Her appearance as a discreet, submitted wife in shot 8 is sharply contradicted by her moments of furious action: she really is the dominant one of the couple in this sequence. Anthony Davies maintains that in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*, 'the dramatic conflict between the world of nature and the world of man, broadly expounded through the opposition of the castle and the forest, is elaborated through the collision of shape and design, movement and stasis'.⁴⁹ I would also like to argue that the aesthetics of stillness and motion replaces the aesthetics of gender representation, or more precisely that the gender economics of the film are translated into an aesthetics of absence and presence of movement. Such binary oppositions are characteristic of Kurosawa's cinema and he has envisioned Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *King Lear* through such elemental and deeply Japanese combinations. Once Kurosawa stripped the plays of their words, all that remained was the bare essential of the tragedies: the characters' basic actions, gestures, motives, and feelings.

In comparison with *Throne of Blood*, *Ran* is an even further attempt to bring out the substantial marrow of Shakespeare's play, albeit without veering towards caricature. Lady Kaede in particular, is one of Kurosawa's most successful embodiment of this aestheticism of bareness. Lady Kaede and Lady Asaji share this sheer determination to serve their own interests, the ability to manipulate men, and a deep cold-heartedness. Significantly symbolised by the fox, Lady Kaede is cunning and artful enough to bring the downfall of the Ichimonji house. If Kurosawa's female characters are strong, and even stronger than his warriors, this might be explained by one of his childhood

⁴⁹ Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook, and Akira Kurosawa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 161.

anecdotes. In his autobiography, Kurosawa recounts how he was strongly impressed by his mother's courage:

My mother's strength lay particularly in her endurance. I remember an amazing example. It happened when she was deep-frying tempura in the kitchen one day. The oil in the pot caught fire. Before it could ignite anything else, she proceeded to pick up the pot with both hands — while her eyebrows and eyelashes were singed to crinkled wisps — walk calmly across the tatami-mat room, properly put on her clogs at the garden door and carry the flaming pot out to the centre of the garden to set it down. Afterward the doctor arrived, used pincers to peel away the blackened skin and applied medication on her charred hands. I could hardly bear to watch. But my mother's facial expression never betrayed the slightest tremor. Nearly a month passed before she was able to grasp something in her bandaged hands. Holding them in front of her chest, she never uttered a word of pain; she just sat quietly. No matter how I might try, I could never do the same.⁵⁰

It seems very likely that this incident shaped Kurosawa's characterisation of his Shakespearean heroines: strength is gendered and is overtly feminine. 'These women', Donald Richie explains, 'are more capable of extremes than most of the men in Kurosawa's films. Asaji has gone the whole way. Washizu wavers.'⁵¹ We have seen earlier the ability of Kurosawa's female characters to carry through their public 'performances' by hiding their true nature behind their Noh mask-like faces. In the following scene, we shall see that the performance comes to an end behind closed doors. This is a private scene that takes place after Jiro has had his brother Taro (Lady Kaede's first husband) murdered. Although Lady Kaede and Jiro have already met in public, this is the first time they meet in private. At this point, Lady Kaede's future depends on this encounter with Jiro who has become the head of the Ichimonji's:

- Shot 1: medium long shot in straight angle of Lady Kaede who, still squatting, moves slowly towards Jiro, handing him Taro's helmet as a token of good will. As Jiro bents forward to take the helmet, Lady Kaede throws it away, grabs a long dagger from beneath her kimono, and points it against Jiro's throat who

⁵⁰ Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography* (New York: First Vintage Books, 1983), p. 22.

⁵¹ Donald Richie, p. 118.

finds himself at her mercy, pushed to the floor on his back. She completely covers him up with her white robe as she threatens to cut his throat.

- Shot 2: medium shot in straight angle of the dagger slashing Jiro's jugular vein.
- Shot 3: medium long shot in straight angle of Lady Kaede, still maintaining Jiro on the floor and pointing her dagger at him.
- Shot 4: medium shot in straight angle of the dagger making another cut on Jiro's throat.
- Shot 5: medium long shot in straight angle of Lady Kaede still threatening Jiro with her dagger. She then quickly gets up, still holding the dagger and moves all the weapons away from Jiro. She closes all the sliding doors while she demonically laughs at him. She walks towards Jiro with the dagger pointed at him as she tells him that she will remain in this castle and keep her situation as the first Lady of the Ichimonji household.
- Shot 6: medium shot in straight angle of a screaming Lady Kaede.
- Shot 7: medium long shot in straight angle of Lady Kaede who squats down.
- Shot 8: medium shot in straight angle of Jiro who makes a slight move away from her, he seems paralysed by terror.
- Shot 9: medium long shot in slightly high angle of Jiro and Lady Kaede. She asks him to take her as wife instead of her silence regarding his assassination of his brother Taro.
- Shot 10: medium shot in straight angle of Jiro, still petrified.
- Shot 11: medium long shot in straight angle of Lady Kaede who gets up, holds the tail of her robe in one hand and slashes it with her dagger.

- Shot 12: medium shot in straight angle of the dagger cutting through the robe, the camera zooms on her face, she throws the dagger away, and moves slowly towards Jiro.
- Shot 13: reverse shot, medium long shot in straight angle of Jiro looking frightened and moving backwards as Lady Kaede comes closer. She throws herself at him and kisses him.
- Shot 14: medium shot in high angle of Lady Kaede kissing Jiro's throat and licking the blood that runs from his wounds.
- Shot 15: medium long shot in straight angle of Lady Kaede who embraces and kisses Jiro.

This violent scene is a *chef d'oeuvre* of power politics and sexuality. The brutality of the encounter reveals the ferocious nature of Lady Kaede, which until then had remained mostly concealed. Far from being the archetypal submissive Japanese wife, Lady Kaede is endowed with the attributes of a warrior. Interestingly enough, she appears in this scene as the reversed image of Lord Hidetora. As he grows weaker and weaker, falls into madness, and goes from Great Lord to a fugitive, Lady Kaede gains in strength and reaches the highest step of power by using all the means she has at her disposal: her willpower, her shrewdness, and her brutal sexuality.

At the beginning of the scene, as she adopts a submissive and formal posture while moving slowly towards Jiro (the Noh-style heel to toe walk according to Donald Richie⁵²), the latter has no reason to be on his guard or to question his own 'superiority'. Lady Kaede's subsequent assault on Jiro comes even more as a surprise as Kurosawa does not cut this movement into several shots. Although the moment when Lady Kaede gets closer and closer to Jiro demands for a cut into close-up to emphasise the intensity

⁵² Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 3rd. edn (London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 117.

of the action, we are kept at a frustrating distance (medium long shot). By refraining from cutting and moving closer on the action, Kurosawa builds up the tension of the scene so that he keeps the viewers in expectation both of Kaede's attack and of the cut. This first shot possesses the qualities of the emblematic shot of the silent cinema: it combines strong elements of contrast (slowness vs. rapidity, submission vs. domination, normality vs. abnormality) that generates the reversal of power that builds the scene. The image of Lady Kaede straddling Jiro and maintaining him on his back while her white robe covers him up completely summarises the situation better than any words.

During the rest of the confrontation between the two future lovers, Kurosawa uses a very small range of camera angles and distances. The scene is an arrangement of medium and medium long shots that keep the viewer at a distance, perhaps the distance from which a spectator would see the actors on a Noh stage. This distancing, the bareness of the setting, as well as the simple non-artificiality of the editing style help the viewer to remain critical and to concentrate on the actors' performance. Without being totally unobtrusive, Kurosawa's clean-cut editing of this scene serves Lady Kaede's 'performance': it does not distract the spectator's attention from her eloquent gestures but it is harsh enough to assert her ferocity. In most Japanese stories, the woman with a dagger will use the weapon against herself (to commit *seppuku*) either to remain faithful to her husband even through death, or to spare her family from dishonour. In contrast with this traditional image, Lady Kaede is a powerful female figure who uses the dagger against her enemies, to serve her own interests, i.e. to impose her dominion on Jiro and the Ichimonjis. All her statements to Jiro are strongly punctuated with medium shots to her dagger slashing Jiro's throat or cutting through the sleeve (*sode*) of her robe. These phallic punctuating shots (shots 2, 4, and 12) associate Lady Kaede with the masculinity and the authority that used to characterise Lord

Hidetora. In the Noh tradition, the lowering of the kimono sleeves or '*hada nugi* emphasises an emotional or aggressive passage of acting'.⁵³ In Kurosawa's *mise en scène*, it comes to crystallise Kaede's inexorable (or even pathological) thirst for power and revenge. We might even argue that in this shot Kurosawa has created an even more powerful and extreme Lady Macbeth figure than he has with Lady Asaji.

Finally, the scene ends with Lady Kaede's complete victory over Jiro, and with three shots (13, 14, and 15) that reveal her as a vampire woman: she has the swiftness and ferociousness of a predator as she pounces to Jiro's throat and licks the blood that has run from the two cuts. She then proceeds to kissing and embracing Jiro but she does not give him her body: she *takes* his by forcing herself on him in a *mise en scène* that suggests rape. There is a significant coalescence in the way Kurosawa structures his editing as far as the representation of Lady Asaji and Lady Kaede is concerned. Framed within the strict conventions of the Noh, Asaji and Kaede are represented through contrasted moments of intense stasis and frenzied motion. By increasing the editing rhythm when he elaborates these visually dissonant scenes of stillness and fury, the Japanese director reinforces the social constraints and limitations imposed on the two female characters while he asserts their ability to overcome them and even impose their dominion. In the scene under discussion, Lady Kaede's assertion of power is co-expressed by her Noh-like gestures and by the editing rhythm which directly follows the pace of a performing Noh actor. As Kurosawa explains:

People in general think the Noh is static. It is a misunderstanding. The Noh also involves terribly violent movements resembling those of an acrobat. They are so violent that we wonder how a man can manage to move so violently. The player capable of such an action performs it quietly, hiding the movements. Therefore both quietness and vehemence co-exist together. Speed means how fulfilled a period of time is. The Noh has speed in such a sense.⁵⁴

⁵³ A. C. Scott, *The Kabuki Theatre of Japan* (London: Dover Publications, 1999), p.294.

⁵⁴ Akira Kurosawa quoted by Roger Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film*, p. 104.

In 'transmuting' *Macbeth* and *King Lear* into the two *jidai-geki* *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*, Kurosawa's authorial agency clearly lies in his appropriation of the Noh-based dialectic of stasis and movement into significant patterns of editing rhythms.

The Noh-like brutality and bestiality of Lady Kaede's movements in the last three shots of the scene reinforce the reversal of gender aesthetics that dominates the whole scene and the film. Indeed, gender reversal is a rampant theme that finds another expression in the characters Kyoami (Lord Hidetora's fool) and Tsurumaru (Sue's Gloucester-like brother whose parents were killed by Hidetora). Both characters share the same ambiguity regarding their categorising into one specific gender: Kyoami and Tsurumaru's feminine appearances (long hair, fine features, feminine clothing and attitudes) set them apart and connect them to the *Onnagata* (the male actors who play female roles) of the Noh and Kabuki theatre. The character of Kyoami seems to be drawn from the Noh *répertoire*, especially from the *Kyogen* (comic interlude that takes place between the main plays) character of the comic servant or *Kaja Taro*.⁵⁵ Even Kyoami and Tango are not sure whether Tsurumaru is a man or a woman the first time they meet him. They first mistake him for a woman when they come into his small shelter, and it is only when Lady Sue's blind brother assures them that he is a man that all doubts are removed. It seems that Kurosawa attached a particular importance or even a fascination to his 'cross-gendered' characters; the androgynous spinner-witch of *Throne of Blood* is another instance of this interest in gender confusion. These characters who stand out against the others and who are neither men nor women, have this extra-diegetic quality that enables them either to sway the other characters' fate or to comment upon it. One might also say that these 'neutral' characters fulfil the prominent role of the chorus of the Noh and Kabuki theatre so pervasive in Kurosawa's cinema.

⁵⁵ A. C. Scott, p. 51.

2.4 *The bad Sleep well*

In 1960, *The Bad Sleep Well* was the inaugural film of Kurosawa's film company: Kurosawa Productions. As the first film made by his own production company, the film stands as one of the most personal works of the Japanese director. This was the first film in which Kurosawa could enjoy a complete control and therefore a complete authorial agency from the financing to the editing (the much sought after final cut). In this sense, *The Bad Sleep Well* is very much a *film d' auteur*. This would have been the turning point and certainly a very fulfilling moment in his career:

This was the first film of Kurosawa productions, my own unit which I run and finance myself. From this film on, I was responsible for everything. Consequently, when I began, I wondered what kind of film to make. A film made only to make money did not appeal to me — one should not take advantage of an audience. Instead, I wanted to make a movie of some social significance. At last I decided to do something about corruption, because it has always seemed to me that graft, bribery, etc., at the public level, is one of the worst crimes that there is. [...] Exposing them was, I thought, a socially significant act — and so I started the film.⁵⁶

Within such a context of artistic control and authorial self-assertion, the use of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a basis for the film remains subordinated to its message: the evils that corruption brought on Japanese society. We might even say that in being accommodated to suit Kurosawa's ultimate fantasy of *auteurism* and social commitment, *Hamlet* becomes a commodity both commercially and ideologically. In fact, *The Bad Sleep Well* was never meant to be a 'faithful' adaptation of *Hamlet* but rather a personal, committed work — a diatribe against what Kurosawa believed to be the wrongs that plagued the society he lived in.

According to Stuart Galbraith, the first synopsis of *The Bad Sleep Well* was written by Kurosawa's nephew, Mike Inoue, whose passion was to write scripts and short stories. Regarding the origin of *The Bad Sleep Well*, Inoue recounts that after having waited for years for his uncle to read his script:

⁵⁶ Akira Kurosawa quoted by Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, p.140.

One day I went to his [Kurosawa's] birthday party and his wife rushed out to meet me at the front door and said, 'You'll be happy to know your uncle had nothing to do while he was waiting for guests to arrive, and he started reading your script.' Later on he said, 'You know something, you always write about political and bureaucratic corruption. Why don't you write a script about avenging these corrupt men?' That gave me an idea. I spent about six months writing it, titling it *Bad Men's Prosperity*. When I took it to his house, he read it right away and told me, 'The story is very interesting. I might take up the subject for a film, but I'll have to refine the script you wrote. You don't mind, do you?'⁵⁷

Stuart Galbraith also relates that Kurosawa did indeed rework his nephew's script with the collaboration of his usual fellow scriptwriters: Eijiro Hisaita, Ryuso Kikushima, Hideo Oguni and Shinobu Hashimoto. Although Kurosawa had made a significant step towards a more individualistic mode of authorship, he still relied on his collaborators for the first stages of the production. Earlier on, we have seen that it is in the cutting room, isolated from his working companions, that Kurosawa becomes an *auteur* and that his editing style in the *jidai-geki* *Throne of Blood* and *Ran* was mainly drawn from the Noh. I would like to argue that although *The Bad Sleep Well* is a *gendai-mono* (modern-story film), there is still a coherence in his montage and the film's cutting rhythms and patterns are still inspired by the Noh conventions of representation. In comparing *The Bad Sleep Well* with *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*, I would like to contend that what remains of Shakespeare in this *gendai-mono* resides in its montage and particularly in its 'points of contact' with the editing styles of *Throne of Blood* and *Ran*.

The action of *The Bad Sleep Well* takes place in the corporate world of the 1960s Japan. Koichi Nishi is the illegitimate son of Koo, a corrupted official (from a government housing corporation) who has been murdered five years earlier by Kagawa, the company's president. After five years spent in worming his way into the inner circle of his father's murderer, Nishi has finally succeeded in becoming the president's secretary and son-in-law by changing identities with Sai, his best friend and loyal

⁵⁷ Mike Inoue quoted by Stuart Galbraith IV, *The Emperor and the Wolf: The Lives and Films of Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune*, p.284.

accomplice, and by developing a sound friendship with the president's son. If these themes of corruption and vengeance resonate within the narrative world of *Hamlet*, the motivations of the Shakespearean hero are certainly not as conspicuous as those of Koichi Nishi, the avenging son of *The Bad Sleep Well*. Not only Nishi has no doubt whatsoever regarding the validity of his avenging enterprise, but he is also immune to the tormenting existential fear or moral dilemma that has so much hold on Hamlet. As Donald Richie puts it: 'Hamlet is not afraid of doing bad (murder) because it seems good to him. He is mortally afraid, however, of *being* bad'.⁵⁸ This moral and metaphysical fight that storms within Hamlet's mind is significantly absent from Nishi's reasoning. There is no enigma, no ambiguity in the character of Nishi. Indeed, in Nishi's avenging schemes, his procrastination (more than five years) appears as purely circumstantial, motivated by feelings of resentment towards his father for being illegitimate, but also of love for the daughter of his father's murderer.

The film opens with Kyoko Kagawa and Koichi Nishi's wedding banquet. The parallel between this sequence and the *Mousetrap* scene in *Hamlet* has often been noted in critical reviews of the film.⁵⁹ Nishi, the Hamlet figure, uses this very formal and public occasion to *mettre en scène* his father's death in a very theatrical manner and thus, catch the conscience of the president and his accomplices. As the waiters open the champagne bottles and as the corporation officials in turn propose a toast for the happy couple, a white cake in the shape of an office building is wheeled into the room with much ceremony. Although all the waiters and guests are clearly impressed by the size and shape of the cake, the officials react otherwise: they all freeze suddenly as they

⁵⁸ Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, p. 141.

⁵⁹ Tony Howard, 'Shakespeare's cinematic offshoots', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 295-313 (p. 301).

notice a black rose sticking out of one of the small windows: the window from which Nishi's father has been pushed to his death:

- Shot 1: long shot in straight angle of a waiter wheeling the building-shaped cake through a corridor with the journalists making comments in the foreground.
- Shot 2: medium shot in straight angle of the black rose sticking out of one of the cake's miniature windows.
- Shot 3: long shot in straight angle of the cake being wheeled into the reception room from the company's officials' point of view.
- Shot 4: medium shot in straight angle of the cake still being moved forward and getting closer and closer to the camera.
- Shot 5: close-up in straight angle of one of the murderers of Nishi's father. He looks as if he has just seen a ghost.
- Shot 6: long shot in slightly high angle of the cake, the officials, and the bewildered assembly from behind Nishi's point of view.
- Shot 7: medium shot in straight angle of the cake being brought toward the main table while two officials look at each other in the foreground.
- Shot 8: medium long shot in straight angle of the cake and the guests.
- Shot 9: close-up in straight angle of another official, his face filled with fear.
- Shot 10: medium long shot in straight angle from the right side of Nishi's new father-in-law as the cake is finally being placed behind the latter who looks completely and utterly impassive.

The incident brings confusion among the guests and interrupts abruptly the formality of the ritual of the wedding lunch. All in all, the cake with its uncanny rose fulfils the same function as Miki's ghost does in *Throne of Blood's* banquet scene. The

unexpected and unnatural intrusion of the world of the dead into the world of the living is always a bad omen in Kurosawa's cinema. Based upon Lacan's explanation of why the dead return, Slavoj Žižek argues that 'the return of the dead is a sign of a disturbance in the symbolic rite, in the process of symbolisation; the dead return as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt'.⁶⁰ As far as Nishi is concerned, the 'unpaid debt' he owes his father is revealed later on in the film as it turns out that Nishi disowned his father the night before his death, which is also the night when he learnt that the man he was taking for his uncle was in fact his father. There is indeed unfinished business between Nishi and his father, and the son will have to pay for the father's sins with his own life. As Richie explains in his analysis of the film, there is another evil presage in this wedding banquet: the limping bride. Kawada's daughter being lame, she has to be supported by a woman when she slowly enters the reception room. While all the guests stare at the bride's feet as she limps with difficulty, the weight of her shame and the stare seems so heavy on her that she stumbles on the red carpet. According to Richie, 'the guests are horrified because, at any ritual, any breaking of the rite seems a bad omen, in Japan as elsewhere. Too, in Japan there is an aversion toward the physically disabled, and there is even a saying about a bride who stumbles'.⁶¹ As we follow the slow limping of the bride in medium long shots, Kurosawa cuts to a medium close-up of her feet, moving in the heel-to-toe style of the Noh described earlier. This is a shot that can be found in most of his films, and in *Throne of Blood* and *Ran* in particular; it is a trademark of Kurosawa's editing and *mise en scène*. Interestingly, in his Shakespearean adaptations this close-up of heel-to-toe walking is always associated with the main female characters as they enter a room. One remembers the repeating hissing noise of Lady Asaji's silk robe as it trails on the mats,

⁶⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), p. 23.

⁶¹ Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, p. 141.

or the delicate but determined gliding of Lady Kaede as she comes to conquer Jiro. In Kurosawa's cinema as in Noh acting, the female characters are significantly represented by the way they walk and move. Accordingly, in *The Bad Sleep Well*, Kyoko is first and foremost characterised by her limping — that bad omen that horrifies the guests so much. Her limping becomes particularly ominous in the last scene that shows the reunion of Kyoko and Nishi. When Fujiwara brings Kyoko to Nishi's hideaway, what we first see of her are her feet, as she limps down the stairs in the most ghostly way. On the Noh stage, 'the actors', A. S. Scott explains, 'make their entry along the *hashigakari*, a roofed and balustraded passage which connects the stage platform with the greenroom',⁶² symbolically passing from one 'reality' to another.⁶³ Likewise, Kurosawa always includes shots of his characters making their entrance into a room, thereby using these shots to attach some defining characteristics to his characters, e.g. Asaji's hissing noise, Kaede's gliding or Kyoko's limping.

The editing of the banquet sequence serves two main purposes: the presentation of the characters in relation to each other and the exposition of the film's argument. As the ceremony proceeds, we only get to understand the situation and the characters' identity through the journalists' comments. Indeed, Kurosawa intercuts shots of the wedding party with shots of the journalists who, standing on one side (like the chorus on a Noh stage), comment on the ritual we are witnessing. Moreover, the presence of the press makes it clear not only that the characters attending the wedding belong to the highest social ranks but also that they are involved in some kind of high profile financial scandal. These explanatory shots of the journalists can be compared with the shots of the general performing a symbolic Noh dance in the banquet sequence of *Throne of Blood*: they both give a moral comment on the characters. Although

⁶² A. S. Scott, *The Kabuki Theatre of Japan*, p. 49.

⁶³ On the Kabuki stage, the *hashigakari* has been adapted into the *hanamichi* or long wooden gangway that connects the platform to the rear of the theatre.

Kurosawa uses two different historical contexts — feudal Japan and corporate Japan — and two different film categories — *jidai-geki* and *gendai-mono* — the way he structures and edits these two sequences is very similar and very much inspired from the Noh. Indeed, not only does he use explanatory shots like a chorus⁶⁴ which he intercuts within the main sequence in both cases, he also adapts a distinctively theatrical device in both sequences: the sudden and unexpected apparition of a ghost. The Noh stage (and even more so the Kabuki stage) is devised in a such a way that characters like ghosts or supernatural creatures can appear on stage through traps and smoke as if by magic. In substituting traps and smoke with the simple cut (in a very *mélièsque* way), an elaborate montage of the characters, and a structured manipulation of the viewer's gaze, Kurosawa has integrated this characteristic feature of the Noh (albeit not exclusively) into his editing and *mise en scène*. In Kurosawa's cinema, I would suggest, the verbal is subordinate to the visual.

By steadily increasing the cutting rhythm and multiplying shots of the cake as it is wheeled toward the murderers, Kurosawa emphasises the significance of this moment, and if there is such a thing as a cinematic equivalent for the exclamation point, the medium shot of the black rose is one of Kurosawa's best example of it: a flourish of editing rhetoric. There is a significant coalescence between the uncanny presence of the black rose in the building-like cake and the eerie presence of the ghost of general Miki in *Throne of Blood*. As the ghost of Miki can only be seen by Washizu and is therefore only meaningful to him, likewise the black rose does only make sense to the murderers of Nishi's father. Both in *Throne of Blood* and *The Bad Sleep Well* the 'ghost' is irresistibly there, utterly present to claim its unpaid and overdue debt. At the sight of the cake, the guilty corporation officials cannot suppress mixed expressions of fear and

⁶⁴ In Noh drama, the chorus is present on one side of the stage and gives a running commentary of the action.

disbelief on their sweaty faces. As Donald Richie rightly comments, ‘it is like that moment in *Hamlet* where the king calls for lights, where court protocol, even decorum vanishes; a court ritual — the king viewing a play — is forgotten, and the scene turns into a rout’.⁶⁵ The spectacle moves from the stage to the king and queen, or in the case of *The Bad Sleep Well*, from the bride and groom to the company officials.

The first half of the film shows Nishi as a forcefully determined avenger. From the banquet sequence up to the moment when he tears up the photograph of his father and burns the fragments, Nishi is fully committed to his act of revenge and executes his plan without wavering. In order to keep the spark of revenge burning, Nishi forces himself to look at a photograph of his father’s body taken just after his death as he lay on the ground. The scene is a long take shot in straight angle with Nishi in the foreground and Sai and Fujiwara in the background. We only see Nishi’s profile as he ponders on his feelings of revenge and realises that, like Hamlet, his determination is starting to wane. His plan to assassinate Pak (a corporation official) has failed since he could not bring himself to throw him out of the same window from which his father has been pushed:

Nishi (looking at the photograph of his father): I’m not tough enough. I should have pushed him out of that window. Then the newspapers would have printed it all up. The bosses would have gotten it. I don’t hate enough.

Fujiwara: No, you’re wrong. It’s unnatural...

Nishi: It’s hard to hate crime. I have to hate and become hateful myself.

Fujiwara: You can hate crime all you like, but to sacrifice innocent people ...

Like your own wife. What if she finds out?

Nishi uses the photograph of his dead father to prompt himself to his revenge but the ‘reality’ of the photograph is just not enough and does not match the actuality of the act

⁶⁵ Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, p. 142.

of killing Pak. As Hamlet has to use his ‘mind’s eye’ (1.2.185) to remember his father, so Nishi needs the fixed image of his deceased father to remember him. Perhaps because his father has never been ‘real’ to him, Nishi shares with Hamlet the need to visualise his father, to re-create him in a two-dimensional reality in order to feel something for him. But Nishi cannot fake feelings that have never been there in the first place. This is the reason why Nishi’s feeble feelings of revenge do not last long and are indeed easily forgotten when the presence and strength of his feelings for his wife reveal themselves to him. Moreover, it is only when Fujiwara makes him realise that evil only begets evil and that in killing Kagawa, he will only succeed in bringing misery on his wife, himself, and other innocent people that he finally decides to let Kagawa (his father-in-law) live. He still wants justice to be done, but this time in a law-abiding way. Nishi is a Hamlet with a heart who finally decides not to send his Ophelia to a nunnery.

If the editing of *The Bad Sleep Well* is imbued with Noh rhythms and *mise en scène*, in terms of visual style and characterisation, the film can also be read as a *film noir*, and Nishi can also be seen as a *film noir* detective. As Nishi starts following and hunting the corporation officials, the film moves into the visual styles of *film noir*. Chiaroscuro effects and canted camera angles participate in creating the *ambiance* of oppression, mystery, and danger that symbolises the seedy world of corruption and murder. In his obsessive avenging enterprise, Nishi is the reluctant *noir* detective who ‘faces situations of existential solitude in isolation from the legal order’⁶⁶ and who is afraid of finding the truth and of himself. Like Hamlet, Nishi revels in devising stratagems to stir the conscience of the murderers and in producing sadistic scenarios of torture and punishment. In his theatrical revenge, Nishi is a brilliant director but a

⁶⁶ Harry Keyishian, ‘Shakespeare and Movie Genre’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 75.

mediocre actor. He wants to kill Fujiwara, but prevents him from throwing himself into a volcano. He then wants to kill Pak, but rescues him just before he gets murdered. He also wants to kill Kagawa but eventually prefers to see him imprisoned. He wants to feel hatred but can only feel love for his wife. Kyoko is his weak spot and also his *femme fatale* who finally leads him to his death (albeit involuntarily) when she reveals Nishi's hideaway to her father. Truthful to his corrupted nature, Kagawa does not think twice before he makes the phone call that seals Nishi's fate. Kyoko understands too late what her father has done and when she is driven to Nishi by her brother, she only finds his dead body. The film ends on a sour note with Nishi's death (murdered by Kagawa's men), Kyoko's madness, and Sai's loss of identity while the bad *still* sleeps well.

In this chapter, we have seen that in adapting Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet* to his Japanese culture, Akira Kurosawa succeeded in creating his own *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet*, and in expressing the tragedies' thematic contents in an extremely bold and innovating way. In *Subsequent performances*, Jonathan Miller argues that:

As a play is transformed from one revival to the next it can undergo enormous alterations in shape and proportion so that characters and scenes that seemed unimportant in one production loom unexpectedly large in the next. But as in a Mercator projection, the topological relations are preserved, and the work still has the narrative consistency of the original. Even if the work is distorted, it should be possible to map its internal relationships on to those of the original.⁶⁷

Miller's point of view corresponds faithfully to the way Kurosawa worked with Shakespeare: although he has 'distorted' Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet*, he has retained the plays' 'narrative consistency' so that it is still 'possible to map [their] internal relationships on to those of the original'. Kurosawa has used his experience as a Japanese man and as a film-maker to produce his own interpretation of

⁶⁷ Jonathan Miller, *Subsequent Performances* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1986), p. 37.

these three plays. By combining the choreographic style and iconography of Noh drama with the framework and dominant movements of Shakespeare's plays, he gives us the opportunity to perceive *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet* through a completely new perspective. Kurosawa's cinematic adaptation of Noh techniques is truly the mark of his authorship. Kurosawa uses long camera distances, straight camera angles, and a raw, rough-around-the-edges editing to convey and increase the calculated violence and ruthlessness inherent in *Throne of Blood*, *Ran*, and *The Bad Sleep Well*. He engages the viewers constantly by confronting them with a flow of sparingly composed shots that directs their attention to the very few elements of each sequence. This process of reduction (or economy) also affects every aspect of these three films: even the characters are restrained in their gestures and emotional responses. They seem to be restricted by the cinematic space which exerts a powerful influence over them. The characters are firmly anchored in the spatio-temporal frame of these films in such a way that they act as if they were the products of their environment. Far from being bucolic and nurturing, the world depicted by Kurosawa is ruthless and even hostile to its inhabitants who end up reproducing this hostility in their relations with one another. To conclude, *Throne of Blood*, *Ran*, and *The Bad Sleep Well* are Kurosawa's reflections on human vanity and on the absurdity of the human condition, and the receding image of the blind Tsurumaru faltering near the edge of a cliff is the ultimate visual statement of Shakespeare's words: 'Life is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/Signifying nothing' (5.5.26-28).

3

Al Pacino's *Looking For Richard*

With the advent of post-structuralism, the publication of key essays in film studies and in critical theory generally about the death of the author, and the subsequent emergence of spectatorship, reader-response, and reception theory, it has become increasingly problematic to emphasise the author in any discussion of an author-text-reader triad. And yet, despite the fact that most film studies scholars now try to avoid any modernist approach to authorship, in the field of Shakespearean studies the majority of critics tend to resist this trend and continue to produce *auteurist* readings of Shakespearean films. Not only do they proclaim that the Shakespearean film author does exist, but they also assert that he is vigorously alive and has never been in a better health.

Whether we name it the 'Auteur Desire',¹ a concept coined by Dana Polan, or the *raison d'être* of film studies, the ongoing fascination with the author-function of the film director is far from slacking off. 'The author-function', Michel Foucault writes, 'is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society'.² Within the realm of Shakespeare on film studies, the (cultist?) preoccupation with the name of the author is symptomatic of the desire for academics to somehow regulate the circulation and mass mediation of the Shakespearean corpus and even to circumvent its inevitable fragmentation within the field of popular culture, which is the ethos of our postmodern era. Characteristic of such a trend is Courtney Lehmann who in her fascinating *Shakespeare Remains*, undertakes

¹ Dana Polan, "Auteur Desire", *Screening the Past*, no. 12 (March 2001), <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr0301/dpfr12a.htm> (accessed August 8, 2004).

² Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" [1975], *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Josué V. Havari (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p.101-120, p. 108.

to resuscitate William Shakespeare's authorship — some four hundred years after his death — through the aspiration to 'auteurship' of film directors like Michael Almereyda, Baz Luhrmann, and Kenneth Branagh. By using the theoretical instruments of film studies (especially the modernist concept of late *auteurism* and its post-structural antithesis) in her quest for the 'remains' of the Elizabethan dramatist, Lehmann comes to the conclusion that 'if what we really want is a Shakespeare without walls — a pluralistic space for the performance of an enabling relationship to authority — then we should take care to distinguish this desire from a world without Shakespeare'.³ And she goes on to acknowledge that 'whereas cinema once relied on Shakespeare for cultural legitimation, Shakespeare now needs cinema for cultural longevity in a world that increasingly privileges images over words as well as visual literacy over more traditional reading practices'.⁴ For this is indeed what is at stake: the fear for what could be the end of Shakespeare as the ultimate romantic author-figure and generator of discourses (what Foucault calls 'founder of discursivity'⁵) as we know it, hence the need for a renegotiation of the 'birth of the spectator' and for a resistance to a fundamentalist practice of post-structuralism.

However, if we consider that films are mostly produced as a collaborative medium that tends to complicate the attribution of authorship, it may seem paradoxical that when an authorial intention is needed, it is always the director that takes precedence. This is particularly true in the case of such an identity-conscious and participation-oriented film like Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard* (1995). The various critical readings of the film seem to avoid altogether the issue of authorship. H. R. Coursen, Neil Sinyard or Thomas Cartelli, all consider Al Pacino as the sole author and

³ Courtney Lehman, *Shakespeare Remains: Theatre to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 238.

⁴ Courtney Lehman, p. 235.

⁵ Michel Foucault, p. 108.

possessor of the film. Although Cartelli explores the questions of identity and postcolonialism in a very engaging way as he discusses the relocation of Shakespeare in the streets of New York, he approaches the film from a strictly director-centred angle. In fact, Pacino is consistently referred to as the primary source of the film's authorial intention, to the extent that the American actor and director even comes to assume most of the creative functions of this production, and amongst other things: the editing. Not only do the five film editors that worked on *Looking for Richard* remain completely anonymous, but it is Pacino who is recreated as the sole editor of the film. As Cartelli writes, 'Pacino edits this sequence in such a manner that Allen's objections to Kimball are intercut with roughly paraphrased readings from the text...'.⁶ It is such erroneous statements that contribute to the persistence of modernist and sometimes critically limited views on the politics of production and reception of Shakespearean films.

Cartelli's *auteurist* interpretation of *Looking for Richard* is taken one step further by Neil Sinyard who, by establishing a direct homology between Orson Welles (the archetype of the film *auteur*) and Al Pacino, reinforces the latter's authorial status and negates the possibility of a collaborative work of artistic creation. Although Sinyard is right when he maintains that 'Welles would undoubtedly have empathised with Pacino's obsession in bringing this project to the screen',⁷ he offers the same kind of misleading statement as Cartelli when he suggests that Pacino, like Welles, took on full responsibility for the editing of the film. 'The film's mesmerising montage', Sinyard writes, 'has something of the stylistic panache of that most audacious of screen adapters

⁶ Thomas Cartelli, 'Shakespeare and the Street: Pacino's *Looking for Richard*, Bedford's *Street King*, and the common understanding', in *Shakespeare the Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, eds. Richard Burt and Linda E. Boose (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 186-199 (p. 192).

⁷ Neil Sinyard, 'Shakespeare meets *The Godfather*: The Postmodern Populism of Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard*', in *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle*, eds. Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. 2000), p. 59.

of Shakespeare, Orson Welles'.⁸ For a film so imbued with images of collaborative work and composed of so many authorial voices — whether it be the actor's in the rehearsal sequences, the interviews with the scholars or the man-in-the-street conversations as the crew searches for shooting locations — it may seem contradictory or even naive to position Pacino as the single prime source of the film textual coherence, even though the director often spends long hours in the editing room. And perhaps it is simply the need for coherence and unity vis-à-vis such a fragmented work that shaped these *auteurist* readings.

In this chapter, I am particularly interested in reading *Looking for Richard* as a textual ensemble piece, that is to say as the product of a collective discussion, of various authorial voices which are renegotiated and co-expressed through the selective process of the editing, which itself involved the participation of at least five collaborators (Pasqual Eburna, Ned Bastille, André Betz, and William Anderson). Given that attributions of authorship function to circumscribe the reception and reading of a text, I would like to argue that a text based upon dialogue, discussion, disputation, and debate such as *Richard* invites us to explore the questions of identity, intention, and intertextuality on the one hand, and to envisage a different practice of appropriation and control over the Shakespearean corpus. Within such an ideology of postmodern openness and fluidity that characterises collective authorship, it is necessary to question Pacino's position as unique 'founder of discursivity'. It is not so much a question of minimising or distorting Pacino's shifting authorial agencies, as it is a matter of reinterpreting *Looking for Richard* through the lens of a more post-structuralist approach able to comprehend the polyphony inherent in the film's mode of production, what Pacino himself calls a 'docu-drama'. Therefore, by working from the bottom up,

⁸ Neil Sinyard, p. 59.

that is from the editorial organisation and textual dynamics of the film to the issues of 'auteurship' and collective authorship. I propose to discuss the dislocation of Pacino's agency (this 'Auteur Desire') within the plurality of authorial voices that emerges through the editing.

3.1 The Profession of Faith

A film adaptation of a Shakespeare play is a difficult enterprise and a search for the best possible way to produce a new version of the play in using the techniques of the cinema (a union between technique and poetry). *Looking for Richard* is the quintessence of this search and its editing is the expression of this search. With his adaptation of *Richard III*, what Al Pacino is presenting us is a concept-film built as a game of Russian dolls, a hybrid of different styles, and a quest. If Pacino's purpose seems to be quite clear (communicating his passion for Shakespeare and developing his team's reading of *Richard III*), his method is a little bit more obscure as he feels his way along through the play over a period of three-and-a-half years. In fact, the whole film is epitomised in its title, or rather in the process of its titles, for this film hovers between two possibilities, two Richards: *King Richard* and *Looking for Richard*. First *King Richard* appears on screen, to be soon transformed into *(Loo)King (for) Richard* by means of a dissolve. Pacino announces his intentions from the very beginning: this film is going to be an experiment, a heuristic endeavour on how to play Shakespeare for a modern audience, how to put it on film, where to start and how to finish. As he puts it at the beginning of the film:

It has always been a dream of mine to communicate how I feel about Shakespeare to other people. So I asked my friend Frederic Kimball who is an actor and a writer, and also our colleagues Michael Hadge and James Bullet to join me, and by taking this one play, *Richard III*, analysing it, approaching it from different angles, putting on costumes, playing out scenes, we could

communicate both our passion for it, our understanding that we have come to; and in doing that, communicate a Shakespeare that is about how we feel and how we think today.⁹ Now that's the effect we are going to give it here.¹⁰

Pacino declares this profession of faith in voice-over with images corresponding to his words: shots of his friends, of him holding a text of *Richard III*, and of him and Frederic Kimball walking in the streets of New York. By avoiding direct talk to the camera and choosing this more collective style of presentation, the American director took care to move the emphasis from his own persona to his production team. We have seen earlier how Neil Sinyard compares Pacino with Orson Welles in terms of editing style. In fact, Sinyard takes the comparison one step further by pointing out that Pacino, like Welles: 'made *Looking for Richard* over a period of three-and-a-half years, shooting bits and pieces between his lucrative acting assignments on such Hollywood blockbusters as *City Hall* (1994) and *Heat* (1995), which were helping to finance the venture, and enticing his cast with the offer of forty dollars a day and as many doughnuts as they could eat'.¹¹

I would suggest that, albeit Pacino carried out his Shakespearean project in a Wellesian manner, his attitude toward authorship is significantly more complex than that of his illustrious predecessor. Indeed, it is well-documented that Welles would acknowledge and even claim full responsibility for some of his films in a very straightforward (some would say arrogant) way. For instance, his film production of

⁹ In producing his millennial film version of *Hamlet*, Michael Almereyda's intention is very similar to Al Pacino's: they both share the same concern about the relevance and the problems of adaptability of the Shakespearean text in contemporary, image-based culture. As he contends in his screenplay of the film, 'the chief thing was to balance respect for the play with respect for contemporary reality — to see how thoroughly Shakespeare can speak to the present moment, how they can speak to each other'. In *William Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'*, (New York: Faber and Faber Limited, 2000), p. ix.

¹⁰ *Looking for Richard*. Dir. Al Pacino. With Al Pacino, Frederic Kimball, Kevin Spacey, and Winona Ryder. Prod. by Michael Hodge and Al Pacino. 20th Century Fox. 1995.

¹¹ Neil Sinyard, p. 59.

The Magnificent Ambersons (1942) ends with the bold statement: ‘I wrote the script and directed it. My name is Orson Welles. This is a Mercury Production’.¹² On the other hand, there is a feeling of ambiguity and some notable nuances that emerge from Pacino’s above assertion. By moving from the personal ‘It has always been a dream of mine’ to the collective ‘we could communicate our passion for it’, Pacino characterises himself as the initiator of the film as well as a member of the film’s production team, which enables him to circulate freely from one mode of authorship to another, i.e. from being an *auteur* to being a member of an organisation — or more exactly a group of close friends.

There is a connection between Pacino and Welles but while the latter assumed his role as an omnipotent author, the former’s authorial signature seems to be arranged as a curious game of hide-and-seek, thereby freeing himself from the burden of accountability, if not of intention. Moreover, the two directors’ difference of attitude vis-à-vis authorship emerges in their control and use of their screen space: while Welles would mostly occupy the most important part of the frame in terms of physique and also of ‘presence’, in *Looking for Richard*, Pacino tends to share his space on the reels with his fellow producers, directors, and actors. As a matter of fact, by naming his collaborators — Frederic Kimball, Michael Hadge, and James Bullet — he serves the performative function of making authors out of them. As Janet Staiger writes, ‘a performative statement works because it is a citation of authoring by an individual having the authority to make an authoring statement’.¹³ Because of his status as the film’s director and as an international film star, Pacino is in a position that allows him to make an ‘authoring statement’. In one of the rehearsal sequences of the film, Pacino,

¹² Excerpt from Welles’s narration of the credits at the end of *The Magnificent Ambersons*. Dir. Orson Welles. Mercury Production. RKO Radio Pictures. 1942.

¹³ Janet Staiger, ‘Authorship Approaches’, in *Authorship and Film*, eds. David A. Gerstner and Janet Staiger (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 27-57 (p. 51).

with his usual tongue-in-cheek attitude, even anoints Kimball with a 'PhD of the kingdom'. However, although he is able to constitute himself a team of film authors and being no expert in the performance of Elizabethan drama, Pacino finds himself subjected (*assujetti*) to another author-figure which he names repetitively throughout the film: William Shakespeare. The mantric repetition of Shakespeare's name, from the streets of New York to Stratford-upon-Avon where Pacino and Kimball visit the birthplace of the English playwright, produces a highly romantic and indeed cultist vision of Shakespeare which seems to function as a 'talisman' able to validate the enterprise of Pacino and his collaborators.

Within such a complex equation of control and appropriation, the only elements that possess the authority to disapprove of the *Looking for Richard* project, are the scholars. And this is precisely the reason why their voices are heard in the film. In a way, this is a manner of nipping the criticisms in the bud. It is with much facetiousness and irony that these scholarly voices are intercut with the pragmatic comments of Frederic Kimball who in the film seems to be on a mission to re-conquer the holy land of a Godlike Shakespeare. What is particularly ingenious of Pacino is the fact that he manages to position himself on a neutral level of authority by standing in the middle of the two dominant 'factions' presented in the film: the voice of the street represented by Frederic Kimball and the voice of the academia represented by Emrys Jones and Barbara Everett.

3.2 The Search

Looking for Richard is a filmed essay built upon cinéma-vérité interviews with the people of the street of New York, discussions with actors and academics, rehearsals, and the actual shooting of some of the play's scenes. But *Richard* is also a search, not

only for the interpretations and performance of the play, but also for a cinematic form. According to Gérard Genette's classification, the film is made up out of three different narrative levels: extradiegetic, diegetic and metadiegetic. Genette's diegesis refers to the universe of the story with its setting, actions, characters... In *Looking for Richard*, the extradiegesis corresponds with the film's 'making-of', the diegesis with the play's enactment and shooting, and the metadiegesis with the characters' narratives. Al Pacino is clearly the main narrator of the extradiegetic and diegetic narratives and as such, he performs three different functions: narrative since he narrates a story, metanarrative since he makes comments on the story he narrates, and communicative since he establishes a contact with the narratee (e.g. his crew and the viewers).

The interweaving of these narrative levels is made possible and clear by the editing which creates an organisation, a textual coherence that also structures the circulation and expression of the various authorial voices which generate the tensions that pushes the film forward. Thus, *Looking for Richard* is built as a jigsaw puzzle, pieces by pieces, a structure dictated by the plurality of participants as well as by Pacino's experimentations through the play's twists and turns. Behind its disordered appearance, the film's structure acquires a logic of its own when all the pieces of the puzzle are put into place. The macro-divisions of the film are surprisingly complex with the parallel unfolding of two narratives throughout the whole duration of the film by means of an intensive use of crosscutting between the two lines of action: the making of the film and the actual film. By inserting title cards at the beginning of each sequence, the editors have used one of the most significant characteristics of the documentary editing style as far as the main divisions are concerned. Although title cards are not used exclusively in the documentary mode (they were indeed used profusely during the

silent film era), the strong sense of self-reflexivity and didacticism they imply have come to associate them with the documentary style.

In order to conform to the hybridism inherent in the film mode of production, the editors Pasqual Eburna, Ned Bastille, André Betz, and William Anderson used the techniques usually applied to both modes: feature film and documentary. Documentaries share many characteristics with narrative films as they very often borrow techniques and 'looks' from one another. As the documentary editor Paul Barnes puts it:

When I was starting to do documentaries, *cinéma vérité* was beginning to die out. A lot of the documentary directors I began to work with had aspirations to become feature directors, and they would always say to me, "I want it to look as slick as possible, I want it to look like a feature film". It was a whole change in the documentary style, and in my role as editor, I'm responsible to give them that style — without sacrificing the material. If there's a shaky camera movement and the content is great, I'll argue like crazy to keep it if it plays into the story and the emotion.¹⁴

Documentaries tend to be much more factual than feature films. Through documentaries, directors aim at producing a very detailed account of a situation or event (whether it be a non-narrative or narrative documentary) with an extensive use of interviews (a character addressing the camera: either narrating or commenting on facts), photographs, newspapers, and other kinds of material. In terms of editing style, the editors tend to make a more substantial use of long takes, parallel editing, cutaways or montage sequences. Those techniques are also used in feature films but with a much lower frequency. Some other characteristics are usually attributed to documentaries and recognised as such by the viewers: handheld camera, location shooting, Hi-8 video camera, 16 mm wide film formats, ambient sounds, narration in voice-over, filters...

¹⁴Paul Barnes, 'Sparkling Life, Shaping People', *First Cut: Conversations with Film Editors*, ed. Gabriella Oldham (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 131-149 (p.137).

Another editing style borrowed from Eisenstein, Welles, or Oliver Stone and known as vertical editing was also utilised by the editors of *Looking For Richard*. The term ‘vertical editing’ was coined to describe this new form of Eisensteinian juxtaposition, an expansion of cinematic ‘reality’ that goes beyond the linking of cause-and-effect events. Oliver Stone started using this editing method during the making of *JFK* (1991) and used it extensively again in his 1995 production of *Nixon*. ‘Some have called it vertical editing’, Stone explains,

Insofar as we stop, and we go into a moment; we expand a moment by going into internal and external editing...[A character] will say something on an external idea, but we will cut to a completely contrary look or feel, be it black and white or colour. It comments on what’s being said... So I call it exterior/interior. Sometimes we will go to five or six images that will completely contradict or perhaps supplement the external action.¹⁵

The *mise-en-abîme* effect created by these commenting incursions into the ‘external action’ — represented here by the film-text of *Richard III* — functions as a narrative line in its own right so that we may wonder which of the two narratives is the leading one. However, according to the French semiotician Christian Metz, vertical editing implies a paradigmatic (and therefore vertical) operation along the horizontal syntagmatic line of actions that constitutes a film narrative. Based on the homology between shot and word, Metz understands the filmic paradigm as the result of a selection between ‘comparable possibilities’,¹⁶ e.g. a set of qualifying adjectives in a sentence. If we apply Metz’s conceptualisation of filmic language to Pacino’s *Looking for Richard*, it appears that the articulation between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic narrative lines of the film corresponds to the alternation between the interviews and

¹⁵ *Nixon*. Dir. Oliver Stone. Laser disc. 1996. Burbank, CA: Hollywood Pictures Home Video. Supplement material, introduced by Oliver Stone, side 5, chapter 33.

¹⁶ Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 127.

rehearsals sequences on the one hand, and the film of *Richard III. Looking for Richard* is composed of eighteen sequences which appear in the following order:

The Quest,	To Seize the Crown.
The Play,	Buckingham.
Act I,	Hastings,
Casting,	The Council Meeting.
The Iambic Pentameter.	Richard is King.
Shakespeare's Birthplace,	The Last Act.
Moving On.	Richmond.
Lady Anne,	The Battle.
The Murderers.	

As can be seen above, only the opening and closing acts are mentioned. Standing for the two main signposts of the play, they function as a very simple but efficient framing device. The play's first act is given a particularly large scope in Pacino's film since it lasts until the tenth sequence called 'The Murderers'. Thus, the first half of the second narrative (*Richard III*) of the film is centred on several episodes: Richard Gloucester's opening soliloquy, Clarence's imprisonment, the wooing of Lady Anne, Richard's encounter with Queen Elizabeth, Dorset, Grey, Margaret, and Buckingham, and finally Clarence's murder. Presenting the actions, the characters, and their relations to one another to the audience seems to be one of the principal functions of the first tenth sequences (in fact the major part) of the film. Because *Looking for Richard* was marketed at a (young) people-of-the-street audience which, as demonstrated in the *micro-trottoir* interviews at the beginning of the film, knows very little or nothing at all about either Shakespeare or his plays, a large amount of filmic space is occupied by rapid exegeses of the play as well as historical clarifications aimed at disentangling the relations within and between the Yorks and Lancasters. This need for a clear understanding of what is exactly happening in *Richard III*, what is at stake for the reigning couple, and the reason(s) why Richard Gloucester murders his way to the throne, provides the first opportunity for Pacino and his team to ask for some scholarly

intervention. The ‘British scholar-in-the-study sequences’, as Thomas Cartelli contends, stand for ‘the authority of British acting, scholarship, and behaviour’ which ‘amounts more as a heritage industry than as a creative force that can bring anything close to Shakespeare’s originary power to the page of dramatic production’.¹⁷ From an American and nationalistic point of view, Cartelli’s statement could well be symptomatic of the self-consciousness usually attributed to the non-British actors and directors who want to ‘take possession’ of Shakespeare. However, I would suggest that the aggressive postcolonialism that Cartelli associates with the mode of production chosen by Pacino, Kimball, Hadge, and Bullet, veers more toward comic relief than toward a serious confrontation over the control of Shakespeare’s heritage. After all, it is precisely this tension between American (method) acting and British scholarship carefully orchestrated by the editing that creates most of the narrative and dramatic interest of *Looking for Richard*.

In comparison with the rest of the play, Richard’s opening soliloquy is granted a particular significance as it is both analysed (through interviews with academics and Pacino’s own work on the speech) and performed so that we can actually witness the creation of this sequence from scratch. ‘What is important here’, Sinyard writes,

is Pacino’s insistence on showing us not simply an interpretation of the speech but the actor’s journey towards reaching that interpretation. Visually this is suggested through cutting between the informal rehearsal of the speech and the full costume delivery, to give the sense of a performance, as it were, taking shape.¹⁸

¹⁷ Thomas Cartelli, ‘Shakespeare and the Street: Pacino’s *Looking for Richard*, Bedford’s *Street King*, and the common understanding’, in *Shakespeare the Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, pp. 186-199 (p. 190).

¹⁸ Neil Sinyard, ‘Shakespeare Meets *The Godfather*: The Postmodern Populism of Al Pacino’s *Looking for Richard*’, *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle*, pp. 58-72 (p. 63).

In a sequence that shows Pacino trying out the speech in front of a group of students, the American actor seems to have a particular problem with the first two lines of Richard's speech as he clearly fails to catch the attention of his young audience:

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this son of York (1.1.1-2).

The reference to the war of the Roses as well as the significance of the imagery (winter and summer) generate a series of explanatory shots intercut with shots of Pacino working his way through the words. There is a significant moment that reveals Pacino's composition of his performance. The first experimentation with the beginning of the soliloquy shows a Pacino who is hesitant and whose performance is clearly typical of the declamatory, ham-acting style of turn-of-the-century Shakespeareans. And then, following a shot of actress Rosemary Harris who points out how exciting it is to start a play with 'Now', the editors cut back to a shot of Pacino still practising this first line, but this time with a difference, as he puts more emphasis on 'Now'. This is an editorial composition that clearly asserts the collaborative work underpinning the production of *Looking for Richard* while it positions Pacino in his performing function as the main actor of the film. By using Rosemary Harris's hint and incorporating it within his performance, Pacino becomes a collaborator instead of an *auteur*. In this case, it is the editing that creates and articulates the authorial dynamics of the sequence: it is the juxtaposition of these two shots that influences our reading of Pacino's work as collaborative so that we also forget about his function as director and producer.

Through the use of vertical editing style, the comments on the speech are skilfully inserted into Pacino's delivery, thus creating a sense of artificial continuity. Since there is no spatio-temporal continuity between the two plotlines, the editors have produced another kind of continuity by using sound overlappings between the cuts, the meaning of the lines, the alternation between the narratives, and the rhythm between the

shots (a question and answer tempo). In fact, the cutting grows faster and faster as Pacino becomes more confident with his delivery of the speech — the documentary style of editing gives way to a more feature film gloss: jerkiness gives way to continuity. The editing of the first third of the soliloquy is typical of this jerkiness. As far as its composition is concerned, it is structured by a cross-cutting between Pacino playing Richard and Barbara Everett's comments:

- Shot 1: establishing shot (daylight), zoom-in into of a tower with Pacino in voice-over.
- Shot 2: medium close-up of Pacino (wearing casual clothes) uttering the first four lines of the speech in the tower.
- Shot 3: medium close-up in straight angle of Barbara Everett in front of her book shelves.
- Shot 4: close-up of Pacino speaking the next three lines.
- Shot 5: medium close-up in straight angle of the Barbara Everett ('what do they do when the fighting stops?').
- Shot 6: close-up of Pacino delivering lines 9 to 13.
- Shot 7: medium close-up in straight angle of the same scholar explaining 'the transfer of male aggression into the relations with the other gender' ('But Richard has a problem here').
- Shot 8: close-up of Pacino with a sombre music in the soundtrack as he speaks lines 14 and 15 ('But I, that am not shap'd for sportive tricks, /Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass' (1.1.14-15)).
- Shot 9: medium close-up of Pacino in costume, in a different lighting (dark) and setting ('I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion', (1.1.18)).

Editorially speaking, this sequence serves the same function as the contribution made by Rosemary Harris's remark. From this shot onwards, Al Pacino becomes Richard Gloucester *visually*: not only physically as he puts on a medieval costume in a kind of authentication process, but also through the editing process. Indeed, as soon as Pacino puts on his costume in the second part of the speech, the camerawork becomes smoother and less conspicuous while the rhythm of the micro-editing slows down significantly as if to establish the prominence of this narrative line over the interviews and comments through its connection with the invisible style of continuity editing. The documentary becomes feature film within the space of a cut. And yet, once again, we are quickly brought back to a more *art et essai* editing style as an extremely fast montage of sketches of monsters, a shot of Frederic Kimball commenting on Richard's deformity ('He was a hunchback'), and shots of Pacino as Richard in costume creates a vivid visual ricochet on the word 'Deform'd' (1.1.20) — another example of vertical editing. In pure method acting style, Richard's deformity becomes the key to Pacino's performance and interpretation of the role. This series of anamorphic shots comes to represent the transformation of Pacino into Richard as well as the creation of this fictional Richard so that from this sequence onwards, Pacino can move freely in and out of the Shakespearean character without any disturbance of the textual coherence.

The last part of the sequence is an abbreviated version of the first scene of the play. In a definite classical Hollywood style, it is composed of a series of shots and reverse shots between Richard and the King (Harris Yulin), and Richard and Clarence (Alec Baldwin). This is the first time in *Looking for Richard* that we see Pacino as Richard Gloucester performing with other actors, and this is the first time in the film that we get to regard him exclusively as Pacino-the-actor instead of Pacino-the-director. This is the moment when his authorial presence becomes subordinate to the authority of

the editors. To put it briefly, this is the sequence that sets the pace for the whole film and that establishes its inner structure and purpose: the search for a way to communicate the pleasure of performing and watching Shakespeare from the other side of the Atlantic ocean. 'Here', H. R. Coursen writes, 'the finished production — the goal — is a function of the process. The film, the story surrounding the final inner film, becomes its own artefact. The effect is of a film looking in upon a play and also a play looking out upon the ways in which it has come into being'.¹⁹

As far as the first part of the first narrative (the making-of) is concerned, we have seen how it is evenly divided into seven segments dealing with the problems or questions raised by the actors, interviewees (either the academics or the people in the street), Frederic Kimball or Al Pacino. They often refer to the problem of the American actors' inferiority complex toward their British colleagues when performing Shakespeare (i.e. 'Who does Shakespeare belong to?') as well as to the ongoing debate regarding the relevance of Shakespeare nowadays — the linguistic barrier between a modern audience and Shakespeare's dramatic poetry. And it is with much shrewdness and humour that the editors (no doubt with Pacino's collaboration) use the American actor and director's own doubts and struggles in producing and directing this adaptation of *Richard III* as editorial material for the documentary part of the film which is a straightforward but very efficient way to provide some justification for the film's potential failure. Furthermore, considering that both Pacino's mission statement and the film's editorial strategy serve to establish the prominence of collaborative work and authorship, Pacino manages to save himself a way out from the full responsibility that individual 'auteurship' involves. In this postmodern *Looking for Richard*,

¹⁹ H. R. Coursen, 'Filming Shakespeare's History: Three Films of *Richard III*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 99-116 (p. 111).

community-based authorship must be understood as a commitment withstanding challenges as well as a more unpretentious and ‘third-degree’ mode of production which cockily or rather opportunistic oscillates between high and low culture — a ‘studied state of unseriousness’.²⁰

3.3 Finding Answers

Belonging to the first act of the play, one of the longest sequences of *Looking for Richard* is granted to Richard’s wooing of Lady Anne. It is interesting to notice that from this sequence entitled ‘Lady Anne’ onwards, the film gains in importance over the documentary as if to convey the fact that the director, producers, and actors have acquired enough confidence to free themselves from the preliminary work of research and process of learning how to play a Shakespearean part. And perhaps, as H. R. Coursen writes, ‘once Pacino’s technique is established and once we have been educated to it, all the worlds of the film became available as points of reference’.²¹ The seduction scene between Richard and Lady Anne seems to pose two main problems to Pacino and Kimball. The first problem is one of casting choice as Pacino, still pacing up and down the streets of New York with his patronising partner in crime, ponders on the kind of characteristics that the ideal actress should have: ‘someone young enough to believe in Richard’s smooth talk, and old enough to be able to speak the part’. With her frail figure and her status as a popular film star, Winona Ryder finally gets the part because she looks like a Lady Anne tailored for this larger-than-life Richard. Besides, she does display this mixture of weakness and aggressiveness that makes Lady Anne’s vulnerability to Richard plausible. In a medium in which the visual is so paramount, Ryder simply *looks* the part.

²⁰ Thomas Cartelli, p.190.

²¹ H. R. Coursen, p. 112.

The second problem arises during the rehearsal when the actors try to understand the characters' motivations, i.e. Why does Richard want to 'have' Lady Anne? And why would Lady Anne be vulnerable to Richard? Inevitably in this derision-based film, these considerations provide a perfect opportunity for another Don Quixotte-Sancho Pancha double act that again puts the whole Shakespearean experience into Brechtian perspective. While Frederic Kimball argues angrily against Al Pacino's intention to ask a scholar for his opinion concerning Richard's reasons to woo Lady Anne, the latter grabs a sword, anoints the former, and wittily awards him a PhD ('of the kingdom'). In a very carefully edited transition, the next shot shows Professor Emrys Jones who frankly admits: 'I simply don't know', immediately followed by a shot of Kimball, clearly amazed by the scholar's answer. As we have seen earlier, this is one of the main sequences that crystallise the film's power relations vis-a-vis authorship. The issue of control that underpins all authorship discussions is here redefined in terms of knowledge. For the Pacino production and acting team, what matters in their approach to Shakespeare in performance is clearly not so much the amount of information and research that some (like Kenneth Branagh whose artistic supervisor is Russell Jackson) find absolutely necessary in order to gloss their productions with a much sought-after credibility. *Au contraire*, the 'subversive' attitude that Frederic Kimball represents seems to uphold the basic use of intuition that is the process through which a method actor creates his/her performance. The film exposes, in Thomas Cartelli's postcolonial reading, 'an aesthetic that shows off the power of American acting's preference for gesture over word, the body over the head, and of film's capacity to deliver, in howsoever stylised a way, the pressure and fullness of experience: the tenor and immediacy, if not the "truth", of the street'.²²

²² Thomas Cartelli, p. 193.

When the 'Lady Anne' sequence finally moves into cinematic mode, and once the context and reasons behind the encounter between Richard and Lady Anne have carefully been put forward in a very didactic way, the cockiness and humour of the documentary give way to the darkness of this scene. Pacino's sardonic 'I'll have her, but I will not keep her long' (1.2.234) becomes the epitome of the whole scene (if not of the whole film) as it is repeated on several occasions by means of frequent insertions of shots of Pacino rehearsing his part into the filmed scenes. This editing device has a double effect. First of all, this crosscutting between Pacino rehearsing in casual clothes and Pacino playing Richard in full costume is a way of involving the audience into the performance of the wooing scene, of disclosing Richard's motivations and insisting on his intrinsic malice. The other effect is that the documentary shots can be interpreted as the 'real' Richard, the man behind the mask, the man outside the role. During the wooing scene, these shots keep on reminding the viewers of Richard's plan and villainy: 'I'll have her, but I will not keep her long' (1.2.234).

It seems that this rehearsing Pacino *is* Richard, a Iago-like Richard who takes pleasure in sharing his evil designs with his audience, explaining what he is going to do in order to reach his goal, that is to be king. The cutting of the wooing scene is as sober as its setting, focussed on the couple's performance, on Richard's perverse attempt at seducing the woman whose husband and king he has himself murdered. A succession of dark, subtle dissolves between Lady Anne and Richard suggests the moral blackness of the situation and anticipates the final success of Richard. Two objects that visually symbolise Anne's surrender (the dagger) and Richard's victory (the ring) are granted symbolic close-ups within the series of shots and reverse shots that pace with simplicity this balletlike encounter, thus emphasising the easiness with which Richard wins the young and vulnerable Lady Anne:

- Shot 1: close-up in high angle on a dagger in Lady Anne's hands.
- Shot 2: medium close-up in high angle on Richard on his knees as Anne lets fall the dagger.
- Shot 3: close-up in straight angle on Anne's face.
- Shot 4: medium shot in high angle on the dagger at Anne's feet with the camera slowly tilting up to Richard's face as he tells her 'Take up the sword again or take up me' (1.2.187).
- Shot 5: medium shot in straight angle of Lady Anne who replies 'though I wish thy death, I will not be thy executioner' (1.2.188-189).
- Shot 6: medium long shot in straight angle of Richard picking up the dagger.
- Shot 7: medium close-up in straight angle of Lady Anne who looks confused.
- Shot 8: medium long shot in straight angle moving into a medium close-up of Richard still holding the dagger.
- Shot 9: reverse shot, close-up in straight angle of the dagger.
- Shot 10: close-up in straight angle of Richard putting the dagger to his neck.
- Shot 11: medium close-up in straight angle of Lady Anne.
- Shot 12: medium close-up in straight angle of Richard still holding the dagger to his neck as Anne asks him 'Put up your sword' (1.2.200).
- Shot 13: medium close-up in straight angle of Lady Anne.
- Shot 14: close-up in high angle of Richard's face.
- Shot 15: medium close-up in low angle of Richard and Lady Anne.
- Shot 16: close-up in high angle of Richard's face ('But shall I live in hope?' (1.2.203)).

- Shot 17: medium close-up in low angle of Richard and Lady Anne (‘All men. I hope, live so’ (1.2.204)).

This short passage of the wooing scene is representative of the fascinating work of editing that gives intensity and momentum to Pacino and Ryder’s enthralling performance. With the two actors standing in the dark and with no other prop than a corpse on a bier, the scene could very well take place on an emptied stage. In fact, stylistically speaking, this scene could have been very ‘theatrical’, had it been filmed in one long and uninterrupted (Wellesian) take. But with the use of a shot and reverse shot tempo between medium to close-up shots of Richard and Lady Anne and of a cutting that follows the punctuation of the text, the verbal sparring and psychological battle between the couple becomes both intimate and exciting. The scene being mostly shot in close-ups or medium close-ups, the camera is so close to the actors’ face that it can scrutinise the large range of emotions and thoughts that runs through them while it allows the two actors to use the soft vocal tones that such a seduction scene requires, thereby illustrating what Peter Brook explains in one of his interviews with Pacino and Kimball:

Every actor knows that the quieter he speaks, the closer he can be to himself. And when you play Shakespeare in close-up in a film and have a mike and can really speak the verse as quietly as this, you are not going against the grain of the verse but are going in the right direction because you are really allowing the verse to be a man speaking his inner world.²³

As Rosemary Harris’s suggestion on how to speak the play’s first lines shaped Pacino’s delivery earlier on in the film, Brook’s argument on Shakespearean verse speaking is undoubtedly the cue that has prompted Pacino and Ryder’s performance. Once again,

²³ Peter Brook, in *Looking for Richard*. Dir. Al Pacino. With Al Pacino, Frederic Kimball, Kevin Spacey, and Winona Ryder. Prod. by Michael Hodge and Al Pacino. 20th Century Fox, 1995.

through the implementation of the different acting methods and interpretations of the text offered by the film's contributors, it is collaborative authorship that is emphasised.

If the cutting rhythm operates as the mainspring of the scene between Richard and Lady Anne, it also controls the power relations between the couple by translating them in terms of temporal and spatial relationships. By placing the cuts after each of Richard's arguments and lingering on the reaction shots of Lady Anne, the editors accentuate her very pauses and hesitations which increase gradually as her defences crumble against Richard's constant 'assaults'. Spatially speaking, Lady Anne's surrender is visually expressed when she moves into Richard's space. When Anne finally yields to Richard's persuasive advances, the editing moves from separate shots of the two characters to shots where they both appear within the same frame, thereby asserting Richard's final victory. The sequence ends with a shot of Richard-Pacino, looking very satisfied, savouring his triumph, laughing at Lady Anne's frailty, and repeating once more his favourite line of the play: 'I'll have her but I will not keep her long!'. The shot fades out into a black screen with Kimball in voice-over: 'We'll never finish this movie!'. Everytime the film veers towards some kind of 'seriousness', the editors denies it by inserting ironical shots and tongue-in-cheek remarks about the value of this work or the production team's own ability to carry this project through to a successful conclusion.

The second part of *Looking for Richard* mainly consists of two movements: Richard's seizing of the crown (with the sequences: 'To seize the Crown', 'Buckingham', 'Hastings', 'The Council Meeting', and 'Richard is King') and his downfall, i.e. the battle of Bosworth. Most of the text of acts 2, 3, 4, and 5 has been considerably cut in order to retain the most prominent actions of those acts (The King's death, Hastings' murder, Richard's coronation, Buckingham's escape, the murder of the

young Princes, Richard's nightmare, and the battle of Bosworth). All in all, the key 'feature film' sequences of this second part are the council meeting scene and Richard's death.

Using the same editing formula as earlier with the first soliloquy of the play, the editors cut the 'council meeting' scene into several segments, and begin the scene by cross-cutting between the performance, readthroughs, rehearsals, and interviews, before we finally get to see the actual enactment of the scene. The film's council meeting scene corresponds to 3.4 of the playtext which is considerably brief (one hundred and seven lines) compared to the importance it is given in *Looking for Richard*. The scene opens with the peers gathered around a table, ready to 'determine the coronation', and waiting for the Duke of Gloucester's approval. The climax of the action comes with Richard's accusation against Queen Elizabeth and mistress Shore, and consequently against Hastings (Shore's lover) who is sentenced to death. The dénouement shows Richard's successful coup d'état and Hastings' laments over England's fortune. In just one hundred and seven lines, Shakespeare manages to bring a complete turn to the situation by showing us a very cocky Richard Gloucester who is able to cancel the young Prince's coronation, erase his principal opponent (Lord Hastings), and consequently take the crown of England. After the *coup de théâtre* of 3.4 nothing can prevent Richard from being King.

The scene's one hundred and seven lines are translated into the sequence's five minutes and twenty six seconds. The scene occupies a significant place in the film thanks to the metanarrative comments supplied by the actors and all the other contributors, thereby providing a running commentary as well as a textual analysis of the scene in the same didactic approach that has informed the style of this 'docudrama'. After the introductory vignette ('the council meeting'), comes the establishing shot of

the sequence: a view in low angle of a tower and two guards in armour is enough to anchor the action into a believable setting. The first three shots consist in three medium close-ups of the main protagonists of this council meeting: Hastings, Buckingham and Stanley, and the Bishop of Ely, who have been presented one by one in the preceding sequence. The camera moves from one character to the other, showing them in point of view shots which register how well they all know each other and tense the situation is. By way of a series of graphic matches between the actors rehearsing, working seated around a table as they work through their parts and the same actors this time in costume, and also seated around a table, the shot transitions are meant to serve the expository process of the documentary so that the inner fragmentation of *Looking for Richard* gets smoothed out through the illusory effect of continuity created by the editing. But once this preliminary work on the 'council meeting' scene is completed and when we get to see the actual performance in costumes, we are back to a classic continuity style of editing, as can be in the last part of the sequence:

- Shot 1: close-up in straight angle of Richard as he addresses Hastings ('thou protector of this damned strumpet, talk'st thou to me of ifs?' (3.4.74-75)).
- Shot 2: close-up in straight angle of Hastings looking very pale.
- Shot 3: close-up in straight angle of Richard ('Off with his head' (3.4.76)).
- Shot 4: reaction shot, medium shot in straight angle of Lord Stanley who looks at Hastings in disbelief.
- Shot 5: long shot in straight angle of Hastings as one guard threatens him with a dagger.
- Shot 6: close-up in straight angle of Richard ('Now, by Saint Paul I swear, will not dine until I see the same' (3.4.76-77)).

- Shot 7: medium shot in straight angle of Richard ('Lovel and Ratcliffe, look that it be done' (3.4.78)).
- Shot 8: close-up in straight angle of Hastings closely surrounded by Lovel and Ratcliffe.
- Shot 9: close-up in straight angle of Richard ('The rest that love me, rise and follow me' (3.4.79)).
- Shot 10: medium long shot in straight angle of Richard leaving the room and immediately followed by Buckingham.
- Shot 11: close-up in straight angle of Hastings.
- Shot 12: long shot in straight angle of the lords leaving the table one by one.
- Shot 13: extreme long shot in high angle of shot 12 with Hastings in the background.
- Shot 14: medium shot in straight angle of Lord Stanley from Hastings' point of view.
- Shot 15: close-up in straight angle of Hastings looking clearly scared.
- Shot 16: close-up in straight angle of Stanley leaving the table.
- Shot 17: extreme long shot in high angle of Stanley leaving Hastings to his death.
- Shot 18: close-up in straight angle of Hastings ('Woe, woe for England! Not a whit for me' (3.4.80)).
- Shot 19: medium long shot in straight angle of Hastings and the two guards ('For I, too fond, might have prevented this' (3.4.81)).
- Shot 20: close-up in straight angle of Ratcliffe ('come, come, dispatch: 'tis bootless to exclaim' (3.4.102)).

- Shot 21: close-up in straight angle of Hastings ('Bloody Richard!' (3.4.103)).
- Shot 22: medium shot in low angle of an executioner lowering his axe.

From this scene onwards, there is a feeling of urgency that takes possession of the film, as if once all the preliminary work of research is completed, the remainder of the play (and of the film) has ceased to stir up the interest of the production team. And yet, Pacino and his collaborators still need to keep their momentum and find the motivation as well as the angle from which they are going to approach this significant moment of *Richard III*. This time, the defining hint is provided by Emrys Jones who, for the first time in the film, is not held up to ridicule when he suggests that Richard and Buckingham (Kevin Spacey) should be regarded as 'gangsters, high class, upper-class thugs'. As Neil Sinyard puts it, 'it strikes a chord. It connects with the visual design of the film: with the star persona of Al Pacino; and with the relation of *Richard III* to film genre'.²⁴ The *Godfather* trilogy (Francis Ford Coppola) intertext finds here a vibrant reflection in the production of the 'council meeting' scene which, as Kevin Conway (Hastings) makes explicit on another occasion in one of the rehearsal sequences, is filmed as a 'gathering of dons'.

The references to *The Godfather* assert the close relationship between the two film texts and the fact that Al Pacino used his experience from Coppola's films to produce his *Richard III*. The analogy is also conspicuous insofar as *The Godfather*'s gloomy atmosphere has been recycled in *Looking for Richard* by using similar setting and lighting strategies. Only the table for instance, is bathed in light so that the actors can come into and out of the light just by moving backward or forward. This extremely sober and low-key lighting gives the scene the feeling of conspiracy, and shadiness it requires. By granting a large number of shots to this short scene and resorting to a shot

²⁴ Neil Sinyard, p. 67.

and reverse shot routine that saturates the screen with reaction shots of a terror-stricken Lord Hastings, the editors create a rhythm and a visual aesthetic that relates to the *huis clos*, gangland killing scenes of Coppola and De Palma's films as well as to Pacino's persona in popular culture. It is also interesting to notice that when Richard re-enters the room to stage his coup, the change in his behaviour is accompanied by the entry of music in the soundtrack. The music signals the particular significance of the action and reinforces the feature-film style of the sequence. Likewise, the climax of the sequence is indicated by a series of tight close-ups and a faster editing rhythm. In true continuity style, the closer the action gets to its end, the faster the editing becomes. The shots become shorter to enhance the danger of the situation and induce a feeling of tension in the viewer. In the end, the face of Lord Hastings fills the frame when he finds himself alone, abandoned by his friends, and facing an imminent death. Nothing is kept from Hastings' last speech but the first two lines: 'Woe, woe for England! Not a whit for me. For I, too fond, might have prevented this' (3.4.81). Divorced from the speech, his last words – 'O bloody Richard!' – do not resonate politically but personally. Immediately followed by the quick cut of an executioner lowering his axe, the sentence (and the cut) is accomplished without delay.

In keeping with the postmodern attitude of recycling, Pacino uses his experience in playing 'upper-class thugs' like *Carlito*, *Scarface* or *Donnie Brasco* to transform his Richard Gloucester into a 'Michael Corleone' with a hunchback, a modern gangster with Elizabethan style. At last, we feel that Pacino is on familiar ground and that he is finally able to put the stamp of his own work and of his own authorship not only on this 'docudrama' but also on Richard. And his Richard is a natural born actor, not to say a 'natural born killer'. After all, it seems quite logical to find Pacino's mark of authorship in his work as a performer rather than as a director. Because the American actor,

through a carefully organised editing, is mainly defined in relation to his work through the play *Richard III* as well as to his performance of its title role, his function as the director of *Looking for Richard* is downplayed, if not almost kept hidden while his friend and accomplice Frederic Kimball moves into the foreground. Without a powerful assertion of Pacino as the director of the film, the director's chair remains symbolically empty, or rather, physically occupied by part-time directors. Within such a system of production, such a context of shifting authorial agencies, it is the collaborative mode of authorship that is emphasised, thereby encouraging the audience to listen to the plurality of voices that constitutes and contributes to the film texts.

3.4 Finding Pacino?

One of the strengths of Pacino's film derives from the judicious arrangement of the sequences amongst one another. The editing of *Looking for Richard* emphasises not only the relation between film and theatre, but also between Richard-the-actor and Richard-the-conspirator. The editing compresses the Shakespearean text and reduces it to a small selection of lines that get 'iconised' through an unrelenting use of visual and verbal repetitions, and in doing so, the editors gives the (neophytes) viewers the illusion of a thorough exposition of the play. By progressively incorporating fragments of both the film and the play into the documentary and the making-of until the film finally becomes predominant, the viewers do not confuse the two parallel narratives as they are gradually given the codes to decipher the whole film. Moreover, this cross-cutting between rehearsals (a process of work in progress) and performance is a way to incorporate the play in Pacino's time and culture, to make it closer to the film's contemporary audience. The audience's interest is aroused steadily, little by little, and the various vignettes pace this escalation, functioning as landmarks on an orienteering

race. Pacino seems to scatter his clues playfully throughout his filmed essay, obviously playing with Richard Gloucester, coming and going into Richard's deformed frame, and switching from one function (director) to another (actor).

In the ghost scene that precedes the battle of Bosworth, by cutting back and forth between Pacino reading the text and playing Richard as he feels the pangs of his conscience, the editors keep on reminding us that we are not watching a film adaptation of a Shakespearean play but rather a film on the difficulties involved in the making of a film version of a Shakespearean play. In this scene, Pacino takes his cue directly from Shakespeare's text, as we see him with a book in his hands, reading through the part and rehearsing the scene in London, when he visits the Globe 'hoping' to get inspired by the surroundings and the history attached to it. This 'back-to-the-basics' process complicates the politics of authorial agency as defined by Pacino in his introductory mission statement. The American actor and director seems to be motivated by a need to free himself from the plethora of authorial voices that have instructed him and a desire to impose his authorial signature on *Richard III* as well as to derive his authority over the text from the text itself, that is to say from its primary source: William Shakespeare. In spite of the carefree attitude of the production team and of Pacino's declaration at the beginning of the film that all he wants is to communicate how he feels about Shakespeare, what we see through the didactic montages of *Looking for Richard* is an actor who, like Baz Luhrmann or Kenneth Branagh, is looking for a legitimation of his production and for his own authorial status. The initial ironizing approach (even rejection) of what the film establishes as the highest authority, i.e. the Shakespearean (British) academia, is skilfully renegotiated throughout the various performances of the play so that gradually, by incorporating the scholarly suggestions into the production strategies, Pacino subjects himself and his team to this highest authority, which finally

'legitimises' their enterprise. Within the tensions emerging from these conflicting authorial agencies, this nexus of collaborative, extradiegetic agents, it is the editors, these anonymous collaborators who, from their invisible position, possess the final authority to give (or to deny) voice to the film's participants. In the end, it is through the selective process of film-editing that a black American from New York finds himself on the same authorial level as a British scholar when he earnestly contends that 'we should all speak like Shakespeare 'cos then the kids would have feelings'.

4

Editing Bodies: Gender Dynamics in Julie Taymor's *Titus***4.1 Deciding not to Cut**

In the preceding chapter, through the analysis of *Looking For Richard*, I attempted to show how Al Pacino's desire for authorship, which is embraced by the various authorial (and also authoritative) voices present in the film, is carefully subdued but also flamboyantly exposed by the selective and organisational processes of film-editing. And in doing so, we saw how the metanarrative and structuring functions of film-editing make us discover new ways of adapting and interpreting Shakespeare. We saw how, by directing attention to the very process of cutting the rushes, the editors make use of particular styles of editing (e.g. vertical editing and documentary style) in order to integrate Pacino's film's narratives into each other in a pseudo-ordered way while conferring the film its resolutely amateur, tongue-in-cheek, and unpretentious appeal.

In this chapter, I would like to explore and expose another facet of what the film editor can do by using another set of material. Here the editorial work is not only concerned with controlling and working on the actions' structures, order, and chronology; it is also and more particularly subjected to the desire of interpreting, encoding, and cutting bodies. Thus, the filmic performative body and its representations will be the topic of this analysis. And in order to explore how film-editing represents and interprets Shakespeare's 'bodies', I propose to use Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999) as a case study, for in this case it is onto the body and its numerous adjuncts (e.g. costumes and other extensions) that Shakespeare developed his plots and that the film-makers (in the broad and collaborative sense of the word) inscribed their own concepts. As Carol

Chillington Rutter rightly puts it: ‘making the body signify, he [Shakespeare] required his audience to read it, and never just one way’.¹ Accordingly, I would like to argue that it is through the processes of editorial selection and collage that we are invited to read, and not just one way, some significance out of *Titus*’s bodies. In the same way as Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* is rife in bodily representations and symbolism, *Titus* adopts an approach to corporeal imagery that is both realistic and stylised so that Shakespeare’s poetry becomes provocatively visualised. In *Playing with Fire*, Julie Taymor explains how, when she was working on her New York stage production of the play in 1994, the Shakespearean playtext was her primary inspiration and that in adapting the play, her aim was ‘to theatricalize the rich imagery of Shakespeare’s language’ so that ‘verbal motifs would become visual ones’.² In her 1999 film version, and with the same purpose in mind, Taymor remained within the aesthetics of the theatre while experimenting and making full use of the cinematic techniques — the editing in particular — at her disposal. While the camera clinically records the incessant acts of physical violence and transgressions, the director and her editor Françoise Bonnot voyeuristically decide not to cut. Instead, they show us (almost) everything: bodies are unmercifully and bluntly pulled apart, cut through, as blood gushes abundantly, and limbs are held in trophies. Lavinia’s body is indeed ‘a map of woe’ inviting us not only to read this atrociously mutilated — but still beautiful — body but also to draw our attention to the other characters’ bodies. The body becomes the front line in a series of invasions and violent expulsions that structure the film. It also becomes the canvas on which, I shall argue, the director Julie Taymor and the

¹ Carol Chillington Rutter, ‘Designs on Shakespeare: Troilus’s sleeve, Cressida’s glove, Helen’s placket’, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation in Shakespeare’s Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 104-141 (p. 108).

² Julie Taymor, *Playing with Fire* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), p. 184.

film-editor Françoise Bonnot articulate their authorial agencies and crystallise their aspirations to (collaborative) authorship.

More than anything else, the focus of this postmodern film adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* is on gender and race. Taymor judiciously confronts the problems of nationalism and gender boundaries in a postmodern diegetic world where male and female bodies and identities are both symbolically and literally in danger of becoming fragmented. It is within the representations of the body that the questions of identity and race get worked through and become mutually dependent. In her essay on Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Francesca T. Royster argues that the fear of racial 'infiltration' and 'the same panic about the danger of blurred boundaries'³ is at the core of this early Shakespearean tragedy. For Julie Taymor, the problem cannot merely be reduced to a question of miscegenation between hyperwhite and hyperblack, white and hyperwhite, or white and hyperblack. In the apocalyptic world of *Titus*, I would like to argue that the 'blurred boundaries' are displaced from the racial politics to the sexual: being *racially* 'other' signifies being *sexually* 'other', i.e. abnormal and potentially dangerous. Therefore, Taymor's extravagant Rome is not simply endangered by the invasion or 'infiltration' of foreign people (either Goths or 'Blackamoors'). The threat is transmuted into the danger of male castration, incest, and female rape which looms on the characters from the beginning of the film onwards, and jeopardises their sexual identity as well as Rome's national *pérennité*.

³ Francesca T. Royster, 'White-limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's "Titus Andronicus"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 51, (2000), pp. 532-455 (p. 450).

4.2 Male Anxieties

In *Titus*, Shakespeare meets Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (1999) in an ancient Rome which becomes a space of extremes, and where raw violence and deviant sexuality are always closely related. The boundaries between hypermasculinity and queerness are opaque, and male-male violence seems to have an erotic component. Significantly, Chiron and Demetrius are represented as two ambiguous characters who unload their pent up sexual energy through a constant physical aggressiveness towards one another — at least at the beginning of the film. This masculine, brotherly relationship is clearly legible as both queer, incestuous, and 'unnatural'. The key to *Titus*'s gender narratives can be found not only in Julie Taymor's *mise en scène* but also in Taymor and Françoise Bonnot's blatantly associative, thematic editing since film-editing structures the circulation of the narratives within the film.

4.2.1 The 'Norm'

I have in mind a particular scene from the beginning of the film which I would like to use as the mark of a 'normative', pre-chaotic, pre-crisis gender narrative. The relatively short scene (lasting thirty five seconds) is a commonplace that reminds me of a scene from Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing*: the soldiers playfully washing out the dust and blood from their bodies at the return from the war. Although this scene is permeated with images of playfulness and sexual anticipation, its homology — or rather its difference as far as the representation of the male body is concerned — with *Titus*'s scene of bathing soldiers is worth noting. Representations of naked, bathing soldiers in war or post-war time hark back to the Second World War when the American magazine *Life* published photographs displaying dorsal nudity of American soldiers relaxing and washing themselves. In his well documented essay on sexuality and masculinity in

World War II combat films, and commenting on those bathing pictures. Robert Eberwein observes:

Photographs of naked soldiers washing and at play in *Life* provide testimony that affirms these men *can* be observed; that is, the very act of representing their nakedness serves as an assurance that their sexuality is *representable*. The naked men shown to the American public must be heterosexual. If nakedness can be shown in airbrushed photographs, then the sexuality of those shown in the photographs is not in question.⁴

If 'to show' is indeed the quintessential signifier of unquestionable heterosexuality, then Taymor's bathing soldiers are indeed representative of the 'norm'. But the display of male nudity is potentially charged with so many readings that 'to show' cannot be the unique 'proof' of normative masculinity. With its associative editing, Branagh's bathing scene leaves little for confusion as the cross-cutting between shots of the naked soldiers and the bathing women of the villa clearly suggests premarital lust and heterosexual desire. But in the case of Taymor's film, there are no women to state the soldiers' heterosexuality. Indeed, I would like to argue that it is mainly through the *découpage* of the film-editing that we can read these men as heterosexual. Before commenting on *Titus*'s bathing scene, I would like to describe its composition and organisation:

- Shot 1: establishing shot, fade in on a long shot in straight angle of five soldiers, seated on a stone bench, with water pouring down on them.
- Shot 2: medium long shot of the water flowing out of big cylindrical openings in the huge wall with the camera tilting down on a soldier covered in mud.
- Shot 3: close-up in straight angle of a soldier washing his scalp and face.
- Shot 4: medium long shot in low angle of three soldiers washing themselves.
- Shot 5: close-up in straight angle of a soldier's face.
- Shot 6: medium close-up in straight angle of two soldiers.

⁴ Robert Eberwein, 'As a Mother Cuddles a Child', in *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*, ed. Peter Lehman (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 149-166 (p. 161).

- Shot 7: extreme long shot in straight angle of the whole Roman baths.

The way Julie Taymor and Françoise Bonnot treat these bodies through spatial arrangements within the frames and through their montage is particularly significant. Each of these seven shots must be considered as a signifying element, the portion of a *tableau* which is the bathing scene. The composition or visual montage — in the Eisensteinian sense — of the first shot confers an undeniably pictorial or even sculptural beauty to the entire scene. Baked in mud, the soldiers share the same quiet force, enigmatic stillness, and cold solidity of Italian Renaissance statues by Michelangelo or Donatello: they are eternally fixed in their pose and yet they seem to be endowed with the power to come to life out of their stony rigor at any time. This stillness, this economy of movement which makes statues of these naked men is the warranty of their masculinity. As Susan Jeffords defines it in her work on Hollywood masculinity, ‘the hardbody’ is characterised by ‘hard edges, determinate lines of action, and clear boundaries’.⁵ Consistent, powerful, and chiselled, the hardbody represents a fantasy of male self-fashioning and an attempt to suppress the hysterical and undisciplined outbursts of the dangerous — because uncontrolled — ‘softbody’. Order, discipline, courage, honour, stoicism — all of those Roman values (*virtus*) are also graphically asserted in the fixity of this first shot. The soldiers’ hardbodies are symmetrically arranged (on each sides of a central and vertical axis) in very similar postures: their head slightly bent down, their hands on their thighs, and all their muscles relaxed but still sustaining the weight of their own bodies. Combined with the soberness of this shot, the logic of the cut is clear, ‘martial’, and without ornament. Furthermore, with a cutting pace of about six seconds per shot (which is quite slow) and

⁵ Susan Jeffords, *Hardbodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p. 27.

the absence of musical background, the soldiers' heterosexuality is confirmed and reinforced.

Returning from the war, these Roman patricians look worn-out, wounded in their flesh (some of them even lost a limb) and soul (their empty gazes registering trauma). What we see in the six following shots are streams of water gushing out from huge openings in the wall and falling down on the soldiers' head in a kind of early Christian and pre-institutional baptismal ceremony. After the killings of the war, the time of purification has come: this is what is being suggested by this 'holy water' cleansing the soldiers, washing out the mud from their bodies, and connecting these different shots in a very organic way. Commenting on this scene, Julie Taymor explains that: 'The mud streams down their naked bodies as they purify themselves for the burial rites of their brothers'.⁶ Here, Taymor seems to associate nakedness with an act of purification and brotherly love and bonding. And yet, the soldiers' nudity is also a representation of male sexuality.

The representation of a naked body, either male or female, is always charged with some significance — whether it crystallises erotic imagery or social critique — and the exposure of full frontal male nudity is still a taboo in mainstream cinema. This scene contains images of nude male bodies in frontal position where the penis is intentionally kept out of sight, masked by the elaborate lighting created by the cinematographer Luciano Tovoli and 'cut off' by Taymor and Bonnot when they specifically selects heads and torsos. All in all, the bathing scene validates and reinforces Peter Lehman's assumption that 'penises cannot simply be shown as penises in ordinary context'.⁷ Had it been revealed, its view would have brought a very different

⁶ Julie Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), p. 24.

⁷ Peter Lehman, *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representations of the Male Body* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), p. 32.

reading to this scene. The trope of purification and sexual innocence would have been unable to find its way and would have been more or less swayed by other discourses such as hypermasculinity, homosexuality, derision... The absence of the penis as signifier is as meaningful as its presence. Its absence not only eclipses all other possible assumptions but also contributes actively to the dehumanisation of these men so that we only read them through their functions within their community: as soldiers performing a rite. The cutting of the film plays a tremendously important part in the composition and representation of those male bodies. The way Taimor and Bonnot edit these silent 'hardbodies' represents the 'norm'. It is therefore by structuring the spectator's gaze that the editors inscribe particular meanings on the bathing scene, which once again, could have been totally different with a unique long take uniquely composed of a change of camera angles or distances.

Moreover, by cutting at a slow pace from long shots of practically still, asexual bodies to close-ups of faces, shoulders or hands, not only is the viewer invited to 'empathise' with them but also sexual discourses are removed from this scene: or more precisely, the unwanted peripheral sexual discourses are left silent, so that a single narrative is offered to the viewer: the narrative of a 'normative' male sexuality. The cuts grant no bonding between those men, no ambiguities regarding their sexual identity. Therefore, in *Titus*, Rome's normality and stability are registered through the naked bodies of these untainted Roman praetorians. And yet, even if the editing insists in showing these soldiers as invincible statues, their nudity and mutilated bodies are nevertheless signs of their vulnerability.

4.2.2 The Outsiders

4.2.2.1 Chiron and Demetrius

A truism with which to start: if black reveals itself best when contrasted with white, otherness is also displayed best when presented with its opposite. Against the preceding representation of Roman ‘normality’, Taymor shows us what is foreign (Gothic) abnormality through the bodies of Tamora, Chiron, Demetrius, and Aaron, the Moor. Otherness is tattooed on the very skin of the royal Goths and contrary to the mud that covered Titus’s sons and soldiers, their tattoos cannot be simply washed away by purifying waters. Is otherness an unchangeable, permanent state? This is what the film’s rich iconography seems to assert. In *Titus Andronicus* — the play of all extremes — Shakespeare associates otherness with excess, and expresses it through acts of violence, grief or love that make this play flamboyantly monstrous and spectacular. Excess is what describes the Goths (especially Tamora’s sons) best in *Titus*. It is through Chiron and Demetrius’s bodies that the threat of invasion, contamination, and destruction becomes consistent, and that a radical alternative to Roman ‘values’ or ‘normality’ takes shape.

Tamora’s sons are represented as caricatures: they are hyper-sexualized, overaggressive, incoherent, and above all decadent. This decadence — and not their racial or national origins — is the mark of their difference, the sign that marks them as ‘powerfully racially Other’⁸ and as a real threat to the established order of the Roman society. I would like to use a particular sequence to illustrate the way this threat of fragmentation (either physically or ontologically) exercised on the *gens Andronicum* is developed and ‘actualised’ in opposition with what has been established as the ‘norm’. I am referring to the first sequence showing the black Aaron (Harry Lennix) using his

⁸ Chillington Rutter, p. 80.

rhetoric to circumscribe the uncontrolled fits of violence of the Gothic teenagers Chiron and Demetrius.

The sequence is about six minutes long and unfolds through three distinct movements which climax with the young Goths' quarrel. With his opening and closing position, Aaron both frames the sequence and dominates Tamora's sons. In the first movement, he appears with the sunrise, alone on the palace balcony, leaning over a balustrade and looking over the city of Rome contentedly while he ponders on his newly acquired power and prestige derived from being Rome's empress's lover. On the stage of a theatre, addressing his speech to the audience, Aaron foreshadows Iago or Richard Gloucester. In Taymor's *Titus*, Harry Lennix is another Laurence Olivier, Kenneth Branagh, Micheál Macliammóir, Ian McKellen or Al Pacino who speaks directly to the camera.

The second movement shows Chiron and Demetrius's contest over who will 'achieve' Lavinia. In his fascinating essay on *Titus Andronicus*, Sid Ray argues that the young Goths 'project their political ambitions onto Lavinia's body, desiring her because they recognize her as the emblem of imperial power'.⁹ In *Titus* and especially in this sequence, power politics seem very far from Chiron and Demetrius's motivations. Their ambitions do not seem to exceed those of two idle and self-destructive juvenile delinquents. Although the political narrative is largely developed in the playtext, it is mainly absent from Taymor's film which is taken over by the predominant postmodern issues of gender and sexuality. Chiron and Demetrius are merely depicted as two puppies fighting over a bone: they are dehumanised by the eye of the camera.

The third and last movement of the sequence shows us how Aaron becomes 'their tutor to instruct them a thousand dreadful things' (5.1.98 and 141) — 'That

⁹ Sid Ray, "'Rape, I fear was root of thy annoy": The Politics of Consent in "Titus Andronicus"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49, (1998), pp. 22-39 (p. 35).

codding spirit had they from their mother./that bloody mind I think, they learned of me' (5.1.99-101). Here again the focus is on Aaron, and the Goths are characterised not so much by what they are but above all in comparison with him. Nested in their huge suspended bed, the image of the puppies is reasserted for a second time. The mark of their inferiority or bestiality is encoded within their spatial relationship with Aaron: positioned below him, they docilely show their obedience. In this sequence, Aaron is characterised by the close-up and medium close-up while Chiron and Demetrius are shown in distancing long and medium long shots most of the time.

Throughout the whole sequence the cutting rhythm is determined by the characters: a rather slow pace suggests Aaron's cool-mindedness and guile, whereas Chiron and Demetrius's conspicuous lack of restraint is emphasised by a fast and furious editing style. As can be seen in the second movement, the frequency of the shots is extremely high with a cutting pace of about a second or some tenths of a second per shot. This movement being composed of more than a hundred shots, analysing it shot by shot would be too long and therefore tedious. This is the reason why I will focus my analysis on the most significant clusters of shots. Within this dialectic of control and anarchy, the narrative of a normative masculinity placed under assault finds one of its first expressions in the chaotic brawl between Chiron and Demetrius — the trope of a deviant, undetermined (white?) male sexuality. This is particularly apparent in the following shots:

- Shot 1: medium close-up in high angle of the leftovers from the orgiastic wedding celebration.
- Shot 2: medium close-up in high angle of Demetrius playing with chicken paws in Chiron's face.

- Shot 3: long panning shot in low angle of Chiron and Demetrius walking by the pool.
- Shot 4: long shot in straight angle from Aaron's point of view, hidden behind a column.
- Shot 5: medium close-up in straight angle of Demetrius forcing Chiron on his hands and knees.
- Shot 6: long shot in low angle of Demetrius mimicking sodomy on top of his brother.
- Shot 7: medium close-up in straight angle of Chiron throwing Demetrius off his back, taking off his jacket, and kicking it.
- Shot 8: medium close-up in low angle of Chiron striking Demetrius on his head.
- Shot 9: reverse shot, medium close-up in high angle of Demetrius holding his head.
- Shot 10: medium long shot in straight angle of Aaron still hidden behind the column.

The extensive use of the long and medium long shots shows us full bodies: here the technique calls attention not so much to the faces and the eyes as to body language. The gestures or attitudes are always close to the pantomime, and are of chief concern in this *Titus* that recalls the surrealist world of Fellini's *Satyricon*. Combined with the dizzying effects of camerawork (the shifts from high to low angle), the staccato rhythm imposed by the fast micro-editing directs the spectator's gaze and constructs a narrative of abnormality from the bodies of Chiron and Demetrius. Like Shakespeare's poetry, Taymor and Bonnot's thematic editing registers the Goths as unnatural androgynous monsters (later on, respectively named Rape and Murder). Demetrius, the older brother,

masters Chiron through an act that clearly suggests rape. The representation of non-consensual anal sex between two brothers in shot 6 is a twofold transgression — or even blasphemy — which is emphasised by the acts of physical violence of the following shots. Although it is only a simulation and a mockery, the representation of incestuous male rape nevertheless registers a ‘feminizing’ trauma.

Commenting on the film *Sleepers* (1996) by Barry Levinson, Joe Wlodarz argues that ‘in a patriarchal society, the penetration of a man is generally considered a fate worse (or at least equal to) than death’ and that ‘being penetrated [...] involves a radical disintegration and humiliation of the self’.¹⁰ These ten shots crystallise the threat to Rome’s stability. Chiron and Demetrius embody and convey the danger of such a disintegration, the first victim of which will be Lavinia, one of the epitomes of a normative Rome. The questions of governmental overthrow and territorial invasion are displaced onto the problems of gender ambiguity and sexual transgressions — the politics of sexuality central to *Titus*. The disease of fragmentation which takes its roots in the two young Goths, in their transgressions of sexual taboos, social order, and of the Roman law is therefore about to spread. The inherent chaos that feeds on Chiron and Demetrius is visually expressed by the hectic rhythm of the editing which is counterbalanced by the moderate cutting style that comes to represent Aaron. Their verbal sparring is intensified by the fast cutting, while Aaron is the one who brings a structure to their vain disorder. The successful association of two conflicting editing themes corresponding to the three protagonists of this sequence marks Tamora’s sons as serious potential threats.

I mentioned earlier that the bodies of Chiron and Demetrius appear in full on screen thanks to the long shot. This choice seems to suggest that the film-makers’

¹⁰Joe Wlodarz, ‘Rape Fantasies: Hollywood and Homophobia’, in *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Cultures*, ed. Peter Lehman (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 67-80 (p. 68).

intention was to establish a 'moral distance' with the transgressors and that the bodies of the disintegrators must remain in one piece before ending up baked in pies. The strategy developed by Julie Taymor and Françoise Bonnot in order to 'demonise' the young Goths by accentuating their characteristic penchant towards violence and uncontrolled libido is used a second time by the end of the same sequence:

- Shot 1: medium long shot in low angle of Demetrius (on the left side of the frame) standing on a bed with a pillow betwixt his legs.
- Shot 2: medium long shot in high, Dutch (slanted) angle of Chiron lying back onto the big pillows of the bed.
- Shot 3: medium long shot in low angle of Demetrius who jumps down on his brother.
- Shot 4: medium long shot in high angle of Demetrius and Chiron.
- Shot 5: long shot in straight angle of the brothers: Demetrius simulating oral sex on a consenting Chiron.
- Shot 6: medium long shot in straight angle from behind them with Aaron in the background.

The 'portraits' of Chiron and Demetrius are sketched within the space of those six shots. As opposed to the 'Roman baths' sequence, the camera does not dwell respectfully on their bodies: it clinically and coldly eroticizes and objectifies them. The film-maker clearly refrained from using the close-up. Always lingering on the surface of their leather-like costumes, avoiding their eyes, and keeping them at a distance, the camera observes the Goths as if they were wild animals. These shots provide the viewer with another representation of masculinity which is unquestionably diametrically opposed to the one embodied by the bathing soldiers. If nudity was an evidence of the latter's normative male sexuality, leather trousers (in some cases registering

sadomasochistic tendencies) and ambiguous behaviours register the Gothic teenagers as sexually undifferentiated, dangerously oscillating between hypermasculinity (Demetrius) and queerness (Chiron). Chiron seems to be particularly divided between his desire to 'achieve' Lavinia and his unconscious longing for 'being' Lavinia as can be seen in shot 2 in which he childishly and humorously impersonates Titus's daughter (later on in the film he will sports plaits, and wears bra, panties, and tights). The sexual uncertainty of the Goths makes them outsiders. In Demetrius's hands, the hidden penis of the 'Roman Baths' sequence becomes a ludicrous hyperbole as he puts a pillow between his legs. The enormously grotesque mock appendix produces a farcical and carnivalesque metaphor for the Goths' uncontrolled sexuality. Therefore, whereas the 'Roman Baths' sequence illustrates what Peter Lehman defines as 'this conventional approach which contributes to the awe and mystique of the penis by keeping it hidden',¹¹ Demetrius's camp behaviour negates and even ridicules it by turning the penis into an instrument of hypermasculinity: aggression and domination. This sexual ambiguity (and apparently not their political ambitions) seems to be what generates their blind and gratuitous violence: at first internalised since it finds its expression in a fight amongst each other, until Aaron manages to channel their aggressiveness — this is materialised by the radical change of cutting pace and sound background — and direct it towards Lavinia and the *gens Andronicum* at large.

4.2.2.2 Saturninus

Reciprocally and not surprisingly, the effeminate and feminizing young Goths match the androgynous and newly ill-chosen emperor of Rome, Saturninus. In terms of characterisation, Saturninus is marked by an excessive display of black and pink

¹¹Peter Lehman, 'Crying over the Melodramatic Penis', in *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*, ed. Peter Lehman (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 25-41 (p. 33).

make-up registering him as a decadent pseudo-gothic Commodus (cf. *Gladiator*), and clothes that could have been borrowed from Hitler or Mussolini's wardrobe. The reference to the German and Italian fascist regimes of the 1930s and 1940s seen through the eyes of the cartoonist Otto Dix is clearly inescapable. These totalitarian military regimes, in their will to enforce the image of hegemonic white (arian) heterosexual males through the representations of 'perfect' bodies, also succeeded in presenting the male body as a source of erotic spectacle, and therefore in promoting male-male bonding and homosexuality.¹²

The concepts of fascism and latent non-normative sexual preferences conspicuously emanate from Saturninus's body. Dominated by his wife and empress Tamora, Alan Cumming's baroque Saturninus is womanly and feverishly capricious. The quasi-Eisensteinian quality of Taymor and Bonnot's micro-editing — another variant of Oliver Stone's vertical (or rather paradigmatic) editing — projects Saturninus onto different semantic fields which helps to complete the character. I have in mind several examples to illustrate this point, and particularly the astonishing shots following the coronation sequence:

- Shot 1: medium long shot in low angle zooming in on Saturninus's face who displays a self-contented smile.

¹² Commenting on the link between masculinity and politics, R. W. Connell observes:

From the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, the potential for homoerotic pleasure was expelled from the masculine and located in a deviant group, symbolically assimilated to women and beasts. There was no mirror-type of "the heterosexual." Rather, heterosexuality became a required part of manliness. The contradiction between this purged definition of masculinity, and the actual conditions of emotional life among men in military and paramilitary groups reached crisis level in fascism. It helped to justify, possibly to motivate, Hitler's murder of Ernst Röhm, the homosexual leader of the Storm-troopers, in 1934. In *Masculinities* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 196.

- Shot 2: close-up in straight of an enormous metallic wolf's head as the camera zooms out and tilts down to reveal Saturninus seated on a grotesquely gigantic armchair of a throne.

The earlier references to the fascist Europe of the 1930s of shot 1 give way to another motif in shot 2, as shot 2 'demolishes what has been built' in shot 1, that is to say Saturninus depicted as an extravagant and authoritarian dictator with the use of a low angle point of view. The powerful visual oxymoron residing in the second shot is based on the connection between antithetical signifiers: a ferocious, nightmarish wolf's head registering cruelty and ruthlessness, and an effeminate, incongruous Saturninus who seems to be the embodiment of incapacity and weakness. The she-wolf (standing for children-eater Tamora?) is an oxymoron in itself: the symbol of Rome, which protects and feeds every Roman citizens and always represented as suckling Romulus and Remus betwixt its paws, is here represented as a devouring mouth (a trope of ambition?) ready to feed on its own children, and seemingly ready to prey voraciously upon Saturninus himself.

Further on, as Titus and his men shoot messages to the gods tied to arrows, the motif of the she-wolf feeding its children is reiterated in a shot revealing a childlike Saturninus sleeping on Tamora's breast. This associative, Eisensteinian editing brings together subjects and objects that are clearly antithetical, thereby inscribing the extraordinary characters into a pattern of violence and gender transgressions and reversal (expressed by the various colliding shots). Reversing the established codes in order to categorise otherness is the dominant strategy on which Julie Taymor relies in her *Titus*. Black is white and white is black. Taymor resorts again to this strategy in the second part of shot 2. Sitting or rather half-lying on a disproportionate metallic throne-armchair, the emperor is deprived of any manliness, dignity, credibility, and

strength. He is unconditionally devalued and also marked as other, marked with perversion. Significantly, Saturninus is later denied an honourable, heroic, and manly death when Lucius pokes a spoon into his mouth and down his throat as the action freezes suddenly in the style of *The Matrix* (1999). Since the head of the Roman empire is itself an 'outsider', Rome is not only threatened from the outside but also from the inside: 'the real enemy lies within'.¹³

The alienating effect of Taymor and Bonnot's editing can also be observed in the sequence when Saturninus discovers Titus's arrows and messages in his house and hurries to the senate where he complains theatrically against this aggression. Instead of using a series of shots that covers the progress of Saturninus's dressing up as is usually done in such sequences, a narrative ellipsis suppresses the dressing by cutting from a shot with Saturninus in nightclothes behind the door of the senate, to a shot showing him in full regalia as he steps across the same door. Such a narrative compression (or even distortion) is a transgression of the rules of the classical continuity editing technique. It alienates Saturninus and the Goths from the Roman people (who are scarcely represented in the film) more effectively than any other *mise en scène* techniques since the effect is almost subliminal. This editing trick (profusely exploited by Georges Méliès) is also quite humorous as it reminds us of Chaplin (*The dictator*) or of the Marx Brothers' best comedies. While pathos is what defines Titus's household, and while Titus himself is mostly characterised by elements of bathos (especially in the second part of the film in the bath sequence), it is interesting to notice how the farcical and even the grotesque (in the Bakhtinian sense of the word) associated with the 'outsiders' constitute the other pole of the spectrum.

¹³ Coppélia Kahn. *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, Women* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.47.

4.2.3 Feminising the Warrior

Very rarely (as in Surrey's elegy 'Wyatt resteth here, that quick could never rest' or Shakespeare's homoerotic Sonnet 20) do we find men blazoning one another. Rarer still are the occasions when women emblazoned men, as did Lady Mary Wroth.¹⁴

I would like to argue that *Titus* is one of these rare occasions. In her adaptation of Shakespeare's early tragedy, Julie Taymor and Françoise Bonnot have composed a strikingly visual re-working of Renaissance 'Baroque fantasies of the imagination'.¹⁵ The trope of fragmentation at the root of the *blason anatomique* initiated by Clément Marot in 1535 is here particularly analogous to the rhetoric of film-editing developed in *Titus*. Originally, the poetic partition of the female body and the subsequent praise or denigration (*contreblason*) of the selected body part are the constituting elements of the anatomical blazon. Significantly, this literary genre emerged at the same time as the science (or art) of dissection since it was in 1543 that both Vesalius's *Fabrica* and *Les Blasons Anatomiques du corps féminin* were first published. In fact, it is more probably the case that the blazon is a product of the pervasive sixteenth-century dissective and corporeal culture. Through the rediscovery of the interior of the human body and the exploration of the Cartesian division between mind and body, the 'culture of dissection'¹⁶ in the European early modern period has seen the emergence of new understandings of the world. In turning his gaze inwards, within the foreign space of the human body, the anatomist and by extension the philosopher turned the body into an enduring object of scrutiny and transformation.

Being subjected to fragmentation and investigation through the reductive and violent process of dissection, the human body lost its integrity and became a source of

¹⁴ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 201.

¹⁵ Sawday, p. 249.

¹⁶ Sawday, p. viii.

metaphors for the figurative body of understanding. The mixed feelings of fascination and horror inspired by the spectacular dissections taking place in the anatomy theatres during the second part of the sixteenth century and the first part of the seventeenth century strongly influenced the artistic productions of the Renaissance period, whether it be in philosophy, poetry, architecture or drama, as far as Shakespeare is concerned. Early modern scientists like Vesalius made the human body alien territory, Cartesian Body and Soul dualism mechanised it, and the Renaissance artists represented it in its fragmented state in an attempt to (re)conquer it, to make it legible and significant. The body was textualised and the text was embodied. As David Hillman and Carla Mazzio state it: ‘Parts of the body are scattered throughout the literary and cultural texts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe’.¹⁷

Shakespeare is no exception to the trend insofar as various appropriations of and references to the blazon are disseminated in his sonnets (cf. sonnets 20, 23 or 145) and plays (*Twelfth Night*, *Coriolanus*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, or *Titus Andronicus*). A few centuries later, the everlasting craze for haemoglobin, scattered limbs, and big thrills is given full satisfaction on the big screen. As far as Titus and Lavinia are concerned, the anachronism implied in a cinematic emblazoning of some of their body parts involves a fracture of bodily and gender representations as well as a shift in intention from the *blasonneurs*’ point of view. Depriving the human body (most often female) of its wholeness in an attempt to objectify it, annihilate any trace of identity (here again feminine), and eventually subdue it was the profession of faith of the early modern blazoners. Commenting on the illustrations affixed to sixteenth-century editions of the *blasons anatomiques*, Nancy J. Vickers contends that

‘Unlike the more contextualized images in medical treatises, the blazons’ woodcuts

¹⁷ David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, ‘Introduction: Individual Parts’, in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. xi-xxix (p. xi).

undermined any suggestion of bodily integrity the poems themselves might have made; they displayed a body disembodied, divided, and conquered'.¹⁸ The desire to dissect a body discursively (and visually) and impose a dominion upon a selected body part stems mainly from assumptions that 'the part, in the early modern period, becomes a *subject*, both in the sense of being "subjected" — of being isolated and disempowered — and of being "subjected" — imagined to be endowed with qualities of intention and subjectivity'.¹⁹

Representations of corporeality are also central to *Titus Andronicus* where the body's fragmentation and loss of coherence acquire a collective perspective and become a synecdoche of political havoc and social dismantlement. As mentioned earlier, it is through the disintegrated bodies of Titus and Lavinia that the politics of national threat and racial invasion get worked out. On the other hand, the emblazoning process of Taymor and Bonnot's editing in *Titus* does not obey the same early modern imperatives of bodily conquest and dominion — the sadistic load contained in a Renaissance blazon is not here clearly perceptible — for although film-editing is essentially based on deconstructive, paradigmatic methods (cutting), most of the time it aims at constructing a coherent narrative. As Nick Browne rightly explains, 'its [montage] deconstructive form of productivity is the result of both action and negation'.²⁰ In this view, the cinematic (visual) blazon is a more thorough or complete form of the early modern model emerging from a paradox insofar as it is built upon a dynamic of selection based on the fragmentation of a recorded performance (which is itself a construction). From a more practical point of view, the cinematic *blasonneur* resorts to the same technique

¹⁸ Nancy J. Vickers, 'Members Only: Marot's Anatomical Blazons', in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 3-21 (p. 8).

¹⁹ Hillman and Mazzio, pp. xi-xxix (p. xix).

²⁰ Nick Browne, ed., 'Introduction: The Politics of Representation: Cahiers du Cinema 1969-1972', in *Cahiers du Cinema: 1969-1972: The Politics of Representation*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 1-20 (p.1).

used by his early modern counterpart since anaphora is the first and foremost stylistic device common to both activities.

As far as *Titus* is concerned, the visual repetition of shots of body parts (mostly close-ups) stands for the textual anaphora (becoming a throbbing and haunting litany in Shakespeare's text) upon which the anatomical blazon is based. The selected body parts emblazoned in Taymor's *Titus* are self-evidently the hand and the head. As the film unfolds, alternations of praise and blame in the representations of these body parts closely coalesce with the modulations of Titus's identity as his masculinity or masculine attributes (reason, courage, honour, virtue, and *virtus* amongst others) are ruthlessly assaulted from all sides. The very first shots introducing Titus are particularly oriented towards the first category of *blasons anatomiques* which is the laudatory division:

- Shot 1: close-up in low angle of Titus's hand holding a victorious sword high in the air and putting it back into its sheath.
- Shot 2: extreme close-up in straight angle of his face.
- Shot 3: reaction shot in high angle of young Lucius.
- Shot 4: extreme close-up in low angle of Titus's face.
- Shot 5: extreme long shot in high angle of Titus and young Lucius standing in the centre of the Roman arena.

The choice of camera distance is here deliberately related to the intention of endowing these iconic body parts with 'subjectivity'. Shot 1 singularizes and objectifies, shot 2 scrutinises, shot 3 contextualises, shot 4 magnifies, and shot 5 distances us abruptly from the precedent shots and terminates the sequence. The close-up (even though it is not the unique tool at the disposal of the film-maker) encapsulates the essence of the

cinematic blazon. Indeed, the very process of magnification it involves reproduces the tropes of bodily fragmentation and individuation characteristic of the poetic style.

Whether it be laudatory or denigrating, the discursive emblazoning always resorts to the same stylistic devices; the difference dwells in the content, not the form. This apophthegm is not applicable to the performative, filmic blazon since content and form can vary at will in various combinations with one another: not only camera distances and angles but also the numerous visual tricks provided by montage sequences and optical effects involving the manipulation of the photographic process itself (e.g. picture-in-picture imposition) offer a wide range of options.

The low angle shot of Titus's hand holding a sword at the beginning of the film is a first statement of praise as far as his leadership and masculinity are concerned. His hand, figuratively cut from his body by the framing, loses its corporeality and gains in significance. The sword as a phallic symbol is here unavoidable, but it is also a metonym for the hand which takes in the semantic load of the warlike arm and sword. The war-related attributes conferred upon Titus are as many warrants of his masculinity. This heraldic armed hand is an index of a patriarchal, masculine, and domineering Rome determined to impose its rules over non-Roman populations. It is a cliché that the sword (as all other weapons) is the phallic symbol *par excellence* and is also emblematic of patriarchal order and hegemonic masculinity. This makes Titus Rome's hand, and his hand a metaphor for Rome's imperialism. The gendering of Rome as masculine is later reasserted by the paradoxical hyper-maleness of the she-wolf's head whose ferociously fanged gaping mouth is strangely reminiscent of the ancient bloodthirsty divinity Moloch-Baal. And yet, however powerful the weaponry symbolism might be, the end of shot 1 showing Titus's hand putting back the sword in its sheath is also revealing of the subjacent liminality of Taymor's Romanness as far as

gender is concerned. The war is over, the enemy is vanquished, therefore the sword can be sheathed. Shots 2 to 4 confirm Titus's emblazoning initiated in shot 1. The extreme close-ups of shots 2 and 4 isolate Titus's face within the spatial field of the frame (in the same way as shot 1 does with his hand), thereby operating a powerful figurative and visual fragmentation of his body. By filling the whole space of the frame, his face becomes an object of intense scrutiny, the subject-object of a second emblazoning. Whether it be in praise or denigration the nature of the blazon is mainly determinable by the expressiveness of his face. Lorne Buchman writes that the close-up in Shakespeare films 'takes us into a new space for the plays and adds an element to the performance dynamic the spectator must work with in the act of viewing' and 'creates a performance context in which the actor's physicalisation of the role has much to do with his or her work with facial expression'.²¹ What we can read on Titus's face is fatigue, honour, and pride: fatigue accumulated after months of war where he lost most of his sons, honour for having carried out his duty, and pride for returning victorious from the war.

The straight and low angles reinforce Titus's emblazoning in praise for these perspectives encode him as dominating and prominent: the archetype of the old venerable Roman hero. The whole interest or purpose of anatomical blazons residing mainly in the second constituent of the genre, the deconstruction of Titus's praise and masculine gendering, will occupy the remainder of the film. The Titus of the first two sequences of the film is a faithful representation of the image of the modern body as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his analysis of the Rabelaisian grotesque body:

The new bodily canon, in all its historic variations and different genres, presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual. That which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off (when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins) is

²¹ Lorne Buchman, *Still in Movement: Shakespeare on Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 64-66.

eliminated, hidden, or moderated. All orifices of the body are closed. The basis of the image is the individual, strictly limited mass, the impenetrable façade.²²

This is how Titus is represented through the emblazoning process of the editing. If we now move on to the sequence corresponding to the second part of the play's 3.1, a radical change has occurred in the way Titus's body is edited. Not only the cutting rhythm has been modified, but also the very content of the shots has undergone a spectacular transformation as far as the eponymous character is concerned. The sequence I am referring to displays how Titus accepts to lose his left hand in an attempt to save his sons' lives:

- Shot 1: establishing shot in high angle of the kitchen where a female cook is chopping vegetables on a board; Titus enters the room.
- Shot 2: medium long shot in high angle of Titus as he hurriedly sweeps away the vegetables from the chopping board.
- Shot 3: medium long shot in straight angle of Titus with camera following him as he hurriedly gets hold of a cloth.
- Shot 4: medium close-up in low angle of Aaron, trying different utensils.
- Shot 5: close-up in straight angle of young Lucius secretly looking at the scene from the half-open door.
- Shot 6: medium close-up in low angle of Aaron, playing with a chopper.
- Shot 7: close-up in high angle of Titus's hand placed on the board with the remaining of the chopped vegetables.
- Shot 8: close-up in high angle of Titus's face, looking up at Aaron.
- Shot 9: close-up in low angle of Aaron's face.
- Shot 10: close-up in high angle of Titus's face.

²² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 320.

- Shot 11: medium shot in low angle of Aaron severing Titus's hand.
- Shot 12: medium close-up in straight angle of Titus's hand being chopped off.
- Shot 13: close-up of young Lucius, looking horrified with his mouth wide opened.
- Shot 14: close-up of Titus's face, clenching his teeth in pain.
- Shot 15: long shot in high angle of Lucius and Marcus entering the kitchen.
- Shot 16: medium long shot in high angle of Titus who presses a cloth on his wound while Aaron is about to place the severed hand in a plastic bag.

It is quite fascinating to see how the carnivalesque suddenly breaks into the household of the Andronici after it has been confined within the limits of the Goths' sphere of influence until this sequence. Various images of carnival²³ and grotesque which are akin to the texts of Marot, Rabelais or Nashe also pervade Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and are exacerbated in Taymor's *Titus*. The 'kitchen sequence' in particular is both gruesome and grotesque. Setting Titus's dismemberment (which is also a Rabelaisian grotesque image) in an antique-looking kitchen is in itself a direct reference to Renaissance grotesque — this kitchen has nothing to do with a contemporary sterile one where the food is hidden away in storage spaces. In fact, Titus's kitchen could not possibly be more Rabelaisian: all kinds of vegetables and other provisions are spread abundantly on the massive wooden tables while different sorts of poultry as well as hams hang from butcher's hooks. Images of food are closely linked to those of the grotesque body, of devouring and being devoured. Interestingly, Thomas Nashe also shows a particular interest in assembling culinary and macabre images. As Neil Rhodes points out: 'He [Nashe] binds the domestic to the horrific, and one of his favourites

²³ Bakhtin writes that the carnival 'celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions... the feast of becoming, change', in *Rabelais and His World*, p. 10.

analogies is between cooking and death. The basis of his grotesque vision is, ultimately, the relationship between the human body and the external world, and the body's capacity for metamorphosis'.²⁴ In any case, the sickening metamorphosis of Tamora's sons into a pie reaches the summit of the grotesque, both in the play and in the film. The grotesque being a visual mode by nature, Julie Taymor exploits all the grotesque potentiality of the play and gives it full emphasis in her screen adaptation.

It is thus within the grotesque, non-heroic (this is not a battlefield), and somehow 'feminine' space of the kitchen that Titus loses his bodily integrity and jeopardises his gender identity. The abruptness and fast rhythm of the cuts in this sequence, and particularly in shots 11, 12, and 13, move the food and grotesque imageries into the foreground: what the viewer sees is a colourful montage of vegetables, cooking utensils, poultry, hands, and gaping mouths. An almost subliminal shot (lasting some tenths of a second) of young Lucius' face, with his mouth wide-open and framed by the doors ajar — a reference to Kubrick's *The Shining*? — is inserted between a shot of Aaron mindlessly chopping off Titus's hand and a shot of Titus's face, with his mouth wide-open too. The sudden reaction shot of young Lucius generates a coalescence between the image of the gaping mouth and the one of the open wound: Titus's stump (which is kept off screen). Indeed, in Taymor's film, the severing of his hand is given a particular emphasis in keeping with the dynamics of gender confusion mentioned earlier.

The trope of the severed hand is firmly embedded into the early modern discourse of dissection in which it takes on explicit gender connotations. Indeed, the loss of masculine identity is implied by the reductive process of dissection. As Jonathan Sawday contends: 'For the male body to become the explicit focus of male desire (...) it

²⁴ Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1980), p. 157.

first had to be re-created as female. It is this fourth element, for example, that helps us to understand the 'feminisation' of the male body when it lay on the dissecting slab'.²⁵ In losing his left hand on an improvised culinary dissecting table, Titus is also deprived of his masculinity and of his social credibility. The series of shots and reverse shots in close-up between Aaron and Titus, the torturer and his consenting victim, positions the old Roman general in an utterly inferior and submissive role. The point of view is here significant since the alternation between low and high angles accentuates the power struggle between the two protagonists. Titus's emasculation which is kept implicit until this sequence becomes fully apparent through the severing of his hand.

In this kitchen sequence, Titus's emblazoning moves onto another perspective with the close-up of his hand waiting to be cut off on the chopping board like an ordinary piece of meat. We are now very far from the initial image of the heroic warrior whose hand holds a sword, scatters his sons' ashes, or blesses his daughter. The shift from a discursive blazon involving figurative divisions to a performative one finally takes place. Concomitantly, the grotesque and satirical load characterising the Goths takes over and contaminates the Romans as a repeated close-up shows us Titus's hand ending up in a freezer bag like a piece of meat. The food imagery combined with the trope of bodily fragmentation creates a powerful semantic whirlpool which pulls apart Titus's identity, body, family, and to a larger extent, nation. From the kitchen sequence onwards, the former soldier is but the shadow of himself, a King Lear figure who develops signs of hysterical behaviour: he laughs at the sight of his sons' heads, spits at childlike drawings he has made in his bath, mumbles incoherent words... Though no longer considered as a clinical disorder, hysteria typically involves the conversion of psychic trauma into somatic manifestations.²⁶ Speaking of King Lear, Bruce R. Smith

²⁵ Sawday, p. 213.

²⁶ In *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Bruce R. Smith contends that King Lear's loss of reason also entails the loss of his masculinity

ascribes his loss of reason to ‘the triumph of this female passion within’, to ‘a loss of both masculine authority and masculine identity’.²⁷ With Titus’s loss of sanity, the grotesque thrives. When insanity allows uninhibited corporeal expressions and exaggerations, the ‘bodily life’²⁸ takes over the intellect.

Immediately following the severing of Titus’s hand, the carnivalesque figure of the clown intervenes appropriately in a sequence which recalls the films of Federico Fellini and presents the tragedy from the angle of derision. The circus music accompanying the clown and the young girl assisting him adds to the grotesqueness of the situation while a fast cross-cutting between young Lucius and the young girl generates discordant images of innocence, playfulness, and unconcern. The cross-cutting between the happy expectation on young Lucius’ face and what the clown exhibits in his van epitomises the film’s mode. As Bakhtin puts it: ‘The essence of the grotesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life’.²⁹ Images of life and death coexist in a frenzied saraband that upsets the established authority (*auctoritas*). Ambivalence is therefore at the core of the grotesque as it is particularly the case in Renaissance England as Neil Rhodes writes: ‘It is, then, not only the physicality of language itself, but also the imaginative process of associating disparate aspects of the physical world, which constitutes the peculiarity of Elizabethan grotesque’.³⁰

With a close-up on Martius and Quintus’s heads floating in specimen jars, their death is spectacularised as a freak show, as a surreal vision. This grotesque exposure of severed body parts harks back both to the early modern science of anatomisation designed for the voyeuristic gaze of the audience and to the literary genre of the and the subsequent development of an hysterical behaviour.

²⁷ Smith, pp. 1-2.

²⁸ The phrase is borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin.

²⁹ Bakhtin, p. 62.

³⁰ Rhodes, p. 157.

contreblason. Positioned in the context of early modern culture, the hysterical response induced in Titus as he laughs helplessly at this macabre collection registers an uncontrolled release of pent-up, paroxysmal grief, a form of defence against oppression, and a way of escaping sentimentality. From a contemporary point of view, his fit of laughter does not really fit into a defensive and even combative attitude but rather into a mental disorder which is what the *mise en scène* tries to suggest by showing us Titus and Lavinia on each side of the screen. The coalescence of grief between father and daughter (and Titus's ensuing loss of masculine identity) is a powerful motif in Taymor's film. It is not only apparent in this shot, but also in the fact that they are similarly rendered: they are edited in the same fashion. They are the only characters who are represented through montage sequences (what Julie Taymor calls 'the concept of The Penny Arcade Nightmares'³¹) reflecting their inner life and hallucinations: Lavinia recalling her rape and mutilation, and Titus picturing the execution of his sons Martius and Quintus.

Originally conceived by Julie Taymor for her 1994 stage production of *Titus Andronicus* in New York, these sequences were devised 'to portray the inner landscapes of the mind as affected by the external actions' and to appear 'at various points throughout the play, counterpointing the realistic events in a dreamlike, surreal, and mythic manner'.³² On stage, the PANs appeared behind ragged red velvet curtains in floating gold frames and 'positioned behind a translucent layer of plastic that was scarred with scratches and spattered and smudged with black ink, like a rotting old photograph'.³³ More appropriately, these *tableaux vivants* were like old silent films. This coexpression of theatrical and cinematic elements (frame, screen, curtains, and

³¹ Julie Taymor, *Titus: The Illustrated Screenplay* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), p. 183.

³² Julie Taymor, *Playing with Fire*, p. 186.

³³ Julie Taymor, *Playing with Fire*, p. 186.

proscenium) that Taymor devised for her stage production was meant to enrich the audience's viewing experience by making them subjective participants and objective observers at the same time: 'I wanted them both inside and outside the events, reeling with the horror in their bellies and challenged with their dilemmas in their mind'.³⁴ Moreover, the frame that encapsulated the PANs had its parallel because 'the entire production was contained within a giant proscenium gold frame and red curtain, connecting it to the PANs and referring to the vaudeville stages and revenge theatricals of old'.³⁵ This double framing was meant to put — quite literally — the actions into perspectives and to encourage 'a constant shifting of audience involvement in the work'.³⁶

The paradoxical *assemblage* of empathy and alienation that allows the spectators to be both entertained and intellectually challenged functioned on stage because of the very mechanical intrusion of the cinematic apparatus into the theatrical. In adapting the play to the cinema a few years later, the PANs were kept and integrated into the main diegesis with the same intention in mind but by using a different strategy. If on stage, the double framing worked as a Brechtian alienating device, on screen this function was performed by the creative manipulation of the editing. The dialectical relation between cinema and theatre that functioned on stage was modulated into another kind of tension-generating relation within the sole sphere of the cinematic. Thus, as far as the structuring of the viewer's reaction to *Titus* is concerned, it is interesting to resort to film theorist Gilles Deleuze and his taxonomic concepts of the 'movement-image' and 'time-image'. Deleuze sees a historical *fracture* between a cinema based on relations of causality and a cinema of pure abstraction that transcends the rules of narrativity, thereby associating the 'movement-image' with pre-war 'old

³⁴ Ibid., p. 184.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 194.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

cinema' and the 'time-image' with the modern cinema produced by, amongst others, the French New Wave film-makers. In defining the 'movement-image' in terms of classical Hollywood editing and the 'time-image' in terms of cause-effect discontinuities generated by 'irrational cuts' which in turn produce *mnemosignes* (memory-images) and *onirisignes* (dream-images) -- my point here -- Deleuze worked towards a film theory able to comprehend the totality of the cinematic apparatus as well as spectatorial corporeality. 'What is important', writes Deleuze, 'is the possibility of a cinema of the brain which brings together all the powers, as much as the cinema of the body equally brought them together as well'.³⁷ I would like to argue that in *Titus*, within the 'movement-images' of the diegesis, the 'Penny Arcade Nightmares' -- which represent the characters' inner life -- function as both *onirisignes* and *mnemosignes*. These, because of their purely cognitive essence, demand for the audience's undivided attention and active participation: they ask the viewer to remember *and* to imagine. Simultaneously, these collisions of 'action-images' and 'time-images' generate frictions in the viewing experience that parallel the on-stage tensions between the cinematic and theatrical modes.

With the use of superimposition, dissolves, and slow/fast motion, these 'Penny Arcade Nightmares' illustrate this ability that Surrealist directors like Luis Buñuel and André Breton ascribed to the cinema: 'the transcendent capacity to liberate what was conventionally repressed, to mingle the known and the unknown, the mundane and the oneiric, the quotidian and the marvelous'.³⁸ Created as pure nightmares of fragmentation and destruction, these hallucinatory sequences are saturated with violent, flashing images of bodily partitions, immolation, and predation. As far as *Titus* is

³⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 173-174.

³⁸ Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), p.56.

concerned, this is the moment when the old Andronicus fully realises the scope of his tragic downfall, the ruin of his family which finds its expression through a series of shots abounding with baroque imageries born from his grief and feeling of powerlessness:

- Shot 1: medium close-up in straight angle of Titus, lying on the road.
- Shot 2: extreme Long shot in low angle of an angel playing the trumpet and moving closer to Titus.
- Shot 3: medium close-up in straight angle of Titus looking up at the angel.
- Shot 4: long shot in low angle of the angel with Titus in the foreground, extreme close-up on his face which fades out while the angel fades in on the right hand side of the frame with an altar in the extreme background.
- Shot 5: medium long shot in straight angle of a sheep waiting for its sacrifice on the altar with the angel on the left hand side.
- Shot 6: medium long shot in straight angle of the sheep with a picture-in-picture imposition of a sword sliding down through the animal as the background sky becomes bloodstained.
- Shot 7: medium long shot in straight angle of the sheep, the head of which has been substituted with Mutius's (his name is written on screen) while the sword still cuts through its body and the angel glides around the altar.
- Shot 8: long shot in straight angle of the altar fading out in the background as a cohort of angels fills the frame: the camera moves from the interior of an angel's trumpet to a bird's eye view of Titus lying on the ground, Christ-like with his arms outstretched.
- Shot 9: close-up in straight angle of Titus's face.

This montage sequence provides us with an insight into Titus's psyche, these 'anarchic, liberating energies of the Unconscious'³⁹ that suddenly get realised. Renaissance iconography and Biblical imagery converge vividly in this phantasmagoric and proleptic sequence (Penny Arcade Nightmare #2) by means of dreamlike dissolves and picture-in-picture impositions. The rules of continuity editing used at the beginning of the film in the representation of normative Romanitas (e.g. the Roman bath sequence) are here suspended at the precise moment when this normativeness is endangered, and so close to annihilation. Resorting suddenly to discontinuity editing techniques allows the film-makers to represent a Titus torn apart between order and chaos. The angel of Apocalypse — as described by John in the Book of Revelation — moving forward in slow motion against a surreal blazing sky in shot 2 serves as an announcer of doom. Appearing and disappearing by way of dissolves, the angel is the guiding line of Titus's imagination as he pleads helplessly for the lives of his sons. With its trumpet, this angel of Apocalypse that seems to be inspired from a painting by Titian or Veronese, announces what is yet to come: the violent and tragic end of an era. Titus's male anxiety in the face of the imminent loss of his masculine identity and power finds an expression in this series of images of bodily fragmentation and unnatural recomposition that can be seen in shots 6, 7, and 8. As the stormy sky grows spectacularly bloodstained, the sword cutting through a sheep with Mutius's face — a reminiscence of David Cronenberg's kafkaesque *Brundel-fly* — is as anonymous as the instrument of revenge of an implacable and invisible (masculine) hand: this sword is no longer emblematic of Titus's maleness as it was the case in the first scenes of the film.

By working directly on the film and thereby creating an assemblage of visually powerful tropes, the micro-editing of this sequence produces an allegoric vision — an *onirische* — that asserts the general's downfall. The extreme close-up of Titus's head

³⁹ Stam, p.57.

in shot 9 as he lies on the stony ground at a crossroads is a counterblazon of the shot used in his first sequence. With his face horizontally positioned on the ground in the same fashion as Mutius lies on the altar, Titus's head is cut (separated from his body) by the edge of the frame thus repeating the motif of his sons' decapitation and portending his own subsequent mutilation. As he becomes fully aware of the tragic consequences of his obstinate decisions at the crossroads of his life, Titus loses all control over others, over his life, and even over his own body as the compulsive, hysterical movements of his hands betray his vulnerability. The loss of bodily coherence felt by Titus is but the consequence and physical expression of the disruption of gender roles. As the chief representative of Roman values, Titus is therefore the one who is assaulted from all parts, his masculinity being threatened and caught within the gender conflict opposing Goths and Romans, while his own body becomes the locus where this conflict is given full emphasis.

It is not only the editing that actively contributes to the creation of meaning through his body: the costumes also play a noteworthy function in modelling his shifting identity. The muddy, bronze armour, and helmet that protected his body and displayed the marks of his masculinity give way, little by little, to grotesque, soft, shapeless woolly coats depriving him of his proud *virtus*. The progressive loss of his manly attributes culminates at the end of the film when he welcomes his enemies dressed as a cook. Carnival imagery and 'kitchen humour'⁴⁰ set the tone of the grand *finale* where both death by spoon and candlestick as well as fast, jarring cutting de-dramatise the extreme violence of the scene. Titus is denied a heroic, soldier's death he does not deserve, and dies like a buffoon, contaminated and vanquished by the Goths' corruption. The politics of gender invasion and domination at the root of

⁴⁰ Ernst Robert Curtius, 'Kitchen Humor and Other Ridicula', in *European Literature and The Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 431-435.

Taymor's filmic adaptation is therefore the principal motivation of Taymor and Bonnot's editing strategy as far as *Titus* is concerned. The way Taymor composes her shots is particularly revealing of one of *Titus Andronicus*'s main narrative lines: Roman *virtus* under attack. In fact, signs of hidden collaborative authorial voices emerge from the intricate visual tapestry of the 'Penny Arcade Nightmares'. They bear the mark not only of Julie Taymor's authorial agency but also of her collaborators'. As Taymor explains, 'while I was devising the notion of the PANs, Derek McLane, the set designer, and Constance Hoffman, the costume designer, collaborated with me in finding the appropriate context — time and place — for the play'.⁴¹ However, she also adds, 'the PANs, which I had also conceived for the stage as theatrically surreal visions of violence, were created for the film by using completely cinematic techniques'.⁴² In fact, despite Taymor's contradictory accounts regarding the issue of authorship, but because it is (albeit not exclusively) through the process of film-editing and with the collaboration of Françoise Bonnot that Taymor has been able to adapt her theatrical visions into the cinematic medium, I would like to argue that her authorial agency resides, at least partially, in the collaborative work which also positions Bonnot as an active, albeit unacknowledged, collaborative *auteur*.

4.3 Female Dualism

Within the phallogentric and patriarchal world of *Titus*, women's voices are not heard. They are washed away in Tamora's tears for her son and in Lavinia's tears for her dead brothers and husband, and for her horrifying rape and mutilations. These women have no choice but to obey the men's orders and surrender to their good will. Julie Taymor proposes two different representations of female reaction to patterns of male

⁴¹ Julie Taymor, *Playing with Fire*, p. 191.

⁴² Julie Taymor, *Playing with Fire*, p. 191.

domination. In analysing the way power politics and gender conflicts are represented and structured in the film, I have argued that it is through the elaborate cutting (literally and figuratively) of the main male characters' bodies that the fear of racial invasion has been reshaped into a visceral anxiety as far as gender identity and normativity are concerned. Within a society based on the clear-cut separation of gender roles and 'morally correct' sexuality, the sudden and violent breaking out of gender confusion and deviant sexual behaviours epitomised by the Goths signifies the beginning of the end.

At this point, I would like to focus my attention on the female characters of *Titus*. I want to determine how these women are represented, always, but not exclusively, from the point of view of film-editing, and how their bodies are used in a context of such physical violence and gender inversion. What discourses of femininity do Taymor and her collaborators suggest? Do they use the cinematic medium to enlarge or reduce the parts of Tamora and Lavinia as Shakespeare designed them? How do they use the cinematic techniques to develop their own interpretations of the main female characters? Is there a similarity between the cutting strategy used for Tamora and the one used for Chiron and Demetrius? I will try to answer these questions in focussing my analysis on specific sequences offering material relevant enough to my argumentation.

4.3.1 Tamora, the Amazonian Woman

Through Jessica Lange's Tamora, the queen of Goths, the Amazonian myth is re-enacted as it has been before an incalculable number of times. In Greek Mythology, the Amazons were a tribe of women warriors living in Cappadoce under the sovereignty of a queen (Hippolyte being the most famous of them). The ancient Greeks derived

their names from *mazos*, breast, and privative prefix *a*, revealing that, according to different legends, in order to shoot with their bow with more ease and according to different legends, they had to have their right breast either removed or burnt. The fantasy of the domineering woman knew a revival during the body-conscious period of the sixteenth century, which is at the time when Shakespeare wrote *Titus Andronicus*. The Amazons who for the ancient Greeks represented barbarianism — they threatened their values by refusing to conform to their standards of civilisation and proposing a subversive model of society — continued to materialise the same threat in the early modern period through the then newly discovered tribes of the New World.

In her essay on the Amazonian lore and the conversion to Christianity of the New World Indians in the *Amadis Cycle*, Alison Taufer writes that ‘Amazon customs (...) invert the values of Greek patriarchal culture’ and that ‘Amazons also represent the threat of barbarian invasion and the potential destruction of Greek civilization’.⁴³ In the same way, portrayed as an Amazonian queen, Tamora represents another threat to the Romanness depicted in *Titus*. Indeed, if her sons embody the danger of sexual perversion and violence, she represents the threat of gender and power disruption in Rome’s fixed social order where leadership rhymes with patriarchy.

Barbarian is indeed the term that comes to the mind when she first appears in the film. First of all it is through the costumes that a very flamboyant and unambiguous binary opposition is established between Goths and Romans. In their first sequence for instance, through the bars of the cage where they are locked in, we can discern that Tamora and her sons are wrapped in large and coarse animal skins which encode them as uncivilised and undeniably ‘other’. The furs are another reference to the Amazonian

⁴³ Alison Taufer, ‘The Only Good Amazon Is a Converted Amazon: The Woman Warrior and Christianity in the “Amadis Cycle”’, in *Playing with Gender: A Renaissance Pursuit*, ed. Jean R. Brink, Maryanne C. Horowitz, and Allison P. Coudert (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 35-51 (p. 36).

myth. Indeed, according to the legend, it is said that the Amazons celebrated the cult of the goddess Artemis,⁴⁴ sister of Apollo and divine huntress, whose attributes were not only the bow and the quiver but also the bear as far as the more Celtic Artemis is concerned. The trope of the queen warrior is therefore written all over her tribal apparel and even on her skin as, just like her sons, Tamora is tattooed on her arms and shoulders. Even vanquished and enchained, this queen is still ready to fight for survival, still determined and pugnacious, brimming with raw, animal drive and destructive fire that springs out metaphorically around her in a shot where she stands face to face with Titus.

The way she is filmed and edited is particularly interesting to notice. Indeed, there is a fascinating ambiguity surfacing in the camerawork and the cutting of her scenes. The choice of camera angles and distances throughout the film is revealing of a certain attitude of the director and editor --- who happen to be women (Julie Taymor and Françoise Bonnot) --- toward one of Shakespeare's most malicious female characters (King Lear's eldest daughters and Lady Macbeth also deserving their rank in the taxonomy). The sequence showing the sacrifice of Tamora's first son Alarbus is self-evident. As she pleads for his life on her knees, always shot in low and straight angles, the camera stays very close to her face in order to magnify her grief and the nobility and courage she manifests in her grief. Moreover, the cuts remain invisible and at a low frequency thereby providing enough time and visual stability for the viewers to grant Tamora their attention and perhaps even their sympathy. As it is often said by film editors, the length of the shots plays an important part in the way the audience reacts to the characters and perceives them: the more they are seen in close-ups and long takes, the greater the impression on the audience will be and the greater its sympathy for them

⁴⁴ In Book 5 of *The Faerie Queene*, Spencer's Amazonian queen Radigund is also an Artemis (or Diana) figure who has the moon for attribute.

will grow too. We have seen earlier that the scenes showing Chiron and Demetrius are mainly characterised by a very fast cutting rhythm as well as frenzied camera movements that unsettle the viewer and therefore contribute to alienate the young Goths. The sequence of Alarbus's sacrifice indicates a first discrepancy in the filming and editing strategies as far as Tamora and her sons are concerned. Further on, in the first *onirisiqne* of the film – the 'Penny Arcade Nightmare #1' – the Goth queen is graphically constructed and represented both as the antithetical counterpart of Titus and as his alter ego:

- Shot 1: freeze frame of a medium long shot in straight angle of Tamora and Titus facing each other in profile, standing alone in the forum; the screen is filled with flames as the camera zooms in and as burning limbs fly towards the camera: between Tamora and Titus, Alarbus's torso appears through the fire and is slashed in the same way as Titus did: the chest seems to be breathing in and out faster and faster until it stops and everything is blown away with the flames.
- Shot 2: reverse shot in low angle and medium long shot of Tamora and Titus with the Mussolini building in the background: the last flames fade out as Tamora walks up the stairs: dissolve into:
- Shot 3: long shot in high angle of Tamora walking up the stairs in slow motion: dissolve into:
- Shot 4: medium long shot in high angle of Tamora still in slow motion: dissolve into; • Shot 5: medium close-up of Tamora smiling triumphantly.

Tamora is now the empress of Rome but the Amazonian woman has not vanished: she is only hidden beneath the ostentatious veneer of Romanitas, beneath the gold and glitters. Barbarianism is still creeping beneath the appearances of conversion to the values of the republic and her subordination to Saturninus can only be fake. The theme

of conversion and tamedness is a commonplace in the Amazonian narratives of the early modern period, whether it be in the book 5 of Spencer's *Faerie Queene* or in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. As Margaret M. Sullivan puts it:

The myth of the Amazon inverts the dominance/submission polarities of gender formation in a patriarchal culture, with one important difference: in the matriarchal state of the Amazons, the dominant gender, woman, does not marry: after mating to reproduce their kind, the women either kill or dismiss the men who have inseminated them. The Amazons' male children are sometimes killed at birth, sometimes sent to their fathers, and often crippled and forced to spin. Such variant forms of the myth attempt to explain the subordination of women in a patriarchal culture.⁴⁵

The theoretical dichotomy between a 'masculine' political power and a 'feminine', grotesque body brought together in the figure of the Amazonian queen was a very subversive model during the Renaissance: so subversive that it had to be defused. Taymor's Tamora represents the same kind of dichotomy, but contrary to the early modern narratives, *Titus* does not convey the themes of conversion or tamedness. The Goth queen is neither converted to Romanness nor tamed by Saturninus, the weakling emperor. This glamorous and manipulative Tamora assumes and reconciles both her femininity and her political power since she uses the former to achieve the latter. Above all, vengeance for her dead son is burning inside her and this is therefore in a surreal inferno that destruction and revenge are represented in the first shot of this nightmarish sequence where a severed body allegorises the fragmentation and annihilation of both Goths and Romans with Tamora and Titus standing for their respective nation.

The visionary flood of images, the eerie picture-in-picture impositions composing this shot are both anaphoric (repetitive) and cataphoric (heralding) since they re-enact Alarbus's sacrifice and announce what the viewer is about to see, that is the amazing succession of limb severings and killings. The same technique relying on

⁴⁵ Margaret M. Sullivan, 'Amazons and Aristocrats: The function of Pyrocles' Amazon Role in Sidney's Revised "Arcadia"', in *Playing With Gender: A Renaissance Pursuit*, ed. Jean R. Brink, Maryanne C. Horowitz, and Allison P. Coudert (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 62-81 (p. 74).

the fragmentation of the film material will be used in the other 'Penny Arcade Nightmares'. As far as shots 3, 4, and 5 are concerned, we can see that the Goth queen is also granted her own special filming and editing strategy. Indeed, these three shots of Tamora walking up the stairs in slow motion with the camera zooming progressively on her face where a triumphant smile appears on her lips reveal the film-makers' sympathy for her. The use of slow motion combined with the linking dissolves as the camera zooms in soften this sequence, as if the violence unleashed in the first shot vanishes suddenly, giving way to an unexpected softness. The editing of these shots adds another touch to her characterisation. By preferring the delicacy of the dissolve to the neutrality or even sometimes harshness of the straight cut, the film-makers show some sympathy toward their character. Holding her head high, walking gracefully, the Tamora represented in those shots is the expression of elegance, self-confidence, and nobility. Moreover, by showing her from above, the high camera angle does not emphasise her superiority but reinforces the feelings of sympathy that the editing tries to prompt into the viewer. Here we are quite far from the cutting of Titus's body by the emblazoning editing methods: the integrity of her body and therefore of her identity is left untouched. In the cold silver light, she displays Amazonian beauty, strength, and femininity: nobility and barbarianism are reconciled by the editing process.

For the Amazons, motherhood is not an end in itself but a means to an end: it is only a means to perpetuate their race, not in any case a social function or an act of love and devotion. As far as Tamora is concerned, even though she is a mother figure for her husband Saturninus, there is no sequence (except her tears for Alarbus) in Taymor's film where she displays her maternal feelings, her interest in her black baby boy. Paradoxically, it seems that her desire for revenge over Titus is not only the consequence of her first son's death, but that it also stems from the fact that the Roman

general has defeated her, that she was vanquished, and wants to pay him back in the same coin. Thus, there is no particular display of her motherhood (her relationships with Chiron and Demetrius look more incestuous than maternal), especially as far as her baby boy is concerned. They never appear together in the same shot and there is therefore no visual connection between the two of them to make her maternal feelings apparent whereas a strong link is created between the baby boy and Aaron (another example of a Shakespearean mono-parental cell where the man is the only educator) who plays both the mother and father figure for this child.

If we move further on in the film and take a closer look at another sequence — the last ‘Penny Arcade Nightmare’ of the film — we see another facet of the bloodthirsty, warlike Goth Queen. The visionary sequence I am referring to is built as a part of Titus’s hallucinations. He is actually in his bath (a reference to the painting representing the assassinated French revolutionary Jean Paul Marat) when he suddenly starts to hear voices:

- Shot 1: close-up in straight angle of Titus’s face, hearing Tamora’s distorted voice and carnivalesque music, cut to;
- Shot 2: extreme close-up in straight angle of Tamora’s blackened eyes while a third eye appears between them in picture-in-picture imposition.
- Shot 3: close-up in straight angle of Titus’s face (the rate of the film is slowed down in order to produce distorted images of his face).
- Shot 4: long shot in straight angle of Tamora, Chiron, and Demetrius in a tableaulike arrangement, dissolve into;
- Shot 5: close-up in straight angle of Titus’s face (same distorted images), dissolve into;
- Shot 6: medium long shot in straight angle of Tamora, dissolve into;

- Shot 7: close-up in straight angle of Titus, dissolve into;
- Shot 8: close-up in straight angle of Tamora's face, dissolve into;
- Shot 9: medium shot in straight angle of Tamora framed in a vignette, dissolve into;
- Shot 10: medium close-up in straight angle of Chiron sporting the wings of an owl on his head, dissolve into;
- Shot 11: medium shot in straight angle of Tamora and Chiron in the vignettes, dissolve into;
- Shot 12: close-up in straight angle of Demetrius, dissolve into;
- Shot 13: extreme close-up of Titus's face, cut to;
- Shot 14: long shot of Tamora, dissolve into;
- Shot 15: medium long shot of Tamora, Chiron, and Demetrius framed in the vignettes as Revenge, Rape, and Murder.

There is something quite touching in the way the 'Penny Arcade Nightmare #4' is constructed. The allegoric and grotesque mixture of styles of the actors' costumes and of the settings combined with the almost still life quality of the shots possess the rococo signature of George Méliès's experimental early films. The authorial agency of Françoise Bonnot resides in her collaboration to Taymor's *mise en scène* through her creative *montage*: it underlies the whole sequence and makes it work, for this is a very picturesque composition that she has created. This sequence has a life of its own in the sense that would it be detached from the film, it would yet remain perfectly intelligible and keep its interest and appeal. As far as bodily representations are concerned, Tamora takes her part in an allegory: she is Revenge incarnate (as mentioned in the playtext: 'I am Revenge, sent from th' infernal kingdom/To ease the gnawing vulture of thy mind' (5.2.30-31).), while Chiron and Demetrius are respectively portrayed as Rape and

Murder. Borrowing a technique of characterisation from the Japanese Nō drama, Taymor strips Tamora of her humanity so that her body becomes the canvas upon which blind violence and monstrosity are eroticised. Revenge in a female body with masculine attributes has a face: it has the appearances of a Medusa who has traded her serpent-haired visage for a crown of menacing daggers. Interestingly, Freud interprets the mythological theme of the Medusa's head as a symbol of castration:

The hair upon Medusa's head is frequently represented in works of art in the form of snakes, and these once again derived from the castration complex. It is a remarkable fact that, however frightening they may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror. This is a confirmation of the technical rule according to which a multiplication of penis symbols signifies castration.⁴⁶

Intercut with shots of Titus's face, the extreme close-up on her eyes in shot 2 conjures up her Medusan nature. By taking on the iconography of the Medusa, she does not simply embody Revenge: she is the origin of the transgressive inward gaze and of bodily fragmentation (castration). While Titus is left disarmed, completely harmless at the brink of senility and impotence, Tamora displays her symbols of power *on* her body. By appropriating the attributes of masculinity (the crown of daggers), she confronts Titus with the self-reflective image of his disintegrated identity.

Finally, her shieldlike, grotesquely enormous breasts and belly --- another reference to Renaissance culture since the then incomprehension of the reproductive functions of the female body made it aberrant, threatening, even demonic, and therefore grotesque --- are nothing but the materialisation of her propensity to engender and spread destruction. 'Evil feeds on itself': this is what we can read from the series of dissolves forming the demonic triad, connecting Tamora-Revenge to her offspring

Chiron-Rape and Demetrius-Murder. The construction of Tamora, in comparison with

⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Medusa's Head', in *Collected Papers*, v, Miscellaneous Papers 1888-1938, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press Ltd and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1950), pp. 105-106 (p. 105).

the male characters, is characterised by a very emblematic and gender-centered editing. Her association with the Amazonian queen warrior established from her very first scene is maintained during the whole film and even accentuated in the 'Penny Arcade Nightmare #4' where it becomes an hyperbole of the myth thanks to an allegoric variation on Greek mythology.

4.3.2 Lavinia, the 'Marilyn' Icon

This Lavinia played by Laura Fraser is a river of blood. When it comes to the representation of characters such as Tamora's sons, Titus's son Mutius, or Lavinia, visual references to animals are numerous in Taymor's *Titus*. Whether it be in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* or in Taymor's adaptation of the play, while her aggressors are portrayed as wild, ferocious animals, the parallel between Lavinia and a doe seems to be inescapable. If keeping one's bodily integrity, identity or sanity is not an easy enterprise in this *Titus*, keeping one's humanity (figuratively or physically) is not less problematic. The dynamics of capture and loss linked to the trope of fateful mutability which are so pervasive in Taymor's film take shape in the construction of Lavinia's character, or rather in the methodological, clinical, and yet baroque deconstruction of her body.

Lavinia is saturated with so many images of aggression, torture, hunting, and desolation that she becomes simultaneously an overstatement of her condition and a monstrous reduction of herself. The idea of spectacle is therefore central to her representation. Through her passivity, she is very much the nexus of everybody's gaze: subjected to Saturninus's thirst for power, Tamora's hatred, Chiron and Demetrius's lust, Marcus's pity, Titus's despair, and young Lucius's empathy. Her external moderation and passivity is rendered by a slow cutting rhythm and static, straight angle

medium shots throughout the film with the exception of her 'Penny Arcade Nightmare' sequences. This simple, classical editing style also asserts her femininity and normativeness, for she is the emblem of normality and therefore of Rome in the chaotic, ultra-violent world of *Titus*. In fact, she seems to have an existence and a function only when in relation to the other characters, only through their gaze.

Unlike her father, Lavinia's identity is not at stake here: she has nothing else to express but her misery, her loss, the 'trimming' of her life. As an object of spectacle, she is associated with one of the most renowned film star in western contemporary culture: Marilyn Monroe. The reference to Marilyn seems a bit odd because it endows Lavinia with the characteristics of a sex symbol, and it is thus rather difficult to reconcile the model of the respectful, obedient Lavinia with the sensual, curvaceous, and man-eating characters impersonated by Marilyn Monroe. In pure postmodern logic, Julie Taymor explains that 'I was interested in exploiting our store of not only classical but also contemporary myths'.⁴⁷ The 'Penny Arcade Nightmare #3' is a reworking of the famous sequence from Billy Wilder's *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) that crystallised Marilyn Monroe's sex symbol image for ever. The sequence in question shows Marilyn trying to keep her white dress down as a warm draft coming from a subway opening lifts it up and reveals her legs. The parallel between Lavinia and Marilyn's character in *The Seven Year Itch* is not so much articulated as it is between Lavinia and Marilyn as a public figure. Being a constant attraction to the public's attention, being subjected to the public's voyeuristic and demanding gaze contributed to destroy or perhaps even destroyed Monroe's life. Standing on a tree stump, Lavinia is exposed to the gaze of her torturers who turn her into an object of spectacle and who make the gaze of the camera overtly masculine.

⁴⁷ Julie Taymor, *Playing with Fire*, p. 188.

By transforming the crime into a spectacle, Chiron and Demetrius change their status: they switch from the active role of aggressors to the passive role of viewers — of voyeurs. Lavinia is held up as a trophy by this politics of the gaze and her objectification — as she cannot express herself any longer — becomes clear when a medium long shot shows her as the organic continuation of the stump with her hands replaced by a bundle of twigs and a flow of blood spurting out of her mouth like sap. In a later sequence, the motif is reasserted when young Lucius brings Lavinia ‘new hands’ carved in wood. The concepts of her metamorphosis and spectacularisation, of her dehumanisation and transformation into an emblem are cleverly summarised in the nightmarish and baroque recollection of her assault in which she pictures herself as a defenceless doe standing on a pedestal (or perhaps even a sacrificial altar?) and being attacked by two tigers. As depicting the whole sequence would be very difficult and tedious because the shots last only a few tenths of a second, I will limit my description to the more significant and relevant movements:

- Shot 1: tableau-like picture-in-picture imposition in a bluish light of Lavinia in her white Marilyn-like underdress, a doe’s head, a tiger, Chiron, Lavinia’s face in close-up.
- Shot 2: medium close-up in high angle of the ground where Lavinia writes ‘Chiron’.
- Shot 3: close-up in straight angle of Lavinia’s face.
- Shot 4: picture-in-picture imposition of different close-ups from Chiron’s head in the same cold blue lighting and forest surrounding, fading into:
- Shot 5: close-up in straight angle of Lavinia’s face, fading into:
- Shot 6: medium close-up in straight angle of a doe’s head:

- Shot 7: medium close-up in high angle of the ground where Lavinia writes 'Chiron'.
- Shot 8: medium close-up in low angle of Lavinia's tortured face.
- Shot 9: medium close-up in high angle of the ground where Lavinia is now writing 'Demetrius'.
- Shot 10: picture-in-picture imposition of Demetrius and a tiger.
- Shot 11: medium close-up in high angle of Lavinia's writing.
- Shot 12: tableaulike picture-in-picture imposition of Lavinia on a pedestal with two pouncing tigers on each side.

Like the other 'Penny Arcade Nightmares' of the film, this PAN #3 was originally devised for the stage production of *Titus Andronicus*. It is intercut with shots of Lavinia writing the names of her aggressors on the ground with the help of a stick. As the extremely fast cutting takes us from one narrative level to another (from a diegetic to an extradiegetic sequence which is itself a *mise en abîme* of her off screen assault) and from one mode to another (real to surreal, 'movement-image' to 'time-image'), paradoxically the violence and horror of her rape and mutilations acquire an eerie beauty: the Marilyn Monroe intertext colliding with images of predation glamorises her ordeal and makes it even more barbarous and unnatural. As Taymor explains, 'The famous image of Marilyn Monroe holding her dress down over the subway grate seemed an apt modern iconic parallel to add to this scene of humiliation and rape'.⁴⁸

When life develops to the point of becoming monstrous, stirring from all sides, all angles, even the grotesque and the horrific is beautiful. It is also interesting that Julie Taymor chose to show us Lavinia's assault in a sequence representing her recollection and interpretation of what happened to her instead of filming the 'actual' scene. This

⁴⁸ Julie Taymor, *Playing with Fire*, p. 188.

choice seems in total harmony with the general thematic strategy of the film. Showing us the scene from Lavinia's point of view and giving us access to her inner thoughts is another statement of her complete lack of privacy (or full exposure), of the intrusion of otherness into her life. Once again the spectator is asked to remember and to imagine.

The elaborate collage that composes the sequence directs the audience's attention to the editing work, to the fact that we are watching a spectacle, and thereby reiterates the trope of the spectacular, of the macabre voyeurism we have seen earlier with the carnivalesque display of Titus's hand and of his sons' heads in the clown's van. Finally, while the fragmented composition of this sequence intensifies the bodily reduction Lavinia has been submitted to, the very straightforwardness and jerkiness of the montage which transforms Chiron and Demetrius into two wild beasts that seem to pounce on her by means of flashing jump cuts, conveys the savagery and brutality of the attack. Once she has made known who raped and mutilated her, that she has told her story, she has completed her function and her existence must therefore come to an end. Even her death is treated as a spectacle as it is in her father's hands and in front of the guests (Tamora and Saturninus amongst others) attending Titus's banquet that she finally dies.

4.4 Children of War

In examining the way the main protagonists of Julie Taymor's *Titus* are constructed and developed throughout the film, I have attempted to make visible that it is mainly in the cutting room that the characters of the film take shape, that they become 'a chain of signifiers on which meaning slides'⁴⁹ and gets attached. It is fascinating to see how the different characters function or rather interact in connection with one another through

⁴⁹ Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1984), p. 73.

different editing strategies. While a flesh and bone stage actor interpreting Titus Andronicus is limited to his own body and props to make his performance meaningful, his cinematic counterpart possesses the tools of the performer as well as a wide range of editing devices, camerawork techniques, and special effects in order to create his or her character.

Through a non-exhaustive series of key sequences, we have seen how specifically the bodies of the adult characters are modelled, cut and reassembled, becoming the raw material for a more picturesque process of film-making in which meaning is imprinted and encoded within the connections between the shots and in the links between the sequences and scenes. The way the different characters' bodies are edited depends on the artistic and aesthetic choices made by the director and the editor, and in the case of *Titus*, it seems clear that the tropes of racial invasion, bodily fragmentation, and gender confusion are inscribed all over the characters' bodies through the editing work of Julie Taymor and Françoise Bonnot.

After having devoted the main body of this chapter to the adult characters, I would like to conclude my analysis with a brief outlook of the youngest character that Taymor added to the Shakespearean tragedy: young Lucius (Osheen Jones), Titus's grandson. Being present at the onset and coda of the film, he is the 'guiding line' character who conducts the viewer throughout the narrative, the nightmarish counterpart of Alice in wonderland. He leads us through his journey from the protected universe of his childhood to the brutal world of adulthood, the world in which Titus lives. When we first see him, he is busy playing with his food and toys on a kitchen table while at the same time watching blaring cartoons on television. His games soon turn into a tantrum as he violently destroys everything at hand's reach, and as the editing soundtrack and rhythm get faster and faster until a sudden 'real' explosion

shakes the kitchen and terrifies Lucius down the table. At that moment, the clown comes into the room, takes the boy in his arms, and brings him out of the house and into a coliseum (another re-appropriation of the rabbit hole of *Alice in Wonderland*).

When ‘reality’ (or the extradiegetic world) and fiction get confused and collide into each other in the first sequence of the film, Lucius becomes endowed with the double characteristics of the modes of ‘reality’ and fiction. As an *actant* of the extradiegetic world, he has an external point of view vis-à-vis the diegetic universe of Titus. At the same time, as an *actant* of the main diegesis, he is also subjected to the rules of this narrative which means that he is part of the narrative and can be affected by the chain of events. Young Lucius is the materialisation of Taymor’s intention to entertain and to assail the spectator so that, as Walter Benjamin puts it, ‘the public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one’.⁵⁰ Lucius’s journey through the film is both educational and deictic since he learns from the wrongs of his siblings while at the same time, he is the one who embodies wisdom and regeneration, who shows the way, and carries the hopes for a better future. In this respect, *Titus* is very much anchored in the recent trend of Hollywood’s productions (*Gladiator*, *The Sixth Sense*, *The Kid*...) that give leading roles and redeeming functions to children. In their essay on masculine redemption in contemporary films, Amy Aronson and Michael Kimmel argue that:

The transformative power of women’s pure love has been one of America’s most resilient cultural tropes. Except it doesn’t work anymore. Because it wasn’t really femininity that transformed those bad guys. It was innocence. And once upon a time, women embodied that innocence — on screen and in real life. Not anymore. Feminism changed all that. In the movies, feminism changed good girls, innocent and pure, into worldly women — corrupted by power (*Disclosure*, 1994), tainted by greed (the bony climber Sigourney Weaver compared to the zaftig wannabe Melanie Griffith in *Working Girl*, 1988), inured to the needs of their children (*Kramer vs. Kramer*, 1979). (...) So what’s a bad man to do? What force is innocent and virtuous enough to change him? In

⁵⁰ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 234.

Hollywood these days, it's a little child who will lead him. Only young children embody the virtuous innocence that can change bad men into good men.⁵¹

Accordingly, young Lucius is endowed with 'virtuous innocence', righteousness, and goodness. He is even associated with the symbol of Rome as he sports a representation of the feeding she-wolf on the back of his jacket (as opposed to the devouring monster connected with Saturninus). Close-ups of his youthful, innocent face are inserted at regular intervals during the film so that they punctuate the narrative as well as present him as a 'landmark', the possessor of Rome's values. Taymor and Bonnot also use him as a mediator not only between Goths and Romans but also between spectators and characters. Indeed, he is the one who not only brings messages and gifts to Aaron, Chiron, and Demetrius, but also reconciles the two factions (or what remains of them) at the very end of the film when as the sun rises, he walks out of the coliseum with Tamora and Aaron's black baby boy in his arms. This last shot, which is also the longest of the film, is in total contrast with the first scene: the frenzied rhythm of the editing gives way — at last — to a slow motion, uncut long take in which the rescued becomes the rescuer as the image of the clown taking young Lucius into his arms is replaced by the one of young Lucius carrying the black baby boy away to safety.

⁵¹ Amy Aronson and Michael Kimmel, 'The Saviors and The Saved', in *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*, ed. Peter Lehman (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 44.

5

The Politics of Editorial Thinking in Michael Almereyda's***Hamlet***

'All the papers which I have collected to fill the gaps in my memory and to guide me in my undertaking, have passed into other hands, and will never return to mine'.¹

'One cannot help wishing to master absence and yet we must always let go'.²

5.1 The Economy of Presence and Absence as Practised by Michael Almereyda and Ethan Hawke's Hamlet

Closely following in Baz Luhrmann's footsteps, Almereyda's *Hamlet* is a would-be postmodern *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, albeit in a much more subdued stylistic way. Almereyda's *Hamlet* is built upon a Manichean interpretation of the play that opposes a high-profile Claudius, CEO of the tentacular, all-powerful, but rotten 'Denmark Corporation', to a crossbreed between James Dean and Goethe's young Werther (the embodiment of 'the most direct and unequivocal expression of inconsolable suffering'³). By setting the Danish power struggle in the context of corporate finance⁴ in a millennial Manhattan, Almereyda offers a variation on the theme of a postmodern Shakespeare. The world depicted in the film is one of apathy and

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*Les Confessions*), quoted by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 141.

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, p. 142.

³ John R. Williams, 'Goethe the Poet', *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, ed. Lesley Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 42-65 (p. 56).

⁴ In his *Hamlet*-based film *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960), Kurosawa transposed the Shakespearean drama within the corporate milieu of 1960s Japan.

disillusionment, a world of 'hard surfaces, mirrors, screens, and signs'⁵ saturated with hi-tech means of communication and surveillance systems that come to epitomise the alienating forces of Claudius's corporate media organisation. With hardly a third of his soliloquies remaining and delivered mainly in voice-over, Ethan Hawke's Hamlet has no voice to express his opinions and feelings. Indeed, just like Grigori Kozintsev and Laurence Olivier did before him, Almereyda preferred the off-screen introspective reading of the soliloquies accompanying silent actions.

The film opens with a framing shot, a claustrophobic low angle shot of New York by night as the camera looks up through the open roof of a limousine at the illuminated and shiny surface of the surrounding towering skyscrapers. A rapid montage shows Hamlet (Ethan Hawke) who gets off the car, enters the Denmark Corporation building here called 'Hotel Elsinore', and quickly walks to his bedroom where we can see books, magazines, CDs, and all kinds of videotapes scattered everywhere. This heir to the throne of Denmark Corporation stifles in the brutality of a postmodern cityscape, lives in a world of appearances, cameras, and glassy surfaces that reflect his own image endlessly. What follows is another rapid montage of various still photographs intercut with images from the war in Bosnia as well as some footage of Hamlet's grainy video diary: fragments of his memory and fragments of the play's second scene of the second act:

I have of late, [for reasons] I know not, lost all my mirth... (2.2.297-298)
 What piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, (...) in form how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals --- and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? (2.2.305-310)

With such a flaunting of self-referential stylistic flourishes and such a strikingly visual *dis*-location of Shakespeare's words, this provocative introductory sequence positions

⁵ Michael Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's 'Hamlet': A Screenplay Adaptation by Michael Almereyda* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2000), p. xi.

this *Hamlet* within the realm of postmodern ‘cannibalisation’ (the term is borrowed from Fredric Jameson) and opportunistic reappropriation that characterise a significant part of the production of Shakespearean films from the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s (*My Own Private Idaho*, *William Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet*, *Looking for Richard*, and *Titus* amongst others). But this sequence is not just a bold yet meaningless statement of inventiveness and allegiance to the trendy non-conformist neo-adaptations of the Shakespearean text – a way to affirm one’s authority and identity (individuality) while at the same time remaining within a ‘trend’ (collective). Something else is indeed lurking beneath the glossy and at times grainy surfaces of the film, beneath the decorum (*laissez-paraitre*) of Almereyda’s and Hamlet’s editing practices. In fact, I would suggest that this something that Shakespeare’s Hamlet has ‘within which passes show’ (1.2.85), occupies this negative space *in-between* the cuts and gestures toward the reconstruction of its presence through Almereyda’s and Hamlet/Ethan Hawke’s editorial thinking. In order to ‘fill the gaps between the cuts’, I propose to use Jacques Derrida’s discussion of the concept of *supplement* in his interpretation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions*, and more particularly of Rousseau’s obsessive and lifelong recourse to substitutes both physically and symbolically. Drawing on the dialectic of presence and absence, Derrida explains that Rousseau ‘describes the passage to writing as the restoration, by a certain absence and by a sort of calculated effacement, of presence disappointed of itself in speech’, and further contends that ‘to write is indeed the only way of keeping or recapturing speech since speech denies itself as it gives itself’.⁶

According to Derrida, what drives Rousseau to turn to literature as a preferable or alternative mode of communication is a disappointment with himself and more

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 142.

precisely with the way he presents himself socially through speech. ‘I would love society like others’, Rousseau explains in the *Confessions*. ‘if I were not sure of showing myself not only at a disadvantage, but as completely different from what I am. The part that I have taken of writing and hiding myself is precisely the one that suits me. If I were present, one would never know what I was worth’.⁷ In other words, Rousseau denies himself the ‘natural’ presence of speech in order to appear as he thinks he actually *is* through writing (in a better light?), that is through a supplement. Recreating himself in the ideality of truth and value through writing, Rousseau also strains toward the ‘symbolic reappropriation of [his] presence’.⁸ Paradoxically, it is through the process of choosing absence *and* writing that he is able not only to reclaim his true self but also to bypass the duration of his own existence. By establishing an analogy between the work of writing and the work of film-editing, I would like to argue that the editorial dialectics of Almercyda’s *Hamlet* offers a particularly compelling illustration of Rousseau’s paradoxical attempt to reappropriate his (ideal) presence through the proxy of its image at the very moment when he destroys his symbolic presence.

Significantly, the world that Almercyda depicts in his *Hamlet* is one obsessed with images, signs, and representations in which words have lost their ‘referentiality’ and fail to express ‘which passes show’ (1.2.85). Hamlet’s words as well as his own reflection are thrown back at him endlessly from the multiple screens, mirrors, and all the other hard and shiny surfaces that surround or even ensnare him. In a comment spurred by a mixture of frustration and exasperation vis-à-vis the critics that accused him of having included billboards and brands as promotional throwaways, Almercyda retorts: ‘The undignified, all but unbelievable truth is that we paid for the privilege of

⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, quoted by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, p. 142.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, p.143.

parading certain logos and insignias across the screen. There was, after all, an intended point. (...) It's another way to touch the core of Hamlet's anguish, to recognise the frailty of spiritual values in a material world'.⁹ In such a world, the main problem one is confronted with is that of the loss of identity, of presence in Rousseau's sense of the word. Hovering between the potentialities of presence and absence, I would therefore suggest that Almercyda's *Hamlet* is caught within this schizophrenic (impossible) choice which finds its expression both in Almercyda's final cut¹⁰ (this significant act and mark of *auteurisme*) and in Hamlet's editorial activities.

The first sequence of the film should, or more exactly would have never existed if the 'first' final cut of *Hamlet* had succeeded in obtaining the approval (or even sanction) of the original test audience and consequently of the executives from Miramax who financed the production. Poised on the verge between presence and absence, the sequence occupies a very liminal, precarious *reel* space. It is an adjunct to the original editing as well as to the play text which, by its *presence* prior to the actual beginning of the film, stands out *in absentia*, located at the same time outside the film text of *Hamlet*, and outside the screenplay and the original final cut. In the screenplay of the film, Michael Almercyda relates how, instead of starting the film with the first encounter with the Ghost, he had to move Hamlet to the foreground so that the viewer is directly confronted with the 'Danish' prince and his obsessive cinematic practices:

But it became apparent that the Elizabethan language, coming thick and fast at the outset, confused our early audiences. (A test screening organised by Miramax yielded the second worst scores in the company's history.) More to the point, it was troublingly clear that Hamlet's first appearance in the film came too late and felt flat. Admitting that we needed a more urgent start, Ethan and I

⁹ Michael Almercyda, p. xi.

¹⁰ In this chapter, although I fully acknowledge the fact that Almercyda worked on the editing of *Hamlet* with the collaboration of Kristina Boden — who completed the montage of the last sequence of the film on her own — but because most of the editorial decisions have been taken by Almercyda, he will be regarded as the figure of authority as far as the major part of the film's editing is concerned.

sat down with a pixel camera and worked out a new introduction, a video diary excerpt from one of our favourite speeches. I held the camera while Ethan adjusted lights, fooled with a water glass, executed a rudimentary conjuring trick. (...) Backed by a cross-mix of Morecheeba and orchestral music by Niels Gage (an authentic Dane) and intercut with images I had shot off the TV during the bombing in Bosnia, this 'improvised' scene now kickstarts the movie, giving the Prince a series of intimate close-ups and a private (pixelated) language.¹¹

Significantly, the sequence is not even recorded within the text of the published screenplay, being merely relegated to the end of the book where it is furtively mentioned in a footnote, as if it was not 'authorised'. However, the original introductory sequence that would have been a version of the beginning of the first scene of the play is here quoted in full and detailed with much care. The scene would have summoned the bizarre and disturbing presence of the Ghost amidst the headquarters of 'Denmark Corporation', amidst the artefacts of our postmodern media-saturated world. In other words, what Almereyda implies is that, following the film's failure to win the test audience's green light, he had no other choice but to modify his production to comply to the imperatives of the market: to put it differently, Miramax needed a product that sells. Discussing the commercial failure of his film *Patty Hearst* (1988), the writer and director Paul Schrader said that

the definite problem is that it deals with a passive protagonist. Movies are about people who do things. The number one fantasy of the cinema is that we can do something we are relatively impotent in our own lives so we go to the movies to watch people who are in control of their lives. *Patty Hearst* violates the cardinal rule of the cinema.¹²

If there is any truth in Schrader's comment, then we could say that Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, whose main character is particularly famous for his chronic procrastination, is potentially the worst choice in terms of marketability.

¹¹ Michael Almereyda, p.135.

¹² Paul Schrader, *Schrader on Schrader*, ed. Kevin Jackson (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), p.189.

Unable to express himself freely and truthfully to his approach of the play, Almercyda has to have recourse to a supplement, in lieu of the thing itself. Subjected to the sanction of society, Rousseau considered writing as the critical response to a situation of distress. ‘When nature, as self-proximity’, Derrida contends, ‘comes to be forbidden or interrupted, when speech fails to protect presence, writing becomes necessary. It must be added to the word urgently’.¹³ It is within such an economy of supplementarity that I propose to read Almercyda’s reediting of Hamlet. It is indeed in response to a situation of crisis (the loss of his authorial presence) as described by Rousseau that the American director turned to another ‘mode of expression’, i.e. discontinuity editing as opposed to the classical Hollywood style of editing that ‘maintains a sense of uninterrupted action and continuous setting within each scene of a narrative film’.¹⁴

To put it more succinctly, being subjected to the rules of audience reception and commerce Almercyda, in order to re-appropriate his presence as an *auteur*, chooses absence *and* to edit, but to edit *with a difference*. It is thus through this art, the technè of discontinuity editing, that Almercyda substitutes the original (and therefore most natural) first sequence with a supplement of itself, thereby filling the void left by the suppression of the natural, original one with an added and compensatory presence. Significantly, Almercyda takes on the full responsibility of the sequence’s shooting and editing while he insists in its urgency and home-made (*bricolage*) production style. As he points out in the screenplay: ‘I held the camera while Ethan adjusted lights, fooled with a glass, executed a rudimentary conjuring trick. We were alone in a hotel room, between setups during a weekend’s worth of pickup shots’.¹⁵ It is interesting to observe

¹³ Jacques Derrida, p.144.

¹⁴ William H. Phillips, *Film: An Introduction* (Boston: Bedford / St. Martin’s, 1999), p. 565.

¹⁵ Michael Almercyda, p.135.

that the original first sequence was edited in the classical Hollywood style. But the adoption of such a personal and private mode of production which strains toward the reappropriation of Almereyda's authorship is also distinctive of the emergence of an act of resistance to the censure imposed by the executives at Miramax that manifests itself through the choice of this particular collage of war images, art house photographs, and excerpts from Hamlet's video diary. Indeed, since the French New Wave of the late 1950s and early 1960s when directors like François Truffaut (*The 400 Blows*), Jean-Luc Godard (*Breathless*), and Claude Chabrol (*Handsome Serge*) made use of unconventional editing styles as a counter-discourse to what Truffaut derogatorily called the '*cinéma de papa*'.¹⁶ the mark of resistance has come to be attached to the aesthetics of fragmentation characteristic of discontinuity editing.

From a larger cultural point of view, the reediting of Almereyda's *Hamlet* inscribes the cinematic productions of the Shakespearean corpus within the system of contemporary consumer culture, or as Douglas M. Lanier puts it, it 'suggests how the capitalisation of Shakespearean filmmaking has shaped the adaptational process'.¹⁷ Contrary to Almereyda's contention that 'the idea was to frame and foreground Shakespeare's words, trusting them to bring an audience closer',¹⁸ in this postliterary age of iconocentrism, the language of Shakespeare, the poetry of his words and rhythms, comes second and is subjected to the authority of the visual, the almighty supplementary image. Instead of 'foregrounding Shakespeare's words', this sequence

¹⁶ In the article 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français' published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 31, January 1954, Truffaut refers to the films of directors such as Delannoy, Allégret and Autant-Lara who embodied the tradition of 'psychological realism' in the French cinéma. Truffaut criticised them for being too literary and not cinematic enough.

¹⁷ Douglas M. Lanier, 'Shakescorp Noir', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53 (Summer 2002), pp. 157-180 (p. 162).

¹⁸ Michael Almereyda, p.135.

that now prefaces *Hamlet* reinstates the subordination and inadequacy of speech in relation to the exorbitant power of motion pictures.

In a significant effect of *mise en abîme*, Hamlet himself is portrayed as a filmmaker and as an editor who also works in the solitude of his bedroom. In his fascinating criticism of the film, Lanier contends that Ethan Hawke's Hamlet is the instrument of Almereyda's critique of corporate mediatisation when he affirms that 'Hamlet is intended to mythologize the independent filmmaker as a figure of counterestablishment resistance'.¹⁹ However, within the diegesis of the film, the Hamlet we see in the first sequence is the embodiment of a 'presence disappointed of itself with speech'.²⁰ Oddly enough, although Hamlet appears on screen throughout most of the sequence, he looks particularly absent, subdued, and effaced. Not only does he alienate himself from the world within his black limousine, but he also hides himself behind his sunglasses, and rushes to his bedroom without speaking or interacting with anyone (interestingly the concept of interbeing is later developed in the film through a clip of the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh). Hamlet takes this process of alienation one step further by choosing his cinematic persona over his physical self since it is through his pixelvision image that we are encouraged to apprehend him. By choosing to *re-present* himself through the cinematic apparatus, Hamlet — like Rousseau — chooses the supplement *in lieu of* the real thing. Protected by the solitude involved in the editing process, he is able to turn and re-turn his words as well as his own image at leisure as is later described when Hamlet runs and reruns on his portable clamshell monitor a clip of himself saying 'to be or not to be' as he presses a gun to his temple. Captured by his pixelvision camera, Hamlet's speech becomes a striking illustration of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's symbolic sacrifice of his social presence for the sake of truth

¹⁹ Douglas M. Lanier, p. 174.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, p. 142.

and value. 'I renounce my present life'. Derrida paraphrases Rousseau, 'my present and concrete existence in order to make myself known in the ideality of truth and value'.²¹ Editing himself toward perfection and ideality, Hamlet makes extensive use of the selective process of film-editing to cut out what 'a man might play' (1.2.84) in order to cut in 'what he has within which passes show' (1.2.85). What the first sequence of the film makes clear is the fact that Hamlet's relation to his image is obsessive as well as difficult, as if through the proxy of his video diaries, he was looking for something that is not already present in himself. In other words, the locus of the sign is the mark of a lack. In Derrida's sense of the word, the concept of the supplement is a 'strange unity' between 'two gestures'.²² The supplement is here both an adjunct and a substitute:

But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*: if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up of itself, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself.²³

By substituting film-making and film-editing to speech, Almereyda's Hamlet replaces presence by value, i.e. what he so terribly lacks — his 'weakness and melancholy' (2.2.603). But where Rousseau had found a satisfactory supplement through literature, this mediated representation of thought, this Hamlet has adopted an alternative mode of communication which is even more adequate to his needs, hoping to compose himself as worthy of his own name and title. Indeed, not only does Hamlet have the opportunity to record his speech (and therefore his thoughts) as faithfully and directly as possible, but through the process of montage, he will also be able to organise, rearrange, and

²¹ Jacques Derrida, p. 142.

²² Jacques Derrida, p. 144.

²³ Jacques Derrida, p. 145.

modify his speech — this newly found presence — at leisure, so that on the symbolic level, he can ultimately reach the culmination of his search: his ideal self. Consequently, what is implied in Hamlet's lack of 'value' is his inherent feeling of guilt: what Rousseau calls a 'condition almost unintelligible and inconceivable'.²⁴

Because Hamlet's editorial activities are symptomatic of his guilt, by starting the film with fragments of his video diaries instead of *and* prior to the first manifestation of the Ghost, Almereyda has considerably modified his adaptation of the play. Although his purpose was merely to 'frame and foreground Shakespeare's words, trusting them to bring an audience closer',²⁵ the American director has brought a significant twist to the Shakespearean tragedy by suggesting that Hamlet's feelings of culpability had already taken possession of his mind long before his encounter with the Ghost. His guilt being anterior to the ghost's revelation of his murder and injunction for remembrance and revenge, it can also be understood within the sphere of the personal and in terms of lack and absence (e.g. his inadequacies as a son, a man, and the heir apparent to the throne of Denmark Corporation).

5.2 'Spirit of Health or Goblin Damn'd' (1.4.40)

When we first see Hamlet out of the isolation of his bedroom, it is in a conference room that we find him, among the journalists and photographers who have been assembled there to cover a major event: Claudius's formal takeover of Denmark Corporation. Equipped with his pixelvision video camera and clamshell monitor, Hamlet clearly remains *à l'écart*, alienated from the scene, as if he was declining any kind of involvement in the affairs of his father's tentacular media company. His recording of the scene seems to be mainly motivated by an urge to record and gather the words of

²⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*Les Confessions*), quoted by Jacques Derrida, p. 149.

²⁵ Michael Almereyda, p. 135.

Claudius as evidence that he will add to the case he is building against him. Such behaviour is certainly more in relation with the work of a detective or a film-maker rather than that of a dispossessed son, which is exactly what Linda Charnes and Courtney Lehmann have observed of Shakespeare's Hamlet. While Charnes maintains that '*Hamlet* is the first fully *noir* text in Western literature, and Prince Hamlet is the first *noir* detective',²⁶ Lehmann further develops the comparison and contends that 'Hamlet has more in common with an aspiring *film noir* director than he does with the reluctant detective of *noir* fiction, and that Shakespeare's play is, therefore, not "like any film," but more specifically, like *film noir*'.²⁷ In keeping with Charnes and Lehmann's assumptions, I would like to argue that Almercyda's Hamlet is very much the *noir* film-editor of his own tragedy. Here, *film noir* should be understood in terms of style rather than of genre: a style that, according to Slavoj Žižek,

is characterised by a radical split, a kind of structural imbalance, as to the possibility of narrativization: the integration of the subject's position into the field of the big Other [the public present], the narrativization of his fate, becomes possible only when the subject is in a sense already dead, although still alive, when "the game is already over", in short: when the subject finds himself at the place baptised by Lacan "the in-between-two-deaths" (*l'entre-deux-morts*).²⁸

Because Almercyda's Hamlet employs the practice of film-editing in a very heuristic way in order to create a truer and potentially purer version of himself, he finds himself in the very situation described by Žižek and Lacan: 'the in-between-two-deaths'. Positioned in between his physical death and the symbolical death of his presence which he has deliberately chosen to accept, Hamlet is indeed 'already dead, although

²⁶ Linda Charnes quoted by Courtney Lehmann in *Shakespeare Remains: Theater to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 109.

²⁷ Courtney Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains: Theater to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 109-110.

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 151.

still alive'. hence the growing difficulty he experiences in his editorial enterprises. Being unable to produce a convincing montage of his ideal presence, we see him jumping from one shot to another, from a shot of his father at his desk, to another of his parents laughing together, to yet another shot of Ophelia hiding herself behind a book. Just like the collage of ill-assorted photographs that covers the wall of his bedroom, the diegetic fragmentation of this embryonic montage is a striking denotation of Hamlet's inability to produce a coherent narration of his life. This Hamlet is confronted with the impossible task of reconciling what is by essence irreconcilable: his absence and his presence. And although his editorial practices — the suppression of any excess that threatens the coherence of his representation and the selection of his 'best shots' — bring him an immediate satisfaction, ultimately they will not bring about the reconciliation he is so desperately looking for.

As a *noir* editor, Hamlet can only make an attempt (which can only be vain) at producing a satisfactory and definitive final cut for, as Žižek contends, 'insofar as the subject does not assume this stature of the "living dead", every attempt at narrativization, at the integration of his fate into the symbolic texture, is by definition lethal: a deadly menace looms over his endeavour to "tell the entire story" about himself'.²⁹ In other words, from Derrida's point of view, this 'deadly menace' assumes the form of the supplement — which in Hamlet's case refers to his activities as a film-editor. 'According to Rousseau', Derrida explains, 'the negativity of evil will always have the form of supplementary. Evil is exterior to nature, to what is innocent and good. It supervenes upon nature, but always by way of compensation for what ought to lack nothing at all in itself'.³⁰ In Almereyda's film, I would like to argue that

²⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, p. 151.

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, p. 145.

the character that embodies the most this deadly supplementary is precisely the one who is 'the anterior default of a presence':³¹ the Ghost, this 'goblin damn'd' (1.4.40).

Significantly, it is through the mediation of the CCTV cameras of Denmark Corporation that we get our first glimpse of the Ghost of Old Hamlet (Sam Shepard). Because the original first sequence of the film was edited out of the final cut, it is through a series of flashbacks that the Ghost first occupies the reel space of Almereyda's *Hamlet*. As Horatio begins to 'deliver (...) this marvel' (1.2.193-194) to Hamlet, the uncanny grainy image of the video monitor suddenly intrudes itself on the glossy and polished surface of the film:

- Shot 1: close-up in high angle of a video monitor. As the camera moves into an extreme close-up of the monitor, the image shows a bird's eye view of a man in a lift.
- Shot 2: medium close-up in straight angle of Horatio looking clearly disturbed by what he has just seen.
- Shot 3: long shot in straight angle of Horatio, Marcella, and Bernardo running to the lifts.
- Shot 4: medium shot in straight angle of Horatio and Marcella walking quickly through a corridor.
- Shot 5: long shot in straight angle from Horatio's point of view of a transparent figure walking in slow motion towards a soda machine.
- Shot 6: close-up in straight angle of Hamlet ('Did you not speak to it?').
- Shot 7: close-up in straight angle of Horatio ('My Lord, I did./But answer made it none./Yet once methought it lifted up its head and did address/Itself to motion, like as it would speak').

³¹ Jacques Derrida, p. 145.

- Shot 8: long shot in straight angle of the Ghost turning its head toward the camera while it suddenly materialises itself.
- Shot 9: medium close-up of Horatio who slowly moves toward the Ghost as he addresses himself to it.
- Shot 10: long shot in straight angle of the Ghost standing still.
- Shot 11: medium close-up in low angle of Horatio, Marcella, and Bernardo who try to make the Ghost speak to them.
- Shot 12: close-up in straight angle of the Ghost looking menacingly at the camera and turning its back to it.
- Shot 13: medium close-up in low angle of Horatio and his friends.
- Shot 14: medium long shot in low angle of the Ghost dematerialising itself and dissolving into the radiant façade of the soda machine.

It is in the hazy time-warp between the ghost's comings and goings along the corridors of the 'Denmark Corporation' building and in the temporal discontinuity generated by the inclusion of a series of flashbacks within the main diegesis, that the supernatural suddenly and surreptitiously enters the structure and fabric of the film. In our postmodern age 'when the imagination goes high-street shopping for relics of the past and fragments of the present',³² we can read the grainy image of the Ghost in the video monitor as a visual motif recycled from films like David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992) and Hideo Nakata's *Ring* (1998). By locating the supernatural within the realm of the cinematic, or more exactly of the televised image, just like Lynch and Nakata, Michael Almereyda, in Žizek's words, 'puts aseptic, quotidian social reality alongside its fantasmatic supplement (...) and transposes the vertical into the horizontal and puts the two dimensions --- reality and its fantasmatic supplement.

³² John Alexander, *The Films of David Lynch* (London: Charles Letts & Co Ltd, 1993), p.179.

surface and its “repressed” --- on the same surface’.³³ It is through the temporal dislocations inherent in the editorial structure of the flashback, and in the breach between narration and televisual representation that the Ghost insinuates itself within the quotidian reality of Hamlet. This televisual bizarre ‘shadow’ of shot 1 only becomes a reality for Horatio, Marcella, and Bernardo when the Ghost turns its head toward them and looks at them: as if it were through its own menacing gaze that the Ghost materialises itself. It is also interesting to notice that at the end of the flashback the Ghost dissolves itself before the cut to the next shot, thereby operating according to its own editorial system. In other words, in Almereyda’s *Hamlet*, the Ghost is the only element that is not subjected to and actually resists the rules of cinematic representation because it exists *in absentia* of the filmic apparatus, beyond the spatio-temporal limitations of the reel.

For Rousseau who associates presence with the natural and the positive, we have seen that being exterior to nature and reality, the supplement possesses the negativity of evil. Because the Ghost is first mediated by the medium of the televised image, it is imbued with the negativity attached to the concept of supplement. It is an adjunct, the symbol of an absence which functions like the mark of an emptiness. And when the supplement claims to be presence, it is then that it becomes dangerous because as Derrida suggests ‘it leads desire away from the good path, makes it err far from natural ways, guides it toward its loss or fall (...). It thus destroys Nature’.³⁴ Old Hamlet being symbolically and physically dead, its Ghost can only be the manifestation of its absence, of the void he has left behind him, and by becoming more real than *reel*.

³³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch’s Lost Highway* (Seattle, USA: The Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities, 2000), p.35.

³⁴ Jacques Derrida, p.151.

it properly claims to be the thing itself – i.e. the king — and as such takes on the authority of ‘the father who knows’.³⁵

‘Because Hamlet’s father *knows* what befell him and who is the murderer’, Zizek contends, ‘this knowledge concerns a dark, licentious side of the father-king who is otherwise presented as an ideal figure: he was murdered in full blossom of his sins... It is therefore a very special kind of knowledge, a *knowledge of enjoyment*’.³⁶ This Ghost which comes back as ‘the father who knows’ is a double disruption of the natural order because not only he returns from the dead as a corrupted figure but he also assumes the supplementarity of a *reel* and evil presence. From a *noir* point of view, the Ghost represents the mutation of the theme of social corruption into an externalised supernatural evil. This is also confirmed and reinforced by the second appearance of the Ghost. This time it is in the safe haven of Hamlet’s apartment that the supernatural returns, and as Michel De Certeau puts it, ‘it returns in the present from which it was excluded, but does so surreptitiously’.³⁷

Hamlet is asleep on a sofa when the phone starts ringing. In another re-appropriation (*clin d’oeil*) of a motif of the Japanese film *Ring*, it is precisely after Hamlet is woken up by the telephone ringing that he sees the Ghost standing still on the terrace and staring straight at him. Always already there in the spatio-temporal frame of the sequence, it asserts and claims its threatening and also properly seductive presence. For Almereyda’s Hamlet, the sight is not particularly frightening at first as he slowly but calmly walks toward the terrace and opens the door for the Ghost — now a material figure — to step in. It is only when the Ghost addresses itself to him, moves into his space, and physically comes to his contact that Hamlet looks clearly terrified. As the

³⁵ Slavoj Zizek, *Enjoy your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, p. 159.

³⁶ Slavoj Zizek, *Enjoy your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, p. 159.

³⁷ Michel De Certeau, quoted by Philip Armstrong in *Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 136.

Ghost moves closer to Hamlet, the latter withdraws more and more, trying to put a real physical distance between them in a desperate attempt to reclaim the protective barrier of the television screen. In the screenplay of the film, Ethan Hawke explains how his interpretation of the role is based on the assumption that ‘that Ghost breathed nothing but evil into his son’s ear, that the play is the story of a father reaching from beyond the grave and corrupting and burdening the mind of his child with the baggage of his own vengeful anger and lust for power’.³⁸ As long as Old Hamlet remained contained within the sphere of his home-made videos, Hamlet could enjoy a false sense of security because he could edit him at will, cut and paste, play and replay his favourite bits and fragments of paternal presence to create this ideal, honest image able to soothe his guilt. But as a physical presence exterior to the protective limitations of the televised image, the Ghost is a figure ‘in the blossom of [his] sins’ (1.5.76), tainted, and which therefore will not let itself edited out of all his imperfections: it will forcefully resist Hamlet’s editorial thinking. For Almereyda’s Hamlet, the physical presence of the Ghost is more than bizarre or uncanny, it is an aberration, a terrifying and life-threatening experience. Because the Ghost supplements the void left by the death of Hamlet’s father, it also emphasises Hamlet’s own lack and ontological inadequacy to master absence: it is the mirror-image that throws back at Hamlet his fatal lack of value.

5.3 The Play of Substitution

After his encounter with the Ghost, along with his film-making and editing activities, Hamlet resorts to other kinds of supplementarity. In an editorial operation of paradigmatic substitutions, the heir of Denmark Corporation will have recourse to yet other modes of expression while he will find dangerous supplements to the fatal and

³⁸ Ethan Hawke, *William Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’: A Screenplay Adaptation by Michael Almereyda* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2000), p.xiv.

inevitable act of revenge that can only enable him to 'integrate his fate into the symbolic texture'.³⁹ Indeed, it is only through the constant re-activation of his 'presence' that Hamlet can fill the void and try to master absence. For Almereyda's Hamlet, the murder of Claudius symbolises the very thing that he wants to avoid: his self-assertion. Consequently, he will lose himself in a chain of substitutes that will allow him the immediate enjoyment of the *thing itself* while keeping it at a safe distance. But Hamlet cannot give up what immediately restores to him the presence of his ideal self, 'no more than one can give up language'.⁴⁰

Along the chain of paradigmatic choices open to Hamlet, Ophelia is probably the closest to his heart. We have seen earlier that by choosing to be absent and to edit instead of 'inter-being' with society through speech, Hamlet actually enjoys the immediacy of the supplement because it fulfils him with what he desires most while holding it at a safe distance. In Almereyda's *Hamlet*, Ophelia is just another screen, another mirror-image on which Hamlet projects his own self. She *is* but the close-ups that Hamlet selects, runs, and reruns on his clamshell monitor and that seem to fascinate (or rather hypnotise) him so much. In his discussion of Rousseau's use of substitutes, Derrida further argues that 'the danger is that of the image' because 'just as writing opens the crisis of living speech in terms of its "image", its painting or its representation, so onanism announces the ruin of vitality in terms of imaginary seductions'.⁴¹ To phrase it differently, after all, it is the relation to others that Rousseau desired and feared so much that led him to prefer the supplement to the thing itself, because the pleasure he derived from it did not depend on anybody else. Correspondingly, I would like to suggest that Almereyda's Hamlet is characterised by

³⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, p. 151.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, p. 153.

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, p. 151.

the same penchant for onanism and narcissism implied in Rousseau's choice, and that it is this egotistical economy that regulates his (tentative toward a) relationship with Ophelia.

If at the beginning of the film *Almeryda* establishes the bedroom as Hamlet's locale of predilection when engaging in his editorial activities, the relative solitude of a coffee shop by night offers the same kind of haven *and* concealment to the Dane when he decides to write a poem to Ophelia, the poem that Polonius confiscates from his daughter and reads to Claudius and Gertrude:

To the celestial, and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia,
 Doubt thou the stars are fire,
 Doubt that the sun doth move,
 Doubt truth to be a liar,
 But never doubt I love (2.2.109-117).

Significantly, instead of communicating with Ophelia through speech, once more Hamlet has recourse to an alternative means of expressing 'what he has within that passes show' (1.2.85). In the same way as *Almeryda* portrayed his Hamlet caught up in his syntagmatic operations of shot arrangement, we now see him, through a series of jump cuts, scribbling words in a copybook, busy with the writing and rewriting of this poem. Because Hamlet persists in his renouncement of the presence of the spoken word, he is compelled to remain within the economy of self-censure and supplementarity. Adapting his editorial thinking to literature, he can 'turn and return his sentences at leisure'.⁴² Through the temporal ellipsis and the chain of endless repetition marked by the jump cuts that structure the scene, Hamlet can select and arrange his words just as he would select and arrange his shots.

And when Hamlet finally summons enough courage to go to Ophelia's apartment to give her his poem, speech fails him again. As he sees her in the privacy of

⁴² Jacques Derrida, p. 142.

her own space. in the red light of her improvised dark room. he can only bury his face in her embrace. take her wrist and press the folded paper in her hand. The scene that should have followed. and that is included in the screenplay. was cut during post-production. The scene as it appears in its final cut lacks in coherence as it shows Polonius walking into the room with a birthday cake and balloons. and intruding upon his daughter and Hamlet who runs away as if (strangely) he had seen a ghost. Although Hamlet is aware that Polonius does not want him near his daughter. that did not stop him from getting close to her in the initial scenes of the film: his sudden reaction therefore looks particularly odd and unrelated to the situation. However. within the context of the scene that was cut out. Hamlet's reaction becomes more comprehensible. In the screenplay of the film. the bracketed scene reads as follows:

Hamlet reaches into his jacket and pulls out the bag Bernardo handed to him. He unwraps the T-shirt and extracts the gun. staring at it as if trying to imagine what it's doing in his hand. Then looking up. he gives a start — There's a man in the connected back room. sitting on the edge of the bed. It's Polonius. looking at Hamlet with cold. imperious hatred. Hamlet looks back at Ophelia — and now sees that the prints hanging overhead are portraits of her father. Hamlet backs away. gun in hand. His letter drops to the floor. Ophelia stares after him. shocked. as he staggers out of the door.⁴³

Significantly. what the final cut fails to articulate is the fact that it is only after noticing that Ophelia's photographs are in fact portraits of her father that Hamlet runs away in terror. Indeed. I would suggest that what the suppressed scene would have made clear is that Hamlet does not run away from Polonius but from what he sees at Ophelia's. i.e. her own preoccupation with 'summoning absent beauties'.⁴⁴ with the image of the (ideal) father that she tries to compose through her practice of photography. Ophelia is the mirror-image that captures Hamlet's reflection and exposes his presence. In his discussion of Rousseau's *Confessions*. Derrida refers to 'an incident which Rousseau

⁴³ Michael Almereyda. p. 40.

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida. p. 153.

finds some difficulty in relating: the encounter with a man “addicted to the same vice [onanism]”.⁴⁵ Interestingly, Derrida then adds that “terrified, Jean-Jacques runs away, “trembling as if” he had just “committed a crime””.⁴⁶ It is the unexpected confrontation with the mirror-image and above all the shame and the guilt attached to it that makes Rousseau — just like Hamlet — run away. Although the supplement brings an immediate relief *and* pleasure, but because it stands *in lieu of* an absence, it is felt as a perversion of nature, and as such it accentuates the anguish derived from what is intrinsically lacking and needed.

As a would-be artist involved in the same kind of supplementarity as Hamlet (addicted to Hamlet’s vice), Ophelia does represent the mirror-image that reflects the precariousness of his situation and of his choice. On the other hand, as the fixed image on his monitor, Ophelia seems to have no identity, only an image for Hamlet to edit, an icon of purity which incites love or murder. As a matter of fact it is toward his bedroom that Hamlet runs in terror. The film cuts from a shot of Hamlet walking away quickly from Ophelia’s apartment to a shot of Hamlet sitting at his editing desk, “facing a TV wired to his clamshell monitor” that “displays a pixel close-up of Hamlet’s face, blankly staring into the camera. He brings a gun to his temple, then lowers it”.⁴⁷ We then see a crosscutting between a “schizophrenic” Hamlet running and rerunning the film in reverse and his image uttering the words “To be or not to be”. Because film-editing provides him with the mirage of “the thing itself” (i.e. his value), this Hamlet clearly prefers this narcissistic and egotistical, yet “safer” economy of substitution — which is circumscribed to the onanism of his relation to his camera.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 153.

⁴⁷ Michael Almereyda, p. 41.

editing table, and to writing, though to a lesser degree — to any form of hetero-eroticism with Ophelia or anybody else.

Ethan Hawke's Hamlet is also a rebel without a cause, whose capacity for rebelliousness and resistance to homogeneity are crystallised in and limited to his film-making activities that constitute the meta-cinematic line of the film. Hamlet distances himself from the corruption that surrounds him by using his camera as a 'reality-filter', an intermediary between himself and his environment. Throughout the film, the images he constantly records with his camera and edits in the solitude of his bedroom give voice to his disillusionment: they 'become records of painful alienation [...] directed towards using film to create a counterdiscourse, in effect turning the technological apparatus of media culture back on itself in an effort to expose its complicity with corporate corruption'.⁴⁸ This Hamlet clearly wants to be the director (and editor) of his own tragedy and the process of using film-making as a form of resistance takes on full emphasis in Hamlet's home-made short film (*The Mousetrap*: his adaptation of *The Murder of Gonzago*) composed like a 'collage, a patchwork of intuitions, images, and ideas':⁴⁹

- Shot 1: a series of titles appear on screen, written in white letters on a red frame: '*The Mousetrap*, A Tragedy by Hamlet, Prince of Denmark'.
- Shot 2: close-up in straight angle of a red rose blossoming.
- Shot 3: clip from a 1950s American film; medium long shot in high angle of a couple with a little boy, watching television on a sofa.
- Shot 4: medium shot in straight angle of the same scene; the toddler sits down between his parents.

⁴⁸ Douglas Lanier, 52, pp. 157-180 (p. 174).

⁴⁹ Michael Almereyda, p. xii.

- Shot 5: clip from a black and white film: medium shot in straight angle of a father seated on an armchair with his young son on his lap: the boy kisses his father.
- Shot 6: clip from a black and white film: long shot in high angle of a couple with a little boy: the father plays with the boy
- Shot 7: medium long shot in straight angle of Hamlet, Ophelia, and the spectators in the private screening room.
- Shot 8: clip from a black and white film: medium long shot in straight angle of a man watching his young son go to bed which dissolves into
- Shot 9: a shot of the Earth spinning calmly on its axis, idyllically surrounded by stars and clouds which dissolves into
- Shot 10: a clip from a cartoon: close-up in straight angle of a bottle of poison which dissolves into
- Shot 11: a shot of 'swarming microscopic cells'.⁵⁰
- Shot 12: close-up in straight angle of Hamlet and Ophelia, with the screen in the background: a man in black appears on screen.
- Shot 13: reaction shot, medium shot in low angle of Claudius and Gertrude: Claudius looks disturbed.
- Shot 14: picture-in-picture imposition of a black and white man on long chair, lamp, and table and chairs over a red background.
- Shot 15: clip of an animation showing a hand pouring a bluish liquid from a test tube.
- Shot 16: animation: a big blue drop crosses the frames.

⁵⁰ Michael Almereyda, p. 69.

- Shot 17: animation: extreme close-up of the drop of poison pouring into a man's ear.
- Shot 18: reaction shot, close-up in low angle of Claudius, looking more and more disturbed.

This short extract of Hamlet's *Mousetrap* is an eclectic montage of clips from 1950s films, silent films, scientific filmic material, and animations which, put together, acquire a meaningful narrative continuity: the story of a man who kills a father in order to take his place and become king. The very simplistic and elementary technique of assembling unrelated visual signifiers in order to create a comprehensible syntagm chosen by Hamlet associates him with early childhood's communication skills (Hamlet identifies himself with the little boy from the clips in shots 3, 4, 5, and 6) and self-censure. Significantly characterised by a total absence of cinematic syntax and punctuation, the film-within-the-film is also the most consistent and apparent artefact of Hamlet's *mal de vivre*. His cinematic style comes to represent his opposition to the Establishment and his subsequent self-ostracism from the authoritarian corporate milieu that Claudius and his organisation embody. Put into perspective with the rest of the film which is edited mainly in Hollywood classical style, this sequence singles itself out by its fragmented editorial style, its Eisensteinian 'cinema of attractions'⁵¹ style. In many ways, Hamlet's short film is a straightforward instance of Eisenstein's dialectical montage based on the purposeful collision of shots: the combination of two different signifiers to produce a single signified. The two forms of editing employed in Almereyda's *Hamlet* epitomise the two opposing characters of the film (Claudius and Hamlet) while reducing the play's complex thematic fabric to the post-adolescent crisis of a Hamlet in rebellion against the corrupted world of adulthood, but perhaps also

⁵¹ Term describing Eisenstein's theory of film-editing.

craving for its acceptance. Almereyda seems to have reversed the editing strategy that Baz Luhrmann developed in his *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* to present the same generation gap trope. While Luhrmann associates the star-crossed lovers with slow cutting rhythm and classical editing to contrast them with the frenzied rhythm and jaggedness of the editing that characterise the chaotic world of the Montague and Capulet families, Almereyda identifies his rebellious youth with fragmented, non-conventional cutting: the same editing technique for two different ends.

On the other hand, the *Mousetrap* is also the culmination of Hamlet's editorial operation of paradigmatic substitutions, for Hamlet is not merely engaged in a process of syntagmatic shot arrangement, he is first and foremost concerned with the logic of paradigmatic choices that informs his shot selection from an almost infinite bank of images. But the *Mousetrap* is also the culmination of Hamlet's attempt to become a *noir* film-editor. Indeed, his short film being strictly composed of extracts from other existing films and of collages, it is therefore a work of montage in the primary sense of the word (cutting and pasting) and that illustrates Jacques Rivette's definition that 'It's a double movement — emphasising the autonomy of the shot and simultaneously seeking within that shot a strength that will enable it to enter into a relationship with another or several other shots, and in this way eventually form a unity'.⁵² In fact, direct animation can be regarded as the only form of film-making that literally fits the *auteur* theory as the touch of the solitary artist is physically present in every frame, with a recognisable sense of signature. And it is through his postmodern editorial activities of rummaging through the stock of his local 'Blockbuster' store and recycling images of the past that Hamlet becomes not only a *noir* film-editor but also an *auteur*. The

⁵² Jacques Rivette, 'Six Characters in Search of *auteurs*: A Discussion about the French Cinema', *Cahiers du Cinéma. The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 59-70 (p. 61).

Mousetrap allows Hamlet not so much to ‘catch the conscience of the king’ (2.2.607) as it establishes him as an aspiring independent editor-*auteur* who gestures toward the narrativization of his own fate without being able to complete the movement toward this narrativization since it would involve not just his symbolic but rather his physical death.

From the *Mousetrap* sequence onwards, Hamlet gets caught up in a spiralling play of substitution that proves to be more deadly and fatal than what he has been practising at his editing table. By moving from the virtual to the actual, he will proceed to a more contingent but also more radical operation of suppressing any threatening excess. However, because we have seen that being addicted to the vice of the supplement, Almereyda’s Hamlet prefers the sign to the thing itself and because he is intrinsically ‘flawed’, he will therefore recycle and displace the chain of supplements from himself to Claudius. In other words, he will create another paradigmatic chain whose point of reference will be his uncle. The first victim of Hamlet’s deadly game of substitution is Polonius, who along with being the ‘spin doctor’ of Claudius (CEO of Denmark Corporation) is also the father figure that embodies the censoring gaze of the Ghost. The closet scene takes place in Gertrude and Claudius’s bedroom. Hamlet has been summoned to his mother’s after the outrage caused by the official showing of the *Mousetrap*. Polonius is there to counsel the queen on the position to adopt with Hamlet and also to overhear the conversation between mother and son. In a film imbued with ‘hard surfaces, mirrors, screens, and signs’,⁵³ it does not come as a surprise to see Polonius hiding himself into a mirrored closet. In her fascinating ‘cinematic’ reading of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Courtney Lehmann contends that ‘Discounting the phenomenon of the Ghost itself, it would be hard to locate a more proto-cinematic scene in

⁵³ Michael Almereyda, p. xi.

Shakespearean drama than the murder of Polonius, for he is killed at the very moment that he projects sound and movement onto the two-dimensional screen behind which he hides'.⁵⁴ From proto-cinematic to cinematic there is only a small step, and Almereyda's film illustrates this movement rather effectively, thus corroborating Lehmann's assumption. However, unlike the arras of the play, the mirrored closet does not only project the presence of Polonius: it also reflects Hamlet's image. But unlike Hamlet's obsessive acts of recording his image and running it on the screen of his clamshell monitor or television, he has no control over his reflection in the mirror, no way of editing it except in a violent act of destruction. In firing his gun into the mirror, I would like to suggest that Hamlet accomplishes a double act of 'live editing'. Just like Ophelia's mirroring behaviour made Hamlet run away in terror, this confrontation with his immediate reflection has a similar hysterical effect on him. He quite literally destroys his mirror image, suppresses this 'dirty still' of himself -- 'his representation of his corrupt self' -- because he finds himself unable to edit this image into his ideal self. But simultaneously, in killing Polonius, the Danish prince takes his operation of substitution to the limit: he substitutes the act of murdering Polonius for the act of murdering Claudius. In taking '[Polonius] for [his] better' (3.4.32), Hamlet engages himself in a very straightforward reworking of his editorial practices, since Polonius is indeed the next best thing within the chain of paradigmatic choices offered to him. Once again Hamlet repeats his logic of supplementarity by preferring the sign to the thing itself, the secretary of state to the king.

From supplementing his own presence to supplementing his act of revenge, Hamlet now oscillates: to be *and* not to be --- he is utterly unable to make a choice (as Sir Laurence Olivier would have said) between presence and absence, activity and

⁵⁴ Courtney Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains: Theater to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern*, p. 117.

passivity, responsibility and blindness. Right after the murder of Polonius, Hamlet is sent to England from where Claudius hopes he will not come back alive and thereby cease to be threat to his life and political interests. However, Claudius having underestimated his nephew's resourcefulness, Hamlet is back in no time in the precincts of Denmark Corporation, after Horatio picks him up at the airport. But Hamlet does not come back a new man from England, on the contrary, he seems more addicted to his vice as ever, irremediably entrapped in the chain of substitution and representation he has initiated. As Derrida puts it, 'Representation *in the abyss* of presence is not an accident of presence: the desire of presence is, on the contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc.'⁵⁵ As Horatio brings Hamlet back to his apartment that he shares with Marcella, the prince begins to narrate 'how he did proceed' (5.2.27) to escape the conspiracy designed by his uncle. A series of flashback showing what happened when he was in the plane that was taking him to England is cross-cut into the sequence so that Hamlet can give a running commentary in voice-over of the images, as though through 'his mind's eye' (1.2.185). Still caught up in his egotistical editorial thinking, Hamlet produces a self-congratulatory version of his escape which includes all the characteristic elements of the adventure movie: journeying with his enemies, accessing the king's document while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are asleep, devising a new commission, sending the two traitors to a certain death, etc. This is Hamlet re-editing himself as the action man he would like to be (his ideal presence), and this is also Hamlet as his (absent) addicted self, enjoying every minute of his acts of substitution and narrativization.

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, p. 163.

Indeed, what is significant in this episode is the particular method he chooses in order to ‘wipe out’ his former fellow students from Wittenberg. After all, we might ponder on the reason why he does not kill them in their sleep when he has the perfect opportunity. Could it be simply because Hamlet, as Ethan Hawke writes, ‘happens to be a thoughtful and decent human being who doesn’t take lightly the idea of killing another human being’⁵⁶? But if Hamlet was indeed such a ‘thoughtful and decent human being’, would he not have shown some mercy for the lives of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in spite of their act of treason? In deliberately choosing this indirect way of suppressing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, I would like to suggest that Hamlet remains within the logic of the supplement. The substitution of his name with those of his former friends is also the substitution of his fate — his death with those of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern — and in having them killed, Hamlet repeats the act of revenge he has performed on Polonius. It is just another calculated action from Hamlet, the *noir* film-editor who chooses to be absent and edit, who prefers controlling the narration from ‘behind the curtain’ rather than acting in it. In Almereyda’s film, it is within this abyss of representations and within this maze of reflections and distorted images that lies Hamlet’s ‘desire of presence’. Significantly, it is in this sequence that Hamlet asserts this desire for the first time when he tells Horatio that Claudius has ‘Popped in between the election and my hopes’ (5.2.65). This is the first time in the film that we hear Hamlet express his political and personal ambitions and blame his uncle for having taken the throne of Denmark away from him, at the very moment when he decides to ‘inter-be’ with Horatio. Would Hamlet’s words point to Claudius as the origin of his addiction to supplementarity? Indeed, by substituting himself to his brother, the husband of Gertrude, father of Hamlet, and king of Denmark, Claudius had

⁵⁶ Ethan Hawke, p. xiv.

already started the chain by perverting the course of nature. In any case, even the substitution of Hamlet's fate with those of his former friends cannot measure up to his expectations and Hamlet's attempts at narrativization remain hopelessly vain. Hamlet remains torn between two gestures (presence and absence, activity and passivity) without being able to 'splice them together'. Since he has not yet assumed 'this stature of the "living dead",⁵⁷ he is still trapped in the 'in-between-two-deaths',⁵⁸ and still very much on the look out for images and representations of his ideal self. Being the son of a murdered father himself, Laertes represents the perfect image of the avenging son, and Hamlet does not fail to notice it:

But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself,
For by the image of my cause I see
The portraiture of his (5.2.75-78).

Unlike Ophelia, Laertes is more than a mirror-image (this image of the corrupt self), he is the perfect supplement, the ultimate montage that Hamlet has been attempting to produce but which remains painfully unattainable. In forgetting himself to the son of Polonius, I would suggest that Hamlet experiences pleasure and guilt at the same time, enjoying the immediate relief that Laertes's value --- this dangerous supplement -- provides him with, and feeling the sharp guilt of his own inadequacy as an avenging son, of his intrinsic lack of worth. As a consequence, the only possible way for Hamlet to reaffirm his presence is to 'become Laertes', and to do so he either has to kill him or be killed by him. Because, according to Derrida, the supplement is both an adjunct and a substitute that 'cumulates and accumulates presence',⁵⁹ it is a threat to the very wholeness and essence of the thing it supplements. If indeed Hamlet wants to reclaim his presence, he has now no other choice but to accept his status of the 'living dead' and

⁵⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy your Symptom*, p. 151

⁵⁸ Jacques Lacan, quoted by Slavoj Žižek in *Enjoy your Symptom*, p. 151.

⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, p. 144.

accept the fight against Laertes. Significantly, as soon as Hamlet accepts the sword fight organised by Claudius, he sees the Ghost appear in the room, and this time, Hamlet looks straight into the Ghost's eyes without fear and at peace. Back in his bedroom, we see him removing the collage of photographs and cards from the wall. He pauses a moment, lingering on a picture of Ophelia, and then peels it off the wall and lets it drop on the floor. In finally renouncing the supplement with its abysmal chain of substitutions, Hamlet accepts not only the precariousness of his presence — 'to be', but also his death — 'not to be'. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau rightly suggests, 'One cannot help wishing to master absence and yet we must always let go'.⁶⁰

And when after being shot at by Laertes, Hamlet finally dies, his last breath is for the faithful Horatio. In a last desperate attempt at narrativization *post-mortem* — the ultimate act of creative control⁶¹ — he will bypass nature, death, and presence by substituting Horatio to himself. Beyond death, he will speak through Horatio's voice and it is again through a supplement that he will be heard. It is therefore through death *and* through Horatio that Hamlet can realise his final act of self-composition — his final cut — and be remembered as he wanted to be: as his true self ('aright' (5.2.346)). He thus gives to his friend this legacy which sounds more like a curse than a wish:

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story (5.2.353-356).

⁶⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*Les Confessions*), quoted by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 142.

⁶¹ Courtney Lehmann, p. 125.

Conclusion

If indeed, as Roland Barthes maintains, ‘To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing’,¹ far from ‘closing the writing’, my purpose in this thesis has been to open the discussion of Shakespearean films towards new perspectives by turning my attention to an aspect of the production of these films — the editing, this fundamental and distinctive element of cinematic representation² — which, most of the time, remains unexplored. Because the prominence of directorial intervention has been dominating the critical landscape for more than five decades, much interest has been taken in studying how the work of *mise en scène* determines the creation of meaning in bringing Shakespeare’s plays to the cinema. As a result, the emphasis on the director and *mise en scène* has kept film-editing, in spite of its ‘transformative’ potentialities, outside the sphere of critical inquiry and outside the questions of control and authorship. As we have seen, authoring practices are particularly varied within the process of film-making and the questions of intention and decision-making are considerably complicated by this variety. In fact, the more one starts digging into the mechanics of cinematic production, the less film authorship appears consistent and well-defined. In this thesis, by drawing my attention to the determining, yet largely disregarded work of editorial creation, I have offered a reading of a selection of Shakespearean films that acknowledges the centrality of collaborative work in representing Shakespeare on film.

¹ Roland Barthes, “The death of the author”, in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. by John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 212.

² In *Like a Film: Ideological Fantasy on Screen, Camera and Canvas* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Timothy Murray contends that the fundamental mechanisms of cinema are projection, shot selection, and montage.

Is the film-editor therefore a silent collaborator or a film *auteur*? The answer to this question is not as straightforward as it might seem, for the simple reason that although the significance of the creative work in post-production is widely recognised (by critics, theorists, and professionals) as particularly influential in the film-making process, the status or rather the authorial voice of the film-editor speaks more or less clearly whether the editor and the director are one and the same person. In general, the politics of ‘the name of the author’ and of traceability are so intimately attached to our understanding of the concept of authorship — in all forms of art — within our contemporary systems of ownership and value that if the person responsible for the editing of a film is not the director, then very often this person is not named and his/her work is either ignored or simply attributed to the director. Moreover, if the editing is the result of a collaborative work (including the director or not), and the plurality of authorial signatures makes any kind of authorial traceability potentially impossible, it is once again the unifying figure of the director-*auteur* who resolves those authorial inconsistencies. Because a film acquires its final and determining ‘shape’ through the process of film-editing, it is very often that the director seeks to exert this significant control (alongside with the work in pre-production and production) either by working in tight collaboration with the editor or by enjoying the undivided privilege of the final cut.

Because ‘the author’, Michel Foucault contends, ‘explains the presence of certain events within a text, as well as their transformations, distortions, and their various modifications’,³ the presence of a unique and coherent author is both reassuring and convenient both to critical inquiry and to the marketability of this text. In a medium where collaborative work is the rule rather than the exception, and where creative interventions are subordinate to the production, such a vision of unique authorship is

³ Michel Foucault, ‘What is an author?’, in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 282-291 (p. 287).

indeed very seductive but also extremely and properly reductive. Paradoxically, it is in film theory and criticism that the myth of the solitary author, so perfectly embodied in the persona of William Shakespeare (the representation of this myth is particularly striking in John Madden's 1998 *Shakespeare in Love*), has found, since the heyday of *'la politique des auteurs'*, a rich soil in which to grow and thrive. And in the case of Shakespearean films, this myth has been and still is perpetuated — more or less eloquently — with all the vigour of the first *auteurist* debates. Is academic criticism, in the realm of Shakespearean studies, not always going to be permeated by ideas of Shakespeare as the ultimate author because of his eminent position in world literature? Is it this tendency towards unique authorship that, in a way, 'impose a limit' to the reading of these Shakespearean film-texts?

By naming the film-editor and taking his/her creative and artistic contribution into careful consideration, and by shifting the emphasis from *mise en scène* to montage, I have attempted to question a purely *auteurist* reading of these Shakespearean films that invests the director with all the attributes of the romantic author. Taking my cue from Nick Browne for whom 'montage rearranges significant relations, transforms pre-texts (the culturally and normally invested fields of fixed sense), interrupts, and renegotiates notions of liaison and continuity'.⁴ I have been particularly interested in tracing the authorial signature(s) ('the stamp of his/her own effort' according to Orson Welles) of the editor(s) by examining and identifying how and according to which specific patterns the Shakespearean pre-texts are transformed into 'Shakespearean' film-texts. Because montage is a 'deconstructive form of productivity', which is 'the result of both action and negation',⁵ it operates according to a logic of selection and

⁴ Nick Browne, "Introduction: The Politics of Representations: Cahiers du Cinema 1962-1972", in *Cahiers du Cinema: 1962-1972: The Politics of Representation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 1-20 (p. 1).

⁵ Nick Browne, pp. 1-20 (p. 1).

systematisation (choosing and arranging) which allows great flexibility and richness in terms of semantic composition. It is this innate ability to transform independent strips of celluloid into a coherent and continuous ensemble and to bring order into chaos that inspired Orson Welles to say that ‘It is the whole eloquence of cinema that one is putting together in an editing room’⁶ and prompted Michael Almereyda to supervise the editing of *Hamlet*. In a medium where images speak louder than words, it is the expressiveness of montage that is appropriate to theatrical action dressed in the kind of eloquence that Shakespeare’s texts offer.

However, although one might think of montage exclusively as an instrument able to emulate and translate the rhythms and stylistic effects of Shakespeare’s prose and iambic pentameters, it is essentially in terms of imagery and conceptualisation that film-editing reveals itself as a particularly potent interpretative tool. Indeed, it is Welles’s use of fast motion and fast cutting rhythms that conveys the urgency and fatefulness that dominate Shakespeare’s *Othello*; it is his rough and violent montage of the battle of Shrewsbury that evokes the brutality and absurdity of war that Shakespeare reproves in his *Henriad*. It is through Kurosawa’s manipulations of filmic space, through his editorial compositions of highly significant locales, and his dramatisation of rituals and ceremonies that Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *King Lear* take on mythical dimensions. It is also the didactic, yet humorous style of the editing in *Looking for Richard* that makes *Richard III* both accessible and entertaining to mainstream audiences. It is through Taymor and Bonnot’s oneiric and evocative editing of the ‘Penny Arcade Nightmare’ sequences – through the rich textures of the pictures-in-pictures impositions – that the violent and corporeal imagery of the surreal world of *Titus Andronicus* becomes so vividly aestheticised. And it is also in

⁶ Orson Welles, quoted by André Bazin in *Orson Welles: A Critical View* (Venice, CA: First Acrobat Books, 1991), p. 110-111.

Almereyda's Hamlet's use of montage that we can catch a glimpse of the inner turmoil that rages inside the head of Shakespeare's Danish prince. Paradoxically, although the syntagmatic arrangements of the shots amongst themselves allow the film-editor to interpret the play-texts by either imitating or disrupting the rhythms of Shakespeare's prose and verse, it is not exclusively through this kind of filmic punctuation and semantic manipulations that the Shakespearean text gets re-presented and translated through the cinematic apparatus. It is also and perhaps more particularly through the paradigmatic process of shot selection — through the selection of significant aural and visual elements — that different concepts and meanings get attached to Shakespeare's words. For instance when, in Taymor's *Titus*, Marcus finds Lavinia standing on a tree stump in the middle of a swamp with her hands cut off, it is by supplementing images of a distressed Lavinia to Marcus's words that Taymor and Bonnot express the sheer monstrosity of the scene. Marcus's poignant description of Lavinia as he sees her —

Speak, gentle niece, what stern ungentle hands
Have lopp'd and hew'd and made thy body bare
Of her two branches, those sweet ornaments,
Whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in,
Why dost not speak to me?⁷

— is echoed and made forcefully visual by a cut to a shot of Lavinia showing bundles of twigs in lieu of her hands and opening her mouth from where a flow of crimson blood spurts out in slow motion. The Shakespearean metaphor that transforms Lavinia into a tree whose limbs have been 'lopp'd and hew'd' is here taken literally, for amongst the stumps of the swamp and with her arms now ending with two woody appendices, she *is* the embodiment of Marcus's words. And although the poetry of these words prepares us to the horror of Lavinia's suffering, it is the editorial overstatement of this shot in slow motion that gives voice to them.

⁷ These lines are cited from the screenplay of the film by Julie Taymor, *Titus, The Illustrated Screenplay* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), p. 93.

Is the film-editor then a collaborative agent or an *auteur* per se? Bound to the hierarchy and imperatives of film production, yet competing with the director for a 'fair share of the pleasure pie',⁸ the editor (if it is not also the director) is truly caught up between two gestures: the necessity to comply to the requirements of the production team and his/her aspiration to authorship — and to some degree of recognition. What ensues is that to some degree, authorship has to be shared. In an attempt not only to reconcile these two movements, to comprehend the discrepancies between the desire for authorship and a collective mode of production but also to rescue the editor from anonymity, I have proposed to use the term 'collaborative *auteur*' — a *collage* between post-structuralism and romanticism. And in the process of restoring authorial agency to its source and to where it belongs, the influence of film-editing in producing Shakespeare on film has become visible and has appeared to be as significant and defining as *mise en scène*, camerawork, actorly performance, or any other aspects of film production.

In this thesis, although my intentions have been to question the hegemony of *auteurist*, director-based criticisms of Shakespearean films, I have the feeling that somewhere along the way, at some level I have formed some sort of Romantic attachment to these *auteurs*, whether they be editors or directors. After all, in spite of the significant advances of post-structuralism, it *does* matter who is speaking, and the need to find unifying figures of authority able to resolve the enigmas we read in a text remains pressingly there. If the critical practice of the concept of *auteurism* in its singular form is indeed reductive in terms of interpretative possibilities, then why not use it in its plurality? And although there can only be one William Shakespeare, could there not be more than one *auteur* to give voice to the work of the Elizabethan playwright? In the end, is it not the richness of collaborative creation in film production

⁸ Courtney Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains: Theater to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern* (London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 233.

that makes Shakespeare's plays so popular and entertaining? Should we not embrace it and celebrate it?

Filmography

Chimes At Midnight (also known as *Falstaff*) (Spain/Switzerland, 1966)
 Dir. Orson Welles, Ed. Elena Jaumandreu, Frederick Muller, and Peter Parasheles
 Orson Welles (*Falstaff*), Keith Baxter (*Hal*), John Gielgud (*King Henry*)

Citizen Kane (USA, 1941)
 Dir. Orson Welles, Ed. Robert Wise
 Orson Welles (*Charles Foster Kane*), Joseph Cotten (*Jedediah Leland*), Everett Sloane (*Mr Bernstein*)

City Hall (USA, 1996)
 Dir. Harold Becker, Eds. David Bretherton and Robert C. Jones
 Al Pacino (*John Pappas*), John Cusack (*Kevin Calhoun*), Bridget Fonda (*Marybeth Cogan*)

Filming Othello (West Germany, 1978)
 Dir. Orson Welles, Ed. Orson Welles
 Orson Welles (*Host*), Robert Coote, Hilton Edwards, Micheál MacLiammóir

Gladiator (UK/USA, 2000)
 Dir. Ridley Scott, Ed. Pietro Scalia
 Russell Crowe (*Maximus*), Joaquin Phoenix (*Commodus*), Connie Nielsen (*Lucilla*)

Hamlet (UK, 1948)
 Dir. Laurence Olivier, Ed. Helga Cranston
 Laurence Olivier (*Hamlet*), Jean Simmons (*Ophelia*), Eileen Herlie (*Queen Gertrude*), Basil Sydney (*King Claudius*)

Hamlet (Soviet Union, 1964)
 Dir. Grigori Kozintsev, Ed. Grigoriya Kozintsev
 Innokenti Smoktunovsky (*Hamlet*), Yuri Tolubeyev (*Polonius*), Anastasiya Vertinskaya (*Ophelia*)

Hamlet (USA, 1990)
 Dir. Franco Zeffirelli, Ed. Richard Marden
 Mel Gibson (*Hamlet*), Glenn Close (*Queen Gertrude*), Helena Bonham Carter (*Ophelia*)

Hamlet (UK, 1996)
 Dir. Kenneth Branagh, Ed. Neil Farrell
 Kenneth Branagh (*Hamlet*), Kate Winslet (*Ophelia*), Julie Christie (*Queen Gertrude*), Derek Jacobi (*King Claudius*)

Hamlet (USA, 2000)

Dir. Michael Almereyda, Ed. Kristina Boden

Ethan Hawke (Hamlet), Julia Stiles (Ophelia), Diane Venora (Queen Gertrude), Kyle MacLachlan (King Claudius)

Heat (USA, 1995)

Dir. Michael Mann, Eds. Pasquale Buba, William Goldenberg, Dov Hoenig, and Tom Rolf

Al Pacino (Vincent Hanna), Robert De Niro (Neil McCauley), Val Kilmer (Chris Shiherlis)

Henry V (UK, 1944)

Dir. Laurence Olivier, Ed. Reginald Beck and Laurence Olivier

Laurence Olivier (Henry V), Leslie Banks (Chorus), Renée Asherson (Princess Katherine)

Henry V (UK, 1989)

Dir. Kenneth Branagh, Ed. Michael Bradsell

Kenneth Branagh (King Henry V), Emma Thompson (Princess Katherine), Derek Jacobi (Chorus)

Ikiru (Japan, 1952)

Dir. Akira Kurosawa, Ed. Akira Kurosawa

Takashi Shimura (Kanji Watanabe), Nobuo Kaneko (Mitsuo Watanabe), Kyoko Seki (Kazue Watanabe)

King Lear (Soviet Union, 1969)

Dir. Grigori Kozintsev, Ed. Grigori Kozintsev

Regimantas Adomaitis (Edmund), Juri Jarvet (King Lear), Valentina Shrendrikova (Cordelia)

Looking For Richard (USA, 1996)

Dir. Al Pacino, Ed. William A. Anderson, Ned Bastille, Pasquale Buba, and Andre Ross Betz

Al Pacino (Narrator/Richard III), Kevin Spacey (Buckingham), Winona Ryder (Lady Anne), Alec Baldwin (Clarence)

Macbeth (USA, 1948)

Dir. Orson Welles, Ed. Louis Lindsay

Orson Welles (Macbeth), Jeanette Nolan (Lady Macbeth)

Mr Arkadin (France/Spain/Switzerland, 1955)

Dir. Orson Welles, Ed. Orson Welles, Renzo Lucidi and William Morton

Akim Tamiroff (Jakob Zouk), Orson Welles (Gregory Arkadin), Katina Paxinou (Sophie)

Much Ado About Nothing (USA/UK, 1993)

Dir. Kenneth Branagh, Ed. Andrew Marcus

Kenneth Branagh (Benedict), Emma Thompson (Beatrice), Denzel Washington (Don Pedro), Robert Sean Leonard (Claudio)

My Own Private Idaho (USA, 1991)

Dir. Gus Van Sant, Ed. Curtiss Clayton

Keanu Reeves (Scott Favor), River Phoenix (Mike Waters), William Richert (Bob Pigeon)

Nixon (USA, 1995)

Dir. Oliver Stone, Eds. Brian Berdan, Hank Corwin and Oliver Stone

Anthony Hopkins (Richard Nixon), Joan Allen (Pat Nixon), Ed Harris (E. Howard Hunt)

Othello (Morocco/Italy, 1952)

Dir. Orson Welles, Ed. Jenő Csepreghy, Renzo Lucidi, William Morton, and Jean Sacha

Orson Welles (Othello), Suzanne Cloutier (Desdemona), Micheál MacLiammóir (Iago)

Othello (UK, 1981) TV

Dir. Jonathan Miller, Ed. Malcolm Banthorpe

Anthony Hopkins (Othello), Bob Hoskins (Iago), Penelope Wilton (Desdemona)

Othello (USA/UK, 1995)

Dir. Oliver Parker, Ed. Tony Lawson

Laurence Fishburne (Othello), Kenneth Branagh (Iago), Irène Jacob (Desdemona)

Patty Hearst (UK/USA, 1988)

Dir. Paul Schrader, Ed. Michael R. Miller

Natasha Richardson (Patty Hearst), William Forsythe (Toko), Ving Rhames (Cinque)

Ran ('Chaos') (Japan, 1985)

Dir. Akira Kurosawa, Ed. Akira Kurosawa

Tatsuya Nakadai (Hidetora/Lear), Peter (Kyoami/Fool), Yoshiko Miyazaki (Lady Sue)

Rhapsodie in August (Japan, 1991)

Dir. Akira Kurosawa, Ed. Akira Kurosawa

Sachiko Murase (Kane), Richard Gere (Clark), Hisashi Igawa

Richard III (UK, 1955)

Dir. Laurence Olivier, Ed. Helga Cranston

Laurence Olivier (Richard III), John Gielgud (Clarence), Claire Bloom (Lady Anne), Ralph Richardson (Buckingham)

Romeo and Juliet (Italy UK, 1968)

Dir. Franco Zeffirelli, Ed. Reginald Mills

Leonard Whiting (Romeo), Olivia Hussey (Juliet), John McEnery (Mercutio)

Richard III (UK USA, 1995)

Dir. Richard Loncraine, Ed. Paul Cohen

Ian McKellen (Richard III), Annette Bening (Queen Elizabeth), Kristin Scott Thomas (Lady Anne)

Ring (Japan, 1998)

Dir. Hideo Nakata, Ed. Hideo Nakata

Nanako Matsushima (Reiko Asakawa), Miki Nakatari (Mai Takano)

Shakespeare in Love (UK/USA, 1998)

Dir. John Madden, Ed. David Gamble

Joseph Fiennes (Will Shakespeare), Judi Dench (Queen Elizabeth), Gwyneth Paltrow (Viola De Lesseps)

The Bad Sleep Well (Japan, 1960)

Dir. Akira Kurosawa, Ed. Akira Kurosawa

Toshiro Mifune (Koishi Nishi), Kyoko Kagawa (Keiko Nishi)

The Godfather (USA, 1972)

Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, Ed. William Reynolds and Peter Zinner

Marlon Brando (Vito Corleone), James Caan (Santino Corleone), Al Pacino (Michael Corleone)

The Magnificent Ambersons (USA, 1942)

Dir. Orson Welles, Ed. Robert Wise, Jack Moss, Mark Robson, and Orson Welles

Joseph Cotten (Eugene), Dolores Costello (Isabel), Anne Baxter (Lucy)

The Seven Year Itch (USA, 1955)

Dir. Billy Wilder, Ed. Hugh S. Fowler

Marilyn Monroe (The Girl), Tom Ewell (Richard Sherman)

Throne of Blood (Kumonosu-djo) (Japan, 1957)

Dir. Akira Kurosawa, Ed. Akira Kurosawa

Toshiro Mifune (Washizu/Macbeth), Isuzu Yamada (Asaji/Lady Macbeth)

Titus (USA/Italy, 1999)

Dir. Julie Taymor, Ed. Françoise Bonnot

Anthony Hopkins (Titus), Jessica Lange (Tamora), Harry Lennix (Aaron), Laura Fraser (Lavinia)

Touch of Evil (USA, 1958)

Dir. Orson Welles, Ed. Walter Murch, Aaron Stell, Virgil W. Vogel, Edward Curtiss, Orson Welles

Orson Welles (Hank Quilan), Charlton Heston (Ramon Miguel Vargas), Janet Leigh (Susan Vargas)

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me (USA, 1992)

Dir. David Lynch, Ed. Mary Sweeney and David Lynch

Sheryl Lee (Laura Palmer), Kyle MacLachlan (Dale Cooper), Ray Wise (Leland Palmer)

William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet (USA, 1996) Dir. Baz Luhrmann. Ed. Jill Bilcock
Leonardo DiCaprio (Romeo), Claire Danes (Juliet), Harold Perrineau (Mercutio), Diane Venora (Gloria Capulet), Miriam Margolyes (nurse)

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