Reading Literature through Cinematic Devices

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Abstract: *Cinema has had a long and difficult relationship with literature and, in more than a century of coexistence, the exchanges between the two forms of expression have raised extremely complex questions. There are two opposing views: one is the disdain of the literary for the cinematic; the other is the optimistic belief that the visual is superseding the textual. For this discussion, the most important problem is the differences or resemblances between the "gateways" into the imaginative worlds generated by literature and cinema respectively. Is there a point of juncture between the two arts or do they remain antithetical? The author finds a solution for this conflict in the practices of the pedagogy of adaptation and describes his teaching experience with using adaptation and screenwriting as interpretive tools in the analysis of literary texts.*

Keywords: *cinematic devices, visual narratives, literariness, adaptation, interpretation*

Résumé : *Le cinéma a eu une relation longue et difficile avec la littérature et, pendant plus d'un siècle de coexistence, les échanges entre les deux formes d'expression ont soulevé des questions extrêmement complexes. Il y a deux visions opposées : une est celle du mépris de la littérature pour le cinéma ; l'autre est la croyance optimiste que le visuel remplace le textuel. Pour ce débat, la question la plus importante est celle des différences ou des similarités entre les « portes » vers les mondes de l'imaginaire crées par la littérature et le cinéma. Y a-ti-l un point de jonction entre les deux arts ou est-ce qu'ils restent en antithèse ? L'auteur trouve une solution pour ce conflit dans les pratiques de la pédagogie de l'adaptation et décrit son expérience d'enseignant en utilisant l'adaptation et l'écriture de scénarios comme outils interprétatifs dans l'analyse des textes littéraires.*

Mots-clés : *dispositifs cinématiques, narrations visuelles, littérarité, adaptation, interprétation*

This paper addresses several aspects concerning the troublesome relationship between the literary and the cinematic. The cinema/literature dynamics is difficult to grasp, mostly because the two arts have crossed each other's boundaries countless times in their more than one hundred years of coexistence—since 1896, when, according to Leitch, the first adaptation was recorded (Leitch 24). Cinema and literature are in an ambivalent relationship, simultaneously characterized by competition and collaboration. The theoretical views are also indecisive, moving from a total rejection to a total inclusion. What follows is an uncertain description of their respective functions. Is cinema following

different paths of creating imaginative worlds than those used by literary texts? Are the worlds generated by cinematic devices inferior or superior to those provided by literature?

A redundant cliché is that the visual is inferior to the textual—from the ivory towers of classical literary theories, movies are seen as "superficial" forms of cultural manifestation, part of the degraded nature of popular culture today. For some of the earliest approaches in cinema adaptation studies, novels and movies are antithetic and even antagonistic (Bluestone 31). Literary critics, like Wellek and Warren, dismissed the very possibility of transferring the literary into the painterly, or, for that matter, the need for visual elements in literature (10). Thus, any transfer of the literary into the cinematic was deemed unprofitable. From the perspective of "serious" literary criticism, movies are degenerate forms of the literary, with cinematic adaptations as manifestations of the general pollution produced by mass culture on "valuable" (i.e., literary) cultural products. Furthermore, in this sense any form of combining media—in this case, mixing the literary and the visual—should be considered tasteless and unrefined. This is one line of thought that needs to be recognized and reconsidered.

On the other hand, the art critics, like Adolf Behne, took an overzealous and non-inclusive stance from the opposite perspective, that of the cinematic preeminence. This line of reasoning expresses an overly "optimistic" view about the role of moviemaking in our culture. Although considering cinema as the direct descendent of literary cultures, these early enthusiasts believed that cinema could eliminate books from the center of public attention, making them obsolete. Deepening the gap between the two forms of discourse, even more radical approaches have claimed that literature is actually disappearing, due to the pressures of the new technological means of expression. The replacement of words with images seems to be complete in our contemporary digital age, when visual devices and visual modes of production are predominant. This is the second assumption that needs to be reassessed.

At first sight, this approach seems prevalent, and appears to be confirmed by the new forms of literature, which break with the traditional, chronological and linear narrative forms. Many non-literary tools are integrated within the new "textuality" of some forms of literature that are difficult to comprehend by using the classical instruments of literary theory. The various literary practices facilitated by the new media technologies (video games, video blogging, etc.) have changed our definition of poetry or drama. Cinematic devices clearly play an important role in this transformation. This might indicate another, more radical, solution to the separation we are discussing. The question is whether the readers and the reading practices are adapting to the new literary contexts—otherwise impossible to describe with the classical conceptual tools of literary studies—, such as collaborative writing, multimedia narratives and fragmented story-lines. A third line of inquiry will attempt to address the question "has reading really undergone a radical change or has the way we process meaning altered profoundly?" The underlying assumption is that the new visual technologies (cinema, video games, online narrative softwares) have changed our understanding of literature.

If the new visual technologies have indeed introduced major changes in the way we understand and practice literature, we encounter yet again a negativistic attitude. For

some experts, this evolution, which leads to the expansion of *literariness* into reality and everyday life, thus abandoning the innate "silence" of literature, contributed to the "Death of the Last Writer" ["Mort du dernier écrivain"] (Blanchot qtd. in Hillyer 52). Reading and writing have been abruptly and tragically transformed under the cultural pressures of the new media technologies. This brings us to the disastrous consequences of the "visual turn" brought forward by the new devices. In fact, there is no catastrophic change here; these types of transformation are as old as the production of literary texts itself. We have examples of such transformations in early visual literature, in the art of illustrations, in narrative painting and so on. Once more, we face the difficult nature of the relationship between cinema and literature.

Four Possible Answers to an Impossible Problem

In order to understand the various solutions made possible by this duality, we must sketch a brief classification. In this prolonged debate, there are four major cultural attitudes which deal with the controversial relationship between literature and cinema. Three of these approaches account either for acceptance or rejection; the fourth one, which I will advance at the end of this argument, implies a fusion between the two and a more practical view on their relationship.

The first conceptualization comes from the negativistic outlook on cinema. Many writers, philosophers and literary theorists belong to a group that can be identified as *The Purists.* They despise cinema and claim that literature should have nothing to do with such a "vulgar art form." Perhaps the best example of how the Purists relate to cinema is J.D. Salinger, who was never anything but critical towards movie-making. After the clumsy adaptation of the story "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," transformed by Mark Robson into *My Fooolish Heart* (1949), Salinger decided never to sell his rights to a film studio again. In a letter to a film producer in 1957, Salinger explicitly stated the reasons why he would never accept turning his novels, and specially his famously influential *The Catcher in the Rye*, into films. His main argument was that the inner life of his literary character cannot be brought to the screen, since no actor can express the profound nature of Holden's inner life (Salinger, Letter to Herbert). However, this is actually not the most important rebuttal of the ability of cinema to compete with literature. The other argument Salinger puts forward is more forceful: the writer contends that the very idea of turning his novel into a visually dramatized product is "odious." Literature has nothing to do with cinema, literature must not blend with cinema, because the cinematic transformation is poisonous to literature. As Holden provocatively says, "movies […] can ruin you" (Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* 134).

Did J.D. Salinger's prose remain "untouched" by cinema? Of course not. His refusal to sell the rights to any Hollywood production company did keep his texts "pure." And yet, the numerous second-hand productions and transpositions of Salinger's works all point to the ability of cinema to devour any literary work, since this "purist" view did not prevent Hollywood from using Salinger's plots and characters. As the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky showed when he diagnosed this inner mechanism of cinema, this is what film

narratives do; movies simply use literary storylines and plots (Shklovsky, "Literature and Cinema"). Relevantly enough, many contemporary movies are essentially developing Holden-like characters and storylines, from Benjamin Braddock in *The Graduate* (1967) to *Donnie Darko* (2001). Basically, for the literary Purists, the cinematic is "killing the literary" by taking over its inner structures and depleting them of their intensity.

Other literary works remained "untouched" by cinema not because the authors are Purists who believe that cinema and literature are two different things and that they shouldn't be put together, but because movie makers are reluctant to approach certain writings. There are still some major literary works that have never made it to the big screen, such as *Ulysses* by James Joyce or Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, due to the preconception that literary works dealing with the internalized life of a character (or the subjective self of the writer) are impossible to visualize. Or, as is the case with Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, that sometimes the timespan of the events presented in a literary work is overwhelmingly non-cinematic.

At the other end of this spectrum are those who see film adaptations as forms of "impure cinema" (Cartmell and Whelehan), manifestations of the harmful influence of the textual on the visual. They quote the numerous great writers who tried (and failed) to become great screenwriters—a phenomenon which provides the background for the arguments of the "cinematic purists." Indeed, writers like Norman Mailer, William Faulkner or F. Scott Fitzgerald were hired by major Hollywood studios to write for the screen. They left the business disappointed and adopted a critical attitude towards such attempts. Fitzgerald's case is probably the most relevant: a cinematic writer, who was able to create a powerful character like Gatsby and who developed a montage type of narrative, was unable to adapt his creativity for the movies. And yet Fitzgerald's, who reputedly said that Hollywood ruins even the smallest shred of literary talent (Hamilton 189), are still adapted to the screen. This is often presented as an argument in favor of the Purists of cinema; novelists are not supposed (and are not able) to write for movies, and thus, cinema narratives must remain separated from their literary counterparts.

The second approach is more inclusive and permeable towards cinema. We can list among its supporters the vast majority of writers and movie directors. I call this group *The Adapters*. Basically, the entire Hollywood film industry is based on the doctrine that literature can be easily transposed into the new medium of cinema in a fashion that does not impair the original text. Cinema does not "harm" the written text; on the contrary, it enhances it and adds to its values. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) is one of the earliest and most telling examples. The director, the screenwriter and the cinematographer all honored Frank Baum's legacy. If we were to credit them with nothing but this, at least they were faithful to the text and tried to present the viewers, as faithfully as they could, a visualized universe which projects the world intended by the writer. Some directors do a better job than others, but most Hollywood productions are based on this philosophy of faithfulness to the literary text. Salman Rushdie confessed in his comments on the story of Dorothy, "Out of Kansas", that when he first saw *The Wizard of Oz*, it made him a writer (Rushdie 18). Clearly, cinema not only transforms literary texts, it also turns people into writers.

Perhaps the most famous example in the history of film adaptations remains Franco Zeffirelli, who created the most literary accurate visual representation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968). Zeffirelli is the ultimate Adapter, not only because one can read the play and watch the film simultaneously without any interruption, but also because he is a *faithful reader* of the original text. The literary text (in this case, the dramatic text) is synchronized with the visual text and the Adapters are using the cinematic devices only to recreate the world of literature. Unfortunately, this over the top respect for the written word makes the cinematic subservient to the original work.

No matter how hard the directors try to preserve the essence of literature, no matter how good a film maker they are, *the cinematic product is not literary.* This is proved by works such as Peter Jackson's transformation of Tolkien's novel. There will always be a point of betrayal, a breaking point that takes place at the threshold of the "90-minute magic." How can one make an adaptation of a four-part novel spanning over two thousand pages and compress it into the standard chronological cinematic time of one hour and thirty minutes? The neurological limits of the brain are the ones which determine how we watch motion pictures, and this is the most important difference between reading a book and watching a film. We cannot leave the movie theater and return at a later time, as we do with a book. This physical restriction imposed on reception is unbreakable and marks the divide between the two arts. Even if many directors push the time barrier forward and forward, and we end up with movies like *Lord of the Rings* (2000, more than 680 minutes long), *Melancholia* (2008, 450 minutes long) or *Modern Times Forever* (2011; the Danish experimental film with a runtime of 240 hours), nobody can watch a movie which is ten days long. Therefore, however brilliant Peter Jackson might be, the time restrictions of film-making remain the main problem of the Adapters.

Of course, such faithful adaptations are useful tools in the literature studies departments, and are easily picked up by literature teachers helping students to visualize their object of study. An excellent example is the online platform http://www.teachwithmovies.org, that shows college professors how to use movies in order to teach various classes, from arts to social sciences. Cinema tends to become only an illustration for the visual natives of contemporary societies.

The third group is made of *The Visualists*: film directors who believe in the value of cinema as a completely separate art, dominated by visuality and based on the refusal of textuality (i.e., writing and speaking). A great example for this approach is Andrei Tarkovsky's adaptation of Stanisław Lem's novel, *Solaris*. The homonymous movie (1968) is transformed into a metaphor for silence and impossible psychological connections. Tarkovsky's pictorially beautiful universe, abounding with cultural allusions, is a masterpiece claiming for cinema the status of an autonomous art. Another example is the adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel *What Dreams May Come*, in which Dante's Inferno is pictorially re-created by Eduardo Serra as a background for a modern story. Even here, however daring the narratives might be in their visual dimension, they are still based on storylines, or on plots, as Shklovsky pointed out. Thus the movies keep their literariness (or *literaturnost*, to use the term coined by the Russian formalists).

We find a more radical illustration of this in Stan Brakhage's films, where we witness the highest degree of involvement with developing a pure "art of vision," according to which movies have a single purpose, "to make you see." For Brakhage, the art of cinema is a "transparent hallucination" which has no language, and while filmmaking is an art of the light, closer to painting, it opposes writing as an art of the sound. Sometimes called "pictorial cinema" or "visual films," the productions of the visualists are based on the fundamental assumption that, in order to construct meanings into the cinematic, we have to discard all that is literary, i.e., we have to abandon all dialogues, all plots, all conflicts of characters, and throw away all that Aristotle told us is good in narratives.

Is this acceptable? In order to "read" literary texts we need to remain within the field of literature, and in order to "see" movies we have to embrace a total cinematic purity? Once again, the question is as old as the theoretical debate on what storytelling is. As Aristotle pointed out, once we make a separation between *mimesis*, i.e., the imitation of the world by showing it, and *diegesis*, the capacity of explaining the outside world through words, we make a separation between presentation and representation. Aristotle has left us with a profound divide, suggesting that if we want to get to the meaning of something we have to choose either *mimesis* or *diegesis*, that is either the dramatic or the narrative. We cannot put them together, because if we join the two, we will end up with a monstrous mixture. The example that Aristotle provides in the famous chapter 9 of the *Poetics* is that of "epeisodic" narratives, which are the worst possible kind and are produced by "bad poets." Should we follow the theoretical approaches that dismiss the possible connection between the visual and the written?

Clearly, today this separation is impracticable. More so, many concepts and techniques pertaining to narrative (read *literary*) are assimilated into the dramatic (read *cinematic*), and, which is relevant to the hypothesis of the possible juncture between the two arts, many forms of expression specific to cinema (point of view, focalization) are integrated among the tools of the novelist. Of course, the "classical" forms of storytelling are still observed by many Hollywood directors and writers, who still give Aristotle the credit for the principles of unity and tripartite structure of the stories.

On the other hand, we have great examples of how the visual can combine with the narrative. In this respect, the return of the graphic novel in contemporary cinema is more than telling. Both in the "popular" forms (as is the case with the super-heroes of the Marvel universe) and, more importantly, in productions like *Persepolis* (the graphic novel of the Iranian writer Marjane Satrapi), there is an amazing and natural juncture between the mimetic and the diegetic. We can use any other revelatory example—Frank Miller's transpositions of his own visual universe into the cinematic, for instance. As Miller became a cinema director, his moviemaking practices turned into a proof of how the literary can meet the cinematic. In what has recently been dubbed the "post-celluloid" cinematic, a new cinematic that re-mixes comic books with filmic visualizations and literary devices, the "inspiration" for cinematic works is constantly multiplying. The sources of cinematic narrative are extremely diverse, ranging from toys and action figures (Transformers, Pokemon) to video games (Resident Evil, Prince of Persia) and even "true-stories" from newspapers (Captain Philips) or ideas

originating in popular media, like musical videos and pop songs (e.g., *Across the Universe* or even *Mamma Mia!*).

Without dwelling too much on the complex problems generated by the connections between cinematic devices, the graphic novel and other forms of visual culture, we can use the aforementioned examples to explain how the "cinematic turn" in narrative practices is as important as the preeminence of the literary text. And the case of graphic novel adaptations is relevant for the crucible that cinema is, incorporating literature and other forms of representation. This allows us to identify some mechanisms of how one representation form (cinema) is instrumental for the functioning of all the other.

Not Just a Matter of Adaptation

In the following pages, the discussion will focus on how film adaptations of literary texts, as the most familiar context in which we are used to see narratives brought to screen, can facilitate the understanding of literature. In spite of the negative and dismissing attitudes towards cinematic narratives, or the narrow understanding of movies as autonomous, cinema is constantly borrowing meanings from various sources. In this respect, literary texts remain a major source of inspiration, and, since cinema must manifest itself through a visual medium, the form and content of stories are constantly filtered through the visual, acquiring new valences.

This is why most of the theoretical approaches dealing with the relationship between cinema and literature discussed their convergence from the perspective of film adaptations. The most direct manifestation of this relationship seems to be expressed (improperly, I would add) through the mechanisms of adaptation. The most important traits of the connection between literature and films become salient when watching adapted novels. Actually, the vast majority of films are based on books, and adaptation has been the dominant form of content production in the industry of cinema from the very beginning. Ever since the first photographical cameras were able to capture stories in movement, cinematic productions have been based on narratives adapted from the most popular texts of human culture. The first adaptations were, of course, simple visual transpositions of classical texts. From the Bible—starting with *La vie et la passion de Jésus Christ* (*The Life and Passion of Christ*, 1903) and *La vie de Moïse* (*The Life Of Moses*, 1905) —to the fantastic remakes of classical fairy tales—such as *Cinderella* (1985) or *La sirène* (*The Mermaid*, 1904) by Georges Méliès, the first French filmmaker to become fascinated with fantastic stories—, cinema has constantly been indebted to literature. Later on came D.W. Griffith, who created the modern film industry and who started his own cinematic adventure by adapting *Ramona* (1910), Helen Hunt Jackson's 1884 novel.

After Griffith, who acknowledged the impact of Dickens's works on his filming techniques, adaptation remained a major trope of cinema and filmmakers constantly use this ability of the cinematic medium to draw on literary sources for inspiration. Even if some authors, like Thomas Leitch, argue that Hollywood and global filmmaking have entered an era of "post-literary adaptations," through the use of comic strips, video games and other media as primary source (258), the majority of movie productions are still

based on literary adaptations (Marlow 17). Significantly enough, although the American motion picture industry awards have a separate category for adapted works, most films produced every year are adaptations. From a broader perspective, any film is at first a literary text, since in order to go from plot to screen you need a script, a screenplay (be it for an adaptation or an original idea).

This reality creates an emblematic perspective on cinema—due to the contexts in which we are used to relate to such cultural products. Most of the times, we come across cinematic narratives that are directly borrowing from literary texts, which means they manifest as secondary forms of expression. Thus, films appear to simply recycle literary characters, plots, stories and textual meanings through a visual medium. As Linda Hutcheon noted, the cinematic transformations of literature are most often perceived as bi-products or even as a form of trivialization (Hutcheon 3). Adaptations are considered to be "inferior" readings of literary texts, a "lowering" of high art or even a "parasitical" manifestation of cinema's lack of creative abilities. Therefore, all adaptations are manifestations of the "pollution" of "high" culture by mass culture. The cinematic is seen as a sub-literary cultural product, since any visual discourse is inferior to the textual one. "The book is better than the film" is often presented as an uncontested truth, even by film specialists (Cahir 13). Does this make films pseudo-literary (or even subcultural) product? Are the viewers inferior to the readers?

Leaving aside the differences and the competition between cinema and literature, there is a mechanism common to both—and, as a matter of fact, common to all the arts of representation by reproduction (sometimes called mimetic arts). If we consider how pictorial arts generate an apparent reality in our mind—this is true for the theater or the opera—, we notice that there is an inherent ability of any work of art to create a make-believe universe, one which seems to be self-sufficient. Literature is often appreciated for properties that allow the reconstruction of reality in the mind of the reader. As some literary theorists suggest, there is a more syncretic understanding of the very essence of cultural consumption, if we accept the fact that any reading is a form of modification. When reading, we naturally move away from the initial meaning of the text, because we are immersed in a "web of feelings, sensations, images and ideas" (Rosenblatt 137). As Linda Hutcheon aptly pointed out (Hutcheon 27), there are three basic "modes" of reception (telling, showing and interactivity), yet the separation between the three is only apparent, since at a deeper level, they operate with the same mechanisms.

In this context I would describe cinema as a form of literary interpretation, very much akin to the critical interpretation of a text. Due to the rendition efforts of the film director and our own mental processing, we are not "reading" an inertial message, but literature. The particular type of "reading" in which films engage us actually facilitates our access to a type of medium that is otherwise unavailable. The new technologies have simplified the use of new devices in the process of visual interpretation, just as narrative painting or graphic illustrations did in a previous stage of our culture.

Reading, Seeing and Understanding

The problem is not only one of preeminence (i.e., what comes first, seeing or reading). The question is which one provides a better understanding of the world. Clearly, it is a puzzling state of affairs and we are trying to crack one of the oldest dilemmas of our culture—since one of the biggest impediments in overcoming the hostility between the cinematic and the literary is based on the centuries-old divide that goes back to the classical separation between the spoken and the seen, the articulate and the artistic, the arts of the *presentation* and those of *representation* (Mitchell 51-61). And in the continuous dialectic tension between Word and Image there is always a prevalent viewpoint. As Mitchell observed, there are critical voices that see the "pictorial turn" as an abandoning of language, and the victory of moving pictures over other, classical arts as a subversion of our culture. Literature is often portrayed as one of the victims of the dominance of visuality.

One "negative" example is the fact that children prefer to watch a film rather than spend time reading a book. How can we explain to children that it is not enough to watch the film adaptation of a book, and that even if the film has a great director and is faithful to the content of the book, watching it is not the same as reading the book? Has our mind changed in a radical way now that we are in contact with so many new visual technologies? Has the visual changed the literary? Did it alter the way we see the world around us?

Again, the stereotype says that cinema is not a good instrument for understanding literature and, what is more, once the "reader" abandons the literary, he is no longer in contact with "high culture." If you enjoy seeing a film, this makes you a "bad" consumer of culture. It is even worse if you have the audacity to say that you liked a cinema adaptation of a novel. According to this viewpoint, if we want to understand the textual meaning, it is compulsory to read the literary text alone. For these critics of "popular culture," cinema goers are "literary illiterate"; they are in many ways inferior to those who savor "true meaning." It would be even worse if you had the audacity to say that such a by-product has aesthetic value. Naturally, the academia cultivates a certain highbrow dominance of the written text—after all, this is the job of a college teacher, to use written words in order to control meaning. As seen before, this is a negativistic line of reasoning, according to which cinema is culturally inferior to literature (Griggs 363).

Some writers, on the other hand, have been very clear in expressing their indebtedness to cinema (Greene, qtd. in Marcus 354-55), claiming to have used the "eye of the camera" in their novels. In a way, this brings up the centuries-long problematical relationship between the visual and the textual, addressed by many narratologists dealing with the impact the cinematic plays on other media. The movies exert a powerful transformative pressure on many new media which employ cinematic tools of expression, like television programs or video games. These influences are unequivocal in visual products that can be described as *cinematographic*—i.e., which present reality with the aid of visual cues and cinematic tools. The issues are more complex—and more relevant to my discussion—in the case of the new forms of literary texts (sometimes called cinematic novels) which have

brought into the written culture something that does not necessarily belong to traditional forms of literature. Some authors offer a broad definition of *cinematic literature*, defining it as any "form of literature which communicates through a visual language" (Etzkowitz 8). Here, films are literary practices manifested in the visual. This approach creates an unnecessary confusion between "cinematic literature" and "literary cinema," since by this definition written novels are simply "printed literature" and "filmed" novels become film literature. As explained by Andrew Shail, this confusion springs from the fact that modern literature was profoundly influenced by the cinematic experience, and a "visual literature" began to develop even before the birth of cinema, thus making the borders and the sources of influence not so easily distinguishable.

The problem with these approaches is that they put us completely off track, since the most important question is not why people do not "read texts" or how can we change this trend, how can we force them to return to the "good" and "traditional" ways of reception, but rather what is actually happening with the reading and reception of culture overall? Have things really changed because we now assign meaning to "visual natives," because generations of young people have become "visually literate" and have adjusted their behavior?

In order to overcome this sociological bias, we will have to ask a simpler question: What is reading, actually? What makes it so exceptional? What do we do when we read and why should we understand literature as such a special art and cultural gesture? This set of questions entails another one: what makes some narratives more interesting for filmmakers? What makes them suitable for cinematic interpretation? How is it possible to make a book into a film without understanding the inner functions of the text itself? And finally, how do we make sense of literary texts at all, since they are different from other discourses?

My contention is that in order to understand any text, we have to go beyond the formal devices and turn the meaning into an experience, thus making it our own. In this respect, seeing a film and reading a book are equivalent.

Adaptation as a Form of "Reading"

Adaptations are usually described as "inferior" forms of reading the literary texts from which they drew their inspiration. Yet if we consider adaptation as a cultural process instead of discussing only one particular adaptation, we come to notice that several adaptations provide multiple versions of the same cultural content. As is the case with the classical plays of Shakespeare, the transposition of a single work into a multiplicity of visual representations becomes more relevant than the obvious simplification we find if we look at just one film.

Secondly, we are entitled to wonder whether literature really is so different from cinema, in terms of developing feelings and sensations in the receiver or through its ability to facilitate access to meaning. Is there such a profound separation between a novel and a film?

Many writers and theorists remain hostile to any connection between the two. The critics of such a connection are in greater numbers than its defenders, and certainly more critics will follow. They claim that, even though both literature and cinema develop feelings and sensations and provide a close relationship with the text, the way films do this is more abrupt, and sometimes even brutal. Apart from the fact that the cinematic versions of novels (and cinema in general, as a form of discourse) are described by these critics as manifestations of the parasitical nature of films, in its relationship with literature cinema has two major shortcomings.

It was Viktor Shklovsky who, in his seminal essay on cinema and literature ("Literatura i kinematograf"), expressed one of the first hostile theoretical accounts of the relationship between the cinematic and the literary, claiming that the two media are actually incompatible. Cinema is not literature, nor is it theater, since it is a completely different art, founded on *discontinuity*. Cinema is limited by this defining feature, which it cannot overcome. Shklovsky's radical conclusion was that cinema would disappear in the future of humanity, since motion pictures were primitive forms of expression. His definition of cinema is an expression of the major argument shared by theorists who disparage the cinematic in the name of the value of literature. The lesser value of cinema is given by its "childish" nature. After Shklovsky saw Eisenstein's *Bronenosets Potemkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925), he reconsidered his early perspective on the inferiority of cinema. The literary critic turned into a movie theorist and changed his views from understanding cinema as a simplistic version of the literary plot to seeing it as a powerful propaganda tool. Shklovsky concluded that films could prove to be a helpful propaganda tool for communist activists trying to persuade people to embrace the communist ideology, precisely because of its "poetic" nature. Even if the Soviet film critic acknowledged the poetic function of cinema and considered that "poetic cinema" was the path to overcome the primitive stage of the seventh art, this was doable only by abandoning the literariness of the cinematic.

Another harsh critic of cinema was Virginia Woolf, who evaluated the impact of films on the literary and identified another point of rupture. Strangely enough for a writer extensively using cinematic tools in her works, in a 1926 article, Woolf describes cinema as "rapacious" and monstrous in its relationship with literature. Her contention is that, while giving us the illusion of being *in* the real world, the cinematic is actually offering an absence of the real: the link between cinema and literature is considered "unnatural," because film representations are deformations of the actual world. This is what makes the movie spectator a "savage." Woolf uses Anna Karenina as an example of how the exterior (faces, clothes, scenery) ape the richness of inner life (thoughts, suffering, emotions). For Woolf, cinema is reduced to the oversimplifying solutions of actions and plots—which in turn transform the cinematic experience into a poor and diluted understanding of the literary text, ultimately doing literature a great disservice (Woolf 268-72).

I would argue that we need to get over this negativistic view of adaptation and deal with it as a form of "reading." To begin with, in order to turn a book into a film, the original source must first become a script, i.e., *a text*. In this sense, any adaptation is part of a textual elaboration. My second argument is that the film/text relationship traditionally

(and improperly) called "adaptation" is actually a more complex phenomenon. Any film director—and any screenwriter—who wants to turn a book into a film will face a series of problems which are profoundly *literary*. Any filmmaker dealing with a novel (or a play, or any form of narrative) will have to identify cinematic solutions for non-cinematic aspects. At the end of the process, his view will add to the initial meaning of the text, precisely by exploring the textual meanings. This major function of adaptations becomes clear when comparing various screen adaptations of the same text, as Robert Stam suggestively does with *Don Quixote* (Stam 22-59). An important feature of cinema is its ability to multiply the text in a variety of adaptations, thus generating several versions of the same cultural content and by this providing a comparative tool for analysis. In this respect, cinema is often used in literature classes as a form of literary criticism.

The question for me is not whether adapted movies can be used in teaching literature, but whether we can interpret the literary by the use of cinematic tools, whether we can find ways of "reading" the initial written text by using non-literary tools as part of an interpretive process. Obviously, whenever a novel is transformed into a film there is a process that presents the viewer with a "reading" of narratives that belongs to another mode of expression. Yet in order to better understand the mechanisms in place, we need to address a more difficult question: what does it mean to read? What *is* reading, after all? Why is reading so important for our life experience? Is the act of reading the only possible way to understand literature? Does reading occupy a "special" place in the making of our cultural selves? Finally, are reading practices the only way to access literary meanings, and are they radically different from other forms of understanding?

First I would suggest that we need to change the traditional perspective according to which we are able to understand literature only by the mediation of textual reading. This would allow us to gain better insight into the traditional view on the reception of literature—according to which the meaning of a text is located solely on the written page—and adopt a non-traditional view on how the literary functions. The claim is that the new visual technologies—not only cinema, but also video games or online software interfacing visuality—can provide a more diverse understanding and use of literature.

If we were to rely on classical narrative theories, we would have to agree that the very act of reading is about the experience generated by a writer operating within the mind of a reader, through the use of formal literary instruments. Without going too deep into the theories of reading, the literary work is considered to be a pre-fabricated structure, built and still controlled by "the Writer." The reader is more or less a "decoder" of meanings placed in the textual discourse by this powerful Writer. This is most likely a "superreader" (Riffaterre 37-38); and yet, such a reader is only able to recreate the intentions of the author. This reader clearly does not exist.

We can find a more inclusive definition if we turn to one of the most important contemporary schools of literary theory—reader-response criticism. One starting point would be Wolfgang Iser and the contribution of the Constance School to the study of reading and of literature. For this school of thought, the "actual reader" is completely different from the traditional understanding of the reader: his practices are usually taken from real life. As Iser suggested, we need to change our understanding of reading by

referring to the relevant practices of the actual reader, his real *intentions*. Iser advanced a concept which proves very efficient in helping us realize that our perspective on reading needs to be reevaluated.

To read is no longer comprehensible as something that we do in a linear way, following phoneme after phoneme, syllable after syllable, word after word, sentence after sentence. Instead reading must be understood as something that actually takes place in our mind, a *projection*, an actual visual projection, which takes place in our brain. Consequently, in order to get a better grasp of the effect of literature, we have to make this effort of projection and decipher how the projection of meaning takes shape inside our minds. The assumption is that, in order to understand the production of meaning, we need to see the end of the intentional approach or, as Iser put it, we have to approach the text in a manner which will "make it our own." The reader does not follow the lead of some supreme message transmitter, he is not a mere consumer of the meaning placed in the text by somebody who is often long dead (the author), nor does he accept pre-established messages. The text is brought to life only when the readers are there to allow its existence (Iser 274). The text has to come to life in order for it to be endowed with meaning.

Furthermore, if we are to change our traditional perspective, a more radical re-evaluation of the act of reading is in order. Roland Barthes provides one such renewing perspective on reading, defining the practice as a "form of love." According to Barthes, one needs to abandon the "traditional," pre-established means of entering the text and treat reading as an encounter which involves both pleasure and pain, an act of intimate connection. This is a problematic issue when it comes to the visual and the textual, and many narratologists have addressed this aspect. According to Mieke Bal, who dealt with the visual/textual conflict when she discussed the relationship between some of Rembrandt's paintings and their biblical sources of inspiration (Bal, *Reading Rembrandt*), it is in "the act of reading" that the visual amplifies the meaning of the textual.

Using these two keys of interpretation allows us to move further with our understandings of reading, and bridge the gap between the reception of films and the reception of texts written on a book page. There is a link between the way we "meet the text" inside the book and what happens when we experience the screen version. The cinematic provides us with an interpretation of literature through devices which enable intimate experiences with the textual meanings; it allows us to make the textual meanings our own, private and internal matters. This is due to the highly participatory nature of cinema and the immersive environment in which the act of reception is carried out.

From Visual Storytelling to Cinematic Literature

This leads us to the idea that in order to understand the cultural transformations which influence the way we read (literature), we need to realize how our relationship with the literary has changed in terms of the way we create (non-literary) meanings. Do our minds operate differently simply because we are now constantly exposed to the new technologies of vision (cinema, television, online video productions)? Or are our reception practices the only things that have changed? The new visual technologies have obviously modified

the way we experience the world around us—vision has overpowered the other meaning production practices, especially writing. This transformation, in its turn, has generated relevant changes in the arts, in society, in politics and so on. More importantly, for this discussion, it had a profound impact on literature and what literariness is. If we want to understand what is happening today, we need to overview the changes literature has been subjected to over the last two centuries.

One unmistakable phenomenon today is the *cinematization* of media contents. The cinematic is a major stylistic and aesthetic model, a form of contemporary consumption widespread in almost all our cultural practices (from high art to daily life). C*inematic media* does not refer only to films, since several media employ cinematic tools of expression and, more importantly, there is a dominant form of visual narration which many described as cinematographic. By *cinematographic* we mean a way of presenting the world in a visually realistic manner, by using the cinematic techniques of capturing and editing a particular fragment of reality.

In order to understand the way cinematization came about, we need to grasp the duration of this process. And to do so, we must look back to an important turning point in the history of world literature: a significant transformation, which took place early in modern British literature and whose consequences modified writing practices and later put our culture on a path that lead to the contemporary forms of storytelling, including cinema, advertising, cartoons, video games and so on. Today these new forms of expression have generated new forms of "literature," and they often imply their own set of conditions, sometimes different from the one prescribed by traditional forms of literature (online graphic poetry, online video journals, and so on). These new conditions show the influences of visual mechanisms on literary tools. Yet one of the most radical changes can be seen in the internal structure of narratives—simply put, a cinematic text is one that does not follow the chronological evolution of characters or plots, that does not respect the linearity of the storyline or the unity of the story, that is built on fragmentation and visual montage.

In order to understand the current practices of reading and writing, we need to understand the profound modifications of the way we engage with the literary under the pressure of the visual technologies. These changes originated in the first photographic experiments. Many authors remarked that the first photographs were made in the same period of time when the earliest "cinematic" expressions are found in literary productions. But by then, the visual alterations of literature were already taking shape. Something happened when the Victorian novel met the visual narrative and underwent the influence of Hogarth's drawings, for example, such as those from *A Harlot's Progress*, which played a decisive role in foregrounding the apparition of Dickens's novels. Dickens, in his turn, as Sergei Eisenstein, one of the great Soviet filmmakers, noticed, has influenced the "forefather" of American cinema, D.W. Griffith, who created the Hollywood film industry as we know it today. And although this connection between Hogarth, Dickens and Griffith is contested by many authors, who suggest that a "pre-cinematic cinematic" is an unrealistic explanation (Elliott 119), the first cinematic narratives share the same traits as the first cinematic novels and the early visual narratives in graphic art.

We can describe, therefore, as *cinematic devices* the narrative practices that entered modern European literature. They are based on a remarkable blend between visual storytelling and editing-like writing techniques. Some authors, such as Laurence Sterne or Henry Fielding, who were friends and admirers of Hogarth, the "grandfather" of the comic strip, acknowledged his influence on their writing. Yet it was clearly Dickens who brought visual tools into his narratives and started something that we can identify as a cinematic style, coupled with a specific storytelling device identified by some as melodramatic narrative. Again, as pointed out by Sergei Eisenstein, it was Dickens who introduced in European literature and culture an approach to narrative which influences cinema to this day. It is in this reinvention of narrative that we can identify what can be called the *cinematic form of storytelling.* All its elements can be linked to Dickens: the serialization of storytelling, which allows a montage-like narration; parallel storylines which subsequently intersect; non-linear developments; unforgettable and excessively dramatic characters (Eisenstein 199-203). These *proto-cinematic* instruments (contested by many literary critics) basically place the storyteller in the position of a projectionist. The writer helps the reader generate mind projections of visual nature, with a high emotional impact. After Dickens, the transfer of instruments between the literary and the cinematic continued. There are many literary studies offering an in-depth discussion of the impact cinema had on literature after Dickens—a good example is David Seed's overview of the influences of cinema on the American novel of the 20th century—and we can identify numerous illustrations of this constant interchange between writers and filmmakers in the making of "cinematic fiction."

A question imposes itself at this moment: what are the cinematic qualities of a novel or of any other cultural product and are they specific to this mode of meaning production? First and foremost, by *cinematic* we mean a larger phenomenon, which can be delimited within the broader scope of visual storytelling. Here, the term *cinematic* is used to describe the ability of any type of content creation practice (writing, painting, photographic storytelling) to use "camera techniques": close-ups, the generation of a montage type of juxtaposition, using fragmentary re-compositions of time and movement through cross-cuttings or jump cuts within reality, or operating with multiple viewpoints (Elliott 114). Once again, in this context, many eighteenth-century novels can be seen as instantiations of "pre-cinematic cinematic." In this respect, there are two radical changes which are unequivocal; one has to do with the transformation of the internal structure of storytelling. The second affects the relationship between reader and writer. Thus, we can describe as *cinematic* all the "texts" that do not respect a linear evolution of the storyline—i.e., they present a fragmented plot—and those that involve a high level of participation on the part of the reader—i.e., they display an immersive function based on visual experience.

Understandably, in its recent evolution, literature has opened towards the many visual technologies gradually: first came the graphic narratives, then the photographic, and only later the filmmaking techniques (this is the Hogarth-Dickens-Griffith link). Nevertheless, these are different representation techniques; their impact on narrative techniques can be described as coherently singular only if we accept the commonality

of the tools of "photoplay." One of the best explanations for this development is provided by Mieke Bal when she describes "Proustian epistemology," that is the convergence between the visual and the depiction of reality (Bal, *Images littéraires* [*Literary Images*], 1997). At the simplest level, any realistic rendering of life in a novel can be linked to the development of photographic techniques. This common trait allows the breaking of reality (and of narrative) into "shots" (or frames, or graphic panels) which are later assembled together in a montage type of storyline. Another ingredient is the point-of-view approach to scenes; the narrator functions as a camera lens. Here the special technique can be described as a "close-up" depiction of actions, which remains one the building blocks of cinematic literature.

These non-literary markers are to be found in literary works belonging to various currents and genres—ranging from F. Scott Fitzgerald's fiction (here *The Great Gatsby* is the best example of how literature indicates the presence of the cinematic) to the experiments of the *Nouveau Roman* (where Marguerite Duras's *Destroy, She Said* is probably one of the best examples for the transformation of narrative under the influence of filmmaking). All these changes created something that can be described as a predominantly visual mode of storytelling and, naturally, had an impact on the way in which we read literature. This must be linked to the ability of cinema to build visual stories in our minds, an ability which goes beyond the inherent technological realism of capturing reality. What we are dealing with here is a storytelling practice made possible by mind projections that have to compete with the technological realism of the camera.

The process developed over a long period of time. The idea of telling stories by using the narrative forms of subjectivity (voice-over, subjective points of view), the practice of putting together separate pieces of narratives by montage (visual cross-cutting), connected with the writer's ability to use "camera techniques" (close-ups, de-focalization, depth of field), and a type of approach to narrative which includes camera movement (with compositions similar to traveling shots or long shots) created in the end something which was described as *cinematic literature* and *literary cinema*. As Andrew Shail points out, literary institutions and the production of fiction were marked by the technologies of "animated photography" (Shail 171), which generated an entire cinematic experience—by which I mean a wide variety cultural products, from the 19th-century novels to the 21st-century vlogs.

The unresolved question remains the one that the early Soviet formalists faced when trying to deal with the phenomenon of cinematization. What happens with the essence of literature when colliding with other media, what happens with the literary meanings? Is there a poetics of cinema distinct from that of literature? We find a possible answer in the works of a theorist briefly mentioned before, Viktor Shklovsky. For Shklovsky, art comes into place and produces its best effects only when it allows us to become *defamiliarized* with the already known meanings. His central concept of *estrangement (ostranenie)* actually means to make un-familiar, to allow oneself to be removed from the presets of understanding, or to "make strange" what is taken for granted. O*stranenie* is what happens to us when we encounter profound meanings, or when we are faced with any form of significant messages. When we are exposed to unfamiliar worldviews, to

unfamiliar perspectives, we experience estrangement, and, as Shklovsky shows in "Art as Device," that is where good literature and great art begin. According to Shklovsky, literature is a "high" form of cognition because it constantly challenges our familiar worldviews, undermining our pre-existing perspectives on reality. O*stranenie* is a central function of literature because it allows the *defamiliarization* of the reader with reality when encountering written meanings and, more importantly, when the images in the text are developed through the process of imagination.

The problem with cinema is that films do not facilitate this effect of estrangement, since cinema usually entraps us within what is familiar to us, it uses devices that provide realities we are familiar with. If cinema estranged us from the already known, it would not be able to produce enjoyment. Our physiology is designed in such a way that, if visual representations are uncanny, they provoke unease and even nausea. Because films address another level of consciousness—that of the visual mind—, the premise of the early formalists was that it was impossible for cinema to really have access to the effect of *defamiliarization*.

One of the most suggestive answers to this problem comes from Francesco Casetti, who explains how, by the continuous use of cinematic devices, we went beyond the problem of estrangement. Due to the integration of the mechanisms of the video camera in our daily existence, cinema has made unfamiliar perspectives, which are not part of our normal biological endowment, familiar. Maybe one of the best examples is zooming, a cinematic technique which is contrary to any natural perception, and yet is now included in our experience of reality in various contexts (home videos, video games). We are now familiar with the unfamiliar functions of the video camera. This also allows us to put to use the new technologies of vision in a way they are not supposed to be used. If the best artistic expressions of the literary are those that allow us to become defamiliarized with meanings, if properly used, cinematic devices can provide a similar result. As Casetti suggested, cinema is fundamentally a technique that makes us *see again*; just as literary devices can render unfamiliar that which is already known, sometimes, in cinema, reality no longer is what it usually is. Clearly, most of the times cinema is not able to "estrange" us. Generally speaking, cinema surrounds us with the familiarity of already known experiences, because it uses instruments which reconstruct reality. At this level, the cinematic experience is simply mimetic. Yet, at its best, cinema can be a tool of *defamiliarization.* The example of Frank Miller's classic *Sin City* is useful. If we are engaged in a reality which appears as artificial, which disrupts our visual and emotional connections with what we consider "normal," cinema can reactivate reality.

The Problems of Cinematization

Once more, it seems that we are trapped in a paradox: on the one hand, the possibilities offered by the connections between the two arts remain immense; on the other hand, we are prevented to accept the use of the cinematic by the old separation put forward by Plato and Aristotle, between *mimesis* and *diegesis*, between the imitation of the world by showing it and the capability of projecting the world by means of words.

Actually, this is one of the most debated questions in the history of film criticism. As André Bazin, the French theorist of the New Wave, pointed out when trying to define the essence of cinema (55), the positive perspective is that cinema is an autonomous art form which shares influences with two "literary" sources: the novel and the theater. From this point of view, cinema is influenced by literary devices and influences literature in its turn. The obvious question is if cinema can survive without these two ancillary art forms (or "crutches," as Bazin calls them) which made filmmaking possible. The answer is difficult to give, since the theatrical is an unavoidable part of the cinematic and cinema draws heavily on 19th-century theater practices. We cannot imagine cinema without actors, without complex staging and a carefully thought *mise-en-scène.* Above all, dialogues are essential for cinema and the theatric writing experience is a necessary ingredient. As for literature, there is no cinema without storylines, character development, conflict or dramatic tension.

Nevertheless, there is a profoundly disheartening limitation of the cinematic, which can be summarized through the criticisms elaborated by Marcel Proust. In the burgeoning years of the cinematic, Proust was described as a "cinematic novelist." Yet he disdainfully described the cinematic as a bad way of communicating. Cinema is a form of cryptographic speaking, or as Proust claimed, a form of expression very similar to telegraphy, a tool of message transmission through the compression of meanings. For Proust as well as for other anti-cinematic writers, filmmaking remains an art of brevity and terseness.

As seen before, it is clear that the cinematic is condemned by its time limits to use in a certain way a form of *compressing meanings* in order to generate coherence. This is due to the fact that the cinematic devices, as Deleuze postulated, are deeply connected with the way we experience time. In the second volume of the remarkable book Deleuze dedicated to the relationship between cinema and time, the French philosopher radically changes the ordinary perspective on the cinematic. In cinema, time is not contracted; it is a lived time, unfolding as we watch, and it must be understood as our own subjective experience (Deleuze 82-83).

This compels us to return to the questioning of the essence of cinema in relationship with literature. Can we describe it as a nonliterary, spurious child of novels, if they share the same epistemological purpose? Are we supposed to reject the presence of cinematic devices in literature because they destroy the heart and soul of literature, or rather the cinematic provides a glimpse into something that the literary cannot? And thus, after exhausting these paths of investigation, the problem that we have to address remains the following: what happens if we transfer the devices of the cinema into the literary, with this added dimension of subjective experience?

Once more, some of the answers (as already suggested by Bazin and others) are based on the fact that cinema has affected the traditional ways in which we perceive and consume narratives. We can only evaluate cinema through the lens of this truth—the cinematic has changed the literary. One possible answer is that cinema can only be used to add new meanings to the literary. From this perspective, cinema will always be an art for those who do not like to read. Is novelization the transformative force of cinema,

which subordinates the cinematic to the novel, or have the cinematic devices altered our experiences with all the other media?

Clearly, cinema has several important characteristics which separate it from literature, from theater and even from photography. As James Monaco eloquently argued, literary texts (novels, short prose, and even grand narratives like *War and Peace*) can be transposed into films only because the art of film-making is able to exploit the narrative potential of literary devices, providing the observer with a detailed plot. (Monaco 51-52). Yet beyond these formal narrative elements, cinema remains an art of *movement*, of *sound* and, more importantly, an art of *montage*. It has become a full-fledged art and no longer needs any support from the "old arts," mostly because of the development of these cinematic tools. Cinema is no longer the non-literary abandoned descendant of literature, although it did manage to incorporate in various ways the traditional narrative structures into its visual devices. A classic example is the similarity between the point of view of the camera and the most important methods that writers and novelist have developed in order to bring a subjective presence in the text. When the narrator or the character is speaking in the first person, this technique can be transposed as a POV camera.

Things become more difficult when it comes to the most important element of the cinematic: movement. Although several "spatial movements" are borrowed from literature or art—for example, the way the realist writer describes the world within the narrative space—, the camera has the possibility to move around the character in a natural way. Again, this is not something peculiar to cinema alone, since novelists and artists also have the means to provide the reader/viewer with a 360-degree view of a character. Yet, at the same time, there are technical conditions of camera movements which are impossible in literature (or, for that matter, in the visual arts working with fixed images). This is the case with the cinematic combinations of angles and movements. A director can use the angles of the camera and traveling shots—e.g., he can use a Dutch angle, which is very abrupt, so as to generate a feeling of distortion, of strangeness, coupled with a panoramic view—, but a writer cannot achieve the same effect.

If we retrace the historical development of these filmmaking practices, we see traces of how film devices transformed the literary. In Keith Cohen's classification, there are four basic cinematic elements which influenced modern literature: discontinuity, point of view, temporal fragmentation and mobility. We find examples of this influence in the works of authors like Joyce, Woolf and Proust. Finally, there is one more major transformation of cinema which we must take into consideration: the transition to sound after the 1920s, which transformed cinema from a "literary" and "theatrical" art into an independent cultural form, separate from literature, painting or drama. No matter how good a writer is, he cannot capture music—or any extradiegetic sound, for that matter—onto the paper. A writer can refer to extraneous sounds only from outside the narrative, but he cannot make the reader hear it physically. Furthermore, the novelist faces the impossible task of simultaneously generating a visual narrative and a sound experience—which is possible in cinema, where we can watch the action and hear an off-screen sound at the same time. This is another key device that allows us to access the literary text with non-literary tools and move beyond it, creating new meanings.

At this point, the remaining question is whether cinema can be used as an art to add new meanings to a literary text, or should be accounted for as a cultural practice for people who simply do not like to read? To answer this question, I would like to refer to a case study I conducted at one of my adaptation courses where, together with film students, I attempted to address some of these theoretical issues in practice.

A Practice-Based Approach to the Literary and the Cinematic

The approach I would like to suggest in this section is based on a teaching practice described as the *pedagogy of adaptation*, which offers an alternative perspective on the complicated relationship between cinematic and literary narratives. In a very challenging book, edited by Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw and James Welsh, the authors advance a model for rethinking adaptations. According to them, the direct, cinematic experience of the reader with the text allows us to plunge into the literary text with a purpose that is no longer conflicting. The "cinematic reader" has an intimate knowledge of the cinematographer's tools and is searching for an emotional and visual connection with the inner workings of the literary text. The first key concept here is that we need to accept the cinematic as a way to *interpret the literary*, or, as Cutchins put it, as "a better, more effective way to study literature" (Cutchins 87). The cinematic is not something that only happens on the big screen, creating competition for literature; it can also be used as a trope, as a device to enter the text and understand it from within (Cutchins, Raw, and Welsh xv).

The second level of access is, as previously mentioned, the use of cinematic devices as a means to multiply the meanings of the literary text. Adding a "cinematic reading" to the value of the initial text does not destroy the essence of the literary. The non-literary contact with a novel does not "harm the text"; instead, it provides the reader with a floating device into the fluid space of literature. A non-traditional reader can revisit the elements of a novel (or of any traditional narrative) and, by trying to visualize camera movements or montage techniques, he would come to discover new and otherwise unseen meanings. This visualization of cinematographic mechanisms would have to be performed with the ultimate goal of arriving to new meanings through the "defamiliarization" of the reception mode. One must attempt to bring the unfamiliarity of the cinematic into the familiar literary effect.

The third element has to do with the very nature of cinema production and reception—if traditional reading is intimate and personal, filmmaking is a collective form of generating meaning. Cinema is a gregarious form of culture (to use the disparaging terms of some critics); it is not a solitary activity, like the one in which a reader engages when he isolates himself with his "private" projection in his mind, or like the one performed by the writer when he scribbles on a piece of paper. And if cinema is about groups of people coming together to produce meaning—both as creators and receivers—, we can use this particular feature to open the literary to a new experience. This means to willingly abandon the solitary dimension of the act of reading. A cinematic reading is a collective reading, which integrates instruments like brainstorming or group writing.

It would be purposefully designed for a group of people to enter the text as a collective creative mind.

I used these three elements in my screenwriting class, when, together with my students, I tested the devices on a book written by Péter Esterházy, titled *She Loves Me* [*Egy nő*], 1993. The reasons for choosing Esterházy were twofold; the first was my own "love" for this writer. I wanted to find more ways of reading this remarkable author and to overcome the typical, traditional way of achieving this. The second was the nature of Esterházy's writing; the author uses a postmodern technique, dominated by fragmentation. In his short stories, the reader is faced with disruptions of temporal linearity, frequently placed in various timelines by flashbacks and flash-forwards, and the narrative structure often displays similar features to jump cut montage. With the verbal agreement of the Hungarian writer, we began reading his book in class and each student had to choose one of the chapters, according to their own "pleasure" of reception. Then the chapters were discussed in small groups (three members freely chosen by the students). Next there was a collective reading session in class, followed by a discussion of which cinematic mechanisms would best fit each story. At the next stage, each student had to write a screenplay and come up with a storyboard, to show how they managed to transfer the literary meaning into film meanings. Finally, each self-designated group had to produce a short film, based on a screenplay of their choice, where they had to use cinematic techniques (angles and camera movement) in order to present to the rest of the class their understanding of the text. The educational purpose of this experiment was to get students to view these productions and "read" collectively what is happening *with* the text and not only *in* the narrative.

The most important goal of this learning experience was to put to test Iser's contentions—to reach an *internalization of meanings* and to make manifest the inner projection of reading. Of course, not all the individual "readings" of the novel were equal in value: some of them took the students towards a simple mechanic reproduction of plots, while others tried to gain access to the meanings of the text through a visual poetics which had nothing to do with the original. Another issue we addressed all through the semester was the need for *ostranenie*. We used the concept of defamiliarization as central to our approach and during the seminar discussions we constantly tried to find ways to defamiliarize a given scene or a certain character. This created room for discussing the tools of the adaptors—do we follow the path of the people who are using cinema in order to make meanings more explicit and factual, or do we want to estrange the meanings even more? Finally, we attempted to find the most appropriate cinematic devices in order to gain access to the meanings of the text.

What came as a surprise result is also relevant; we realized that meanings are generated in a double direction, as the written text casts light on the cinematic product and vice versa. Literature helps us become more aware of the "cinematic," i.e., we can aspire to a better understanding of a movie once we analyze the different adaptive devices and their relationship with the text. It goes without saying that in order to achieve this one needs to be "cinematically literate," i.e, to have mastered the language of cinema. Approaching

a novel with the intent of a movie director or a screenwriter means looking for solutions to the transfer of meanings from one medium to another.

My personal contribution to the pedagogy of adaptation is the notion that we can move beyond simple group readings and brainstorming or watching several adaptations. Today the democratization of visual tools, through the wide access to DSLR cameras and relatively inexpensive sound capture devices, the students can "get their hands dirty" and film a literary scene themselves. Taking reading to the level of producing personal visual materials, which bear the mark of a personal interpretation of a particular episode in a novel, would provide a completely new vision on the literary. This type of visual essay would immerse the student in a visual narrative. When making the effort of turning a text into a film, any reader can act like a director and, although he might not produce the same results as those of great cinematographers, he will produce amazing interpretations of novels, plays and even poetry.

Ultimately, such practical adaptations are relevant to the exploration of possible meanings with non-literary tools. The cinematically relevant re-creation of the literary would be, first and foremost, a way to penetrate deep into the unseen meanings of the literary texts.

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