



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

From the blank page to the silver screen: re-adaptation [conference report]

Goggin, J.

Publication date
2007

Published in
Scope : an online Journal of Film and TV Studies

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

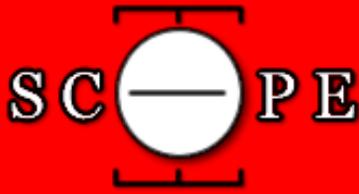
Goggin, J. (2007). From the blank page to the silver screen: re-adaptation [conference report]. *Scope : an online Journal of Film and TV Studies*, 9.
http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/confreport.php?issue=9&id=979§ion=conf_rep&q=goggin

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.



Archive: Conference Reports, Portals Special Issue

From the Blank Page to the Silver Screen: Re-adaptation

From the Blank Page to the Silver Screen: Re-adaptation, University of South Brittany, Lorient, France, May 31 – June 1, 2007

A Report by Joyce Goggin, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Netherlands

This year's conference on film adaptation at the University of South Brittany, Lorient, was well organised by Ariane Hudelet (Université de Paris III– Sorbonne Nouvelle) and Shannon Wells-Lassagne (Université de Bretagne Sud). The papers presented at the conference tackled the topic of re-adaptation in its many forms and explored aspects of re-adaptation that have given rise to the kind of openly self-referential films to which contemporary viewers have become accustomed, many of which announce their serial nature with titles such as *Spiderman 3*. Aesthetically, re-adaptations constitute a sort of self-conscious, *mise-en-abyme* of the practice of film adaptation and ask viewers, implicitly or explicitly, to think about the economics and dynamics of contemporary film production.

Over the two days of the conference, speakers investigated questions such as what might motivate screenwriters, directors, and production companies to re-adapt already adapted literary works. What makes a text, an author, or even a character endlessly re-adaptable or, on the contrary, speak more clearly to one generation than to another? Much of the work presented at the conference also addressed the relationship of contemporary re-adaptations to previous film adaptations of literary texts, as well as how past cinematic versions of literary works influence the conception of new films. Conference participants took on these questions as a means of analyzing what a new film version might add to our cultural conceptions of familiar narratives in political and aesthetic terms, and how they communicate with new generations of viewers.

The first session dealt with the question of re-adapting notions of horror, as these notions change over time along with ideological conceptualizations of the self and the human. The speakers in this session addressed the development of constructions of sexuality, desire, hysteria, death, and the erotic in five productions of *The Phantom* (Xavier Daverat, Université de Bordeaux IV); the monster as a metaphor of artistic creation, and the role of fragmentation and reintegration in Branagh's neo-feminist re-adaptation of *Frankenstein* (Laurent Mellet, Université d'Artois); and ideological constructions of 'the enemy' and how these can be retraced through various adaptations of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Gene Moore, Universiteit van Amsterdam).

The following session of the opening day dealt with the question of ideology in gangster and crime films, and their re-adaptations. The first speaker, Hélène Charlery (Université de Paris XII) examined representations of multiculturalism in the 1971 and 2000 versions of *Shaft*, which included an investigation of violence and how it intersects with notions of race and gender. In his examination of adaptations of *The Postman always Rings Twice*, Gilles Ménégaldo (Université de Poitiers) addressed the style in which cinematic sexuality is represented, focusing on the 1980 version which avoided questions of morality and used a hand-held camera to heighten the effects of realism. The session closed with an intervention on *Scarface* in which the Dominique Sipièrre (Université de Paris X) elucidated how directors have approached adapting *Scarface* and, in the case of De Palma, re-adapting the text as a kind of documentary of interracial relations in the USA, thereby mobilizing notions of authenticity through which past directors as well have presented themselves as experts on gangster hierarchies and the underground trade of psychoactive drugs.

The second day of the conference opened with a session on the economics of re-adaptation in which Nathalie Dupont (Université de Boulogne) addressed the financial history and demographics of the Hollywood blockbuster. In the second paper, Joyce Goggin (Universiteit van Amsterdam) focused on the *Ocean's Eleven* films as an example of what she called "the aesthetics of finance", or the aesthetic expression of a particular genre of serialized Hollywood film that thematizes money with the unabashed, self-conscious goal of creating wealth.

Anne Bellas (Université de Paris XII) followed with a discussion of adaptations of the events surrounding the arrest and incarceration from 1931–1937 of a group of young black men, falsely accused of raping two white women. The Scottsboro Nine, as the accused came to be known, have been the subject of a variety of films from *To Kill a Mockingbird* to TV dramas and, as the speaker explained, their story continues to be a popular topic for film adaptation as it embodies strong oppositions (male/female, black/white, north/south) while affording directors an opportunity to address racial tension and political conflict.

But perhaps the highlight of the conference was the keynote address given by executive film producer Roger Shannon, whose recent documentary *Lost in Adaptation* records interviews with writers, producers and directors working on film adaptations. In Shannon's fascinating talk, he explained how brand recognition, that comes with adapting an already-familiar text, can play a key role in the search for funding, and he then treated those in the audience to a wealth of practical information on how adaptations get made. Shannon's talk ended with the provocative assertion that film adaptation will increasingly look to a "promiscuity of sources", including personal blogs, comic books and video games, which will affect niche markets and move film adaptation far beyond the transposition of the novel into film. What this ultimately means is an accelerated cultural exchange between film and story sources as contemporary culture is increasingly dominated by intertextuality and sampling. This development ultimately begs the important ontological question of where adaptation begins and ends.

The closing sessions included a stimulating discussion of the transference of myth from oral tradition, to text, to screen. Papers included Phillipe Ortolli's (Université de Corse) contribution on re-adaptations of *The Odyssey* and narratives of heritage, wherein the hero comes to reflect a national myth and thus serves as a sort of *mise-en-abyme* of figurative power, mobilized at moments which are epistemologically loaded junctures in a given nation's history.

Sarah Hatchuel (Université de Paris I) discussed the transference of Cleopatra, as legend and character, to the screen in a series of films that have functioned as the repetition of mimetic desire, enhancing the

mythologisation of this powerfully erotic female figure. As Hatchuel showed, this process has mirrored the strategy of classic Hollywood remakes, which relies on its ability to incite in viewers a constant desire for new versions of familiar stories. As such, the remake relies on the return of the not-quite identical, and the notion of cultural unfinished business.

Similarly, Françoise Barbé-Petit's (Université de Paris IV) analysis of Angela Carter's feminist re-reading of *Little Red Riding Hood* demonstrated how the reworking of a fairy tale can powerfully redirect the politics of the gaze. In turn *The Company of Wolves* further investigated this territory and provided a yet more dramatic reversal of gendered roles in beast-beauty fables, while avoiding the temptation to turn Carter's text into a standard horror movie, by upsetting the pre-scripted, pre-gendered predator-prey relationship.

The conference concluded with Sébastien Lefait's (Université de Corse) reading of Orson Welles' *Don Quixote*, which asked how the film was able to preserve the reflexive nature of the text. According to the speaker, Welles accomplished this by self-consciously and ironically owning up to the impossibility of his task, while cleverly drawing our attention to how film has effectuated a shift in the relationship of truth to reality, paralleling the historical narrative shift from the epic to the novel.

The final paper of the conference, presented by Marie Pécorari (NYU / Université de Paris IV) examined how Sirk adapted *Imitation of Life* without reading the novel or viewing the 1934 Hollywood adaptation. As a result, the film ironically moves further and further from both the life and the novel that it adapts, as the film has all but cancelled out the text, thereby assuring itself the last word.

In short, this year's *From the Blank Page to the Silver Screen* conference provided those who attended with a great deal of food for thought. The rich programme covered a wide range of topics from myth to money, and from gangsters to heroes. At the same time, papers addressed a broad range of theoretical approaches to the question of why re-adaptations are made, bringing together feminism, deconstruction, semiotics and economic criticism.

What is more, the conference boldly addressed an area of film studies that continues to be sadly neglected, based on nostalgic, romantic notions of originality or the fear that remakes and re-adaptations are somehow more trite and commercial than other products of the film industry. Whatever the case may be, this conference proved that re-adaptation is a rich area of investigation that most certainly bears a great deal more meditative investigation. And indeed, if Roger Shannon's predictions for the future of the industry are correct, the aesthetics and economics of film re-adaptation will become an increasingly significant aspect of our cultural experience.

;

[ABOUT](#) | [EDITORIAL BOARD](#) | [ADVISORY BOARD](#) | [SUBMISSION GUIDELINES](#) | [LINKS](#) | [ARCHIVE](#)

Institute of Film & Television Studies, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK
E-Mail: scope@nottingham.ac.uk | Tel: +44 (0)115 951 4261 | Fax: +44 (0)115 951 4270

CSS :: XHTML