ADAPTING AUTHORSHIP: BEYOND SOVEREIGNTY AND DEATH

James Brown
School of Arts, Middlesex University, London
School of Politics and Sociology, Birkbeck College, London

Adaptation is an odd term: ostensibly largely formalist, it's apt to be used in ways that imply judgements of value, since it's not every film whose script has been developed from a play or a story or whatever that is perceived as an adaptation.[1] Clearly Welles's *Othello* counts, at least for most people, as an adaptation, because the literary work on which he based his script has such salience that it is never wholly eclipsed in the process, and thus we remain conscious of the adapted quality of the film. So does *Pride and Prejudice*, in whichever version. And so too, for most of us, would Hawks's *The Big Sleep*. But what about *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*? For many these are movies first and foremost. We may recall by the bye that they're based on stories by James Cain, but do we really attach much importance to this? Can he claim the status of the original author, rather than just being a convenient source of material? And as for *Casablanca* — even if one knows that it's based on *Everybody Comes To Rick's* by Murray Burnett and Joan Alison, that doesn't mean that one really thinks of it as an adaptation of the play. Yet by comparison, some have adaptation thrust upon them: *Forbidden Planet* is now routinely referred to as a version of *The Tempest*, but as Judith Buchanan has shown, it was long while before this struck people, but having struck, the label's stuck.[2]

This bias has something to do with institutional pressures. The study of film in relation to literature was a way of smuggling film studies into the academy on literary study's coat-tails. The legacy of this has been a marked preoccupation with the filming of well-known novels, and, as Brian McFarlane notes, an almost obsessive concern for fidelity.[3] If the respectable partner was to raise the tone, it would have to be shown that film's promiscuity had been put behind it, at least in selected works. This drastic selectiveness, however strange it may seem now that film and cultural studies are well established, is what underlies Miller's rather plaintive case for the study of films of 'other' American novels — by James Cain and so on: precisely the kind of texts that seemed, from a certain 'literary' point of view, to have been too close to film in the first place ever to be properly literary.[4]

But there's more to the difficulty of the idea of adaptation than this. What is being adapted? The obvious answer is usually: a text.[5] And adapted to what? Again, an obvious answer: to film. Put like this, one can see why a nervous concern for fidelity might quicken in anyone with a the best interests of the blushing literary bride at heart. For, put thus, it's always literature that makes the compromise — and risks being compromised. Film remains aggressively sure of its own demands, and literature has to comply — with this crucial qualification: that if literature is to retain and be capable of passing on its high art *cachet,* film must not assert itself as aggressively as it might with, say, the work of a Murray Burnett. The marriage negotiations call for a certain delicacy if the goods are not to be damaged — something one can see David O. Selznick reminding Hitchcock of as they worked on *Rebecca.*[6] And, there is often a sexist element in this: film as masculine, technological, commercial, active; literature as feminine, passive, and (forgetting that writing is a technology) inward and natural. The idea that film has its demands which must be met has at least a certain stability of subject and object to recommend it.

But this is too pat. For even as writing may become cinematic,

so film itself may be adapted. As Jorgens and others have argued apropos Shakespeare on film, there are films that simply recast Shakespeare into the form of conventional film-script, and there are others that rethink the medium in order to create the film.[7] Yet at one level to work in any medium is always to be engaged in adapting it, while adapting oneself to it. In this sense all films are adaptations, and adaptations in several respects; as is writing. In ways of which rhetoricians have long been aware, expression calls for skill and practice, and may in some sense (even if the effect is emotional) be deemed an impersonal affair — at any rate, not tied a straightforwardly to the speaker or writer. As Richard Lanham argues, rhetoric is apt to work with a model of the self as lacking a defining centre, often conjured into existence as an effect of words.[8] The rhetorical training of Renaissance humanists lends their work a fluid, dramatic, enacted quality, as word is adapted to form, and self to word.

Adaptation is usually defined as something like 'making fit', or the product of such a process. It thus implies an object to be remade, a set of circumstances or criteria from which to derive a concept of fitness, and a process. What it doesn't necessarily imply — what, in fact, it problematizes — is centred, originary authorship. The concept of 'fitness' in neo-classical and Renaissance literary decorum offers criteria to which the artist must adapt her expression. It's a concept which may be interpreted in terms of intentionality, but not just in terms of the individual author's intentions. The author is like a ruler who inherits a polity in which the constitution is established, and she or he has to uphold it. And often this concern with decorum leads to a ceaseless and multifarious adaptation, not least of oneself: a self to be recreated and projected in apt (and thus adapted) ways. Hence the salience of imitation as a mode of authorship.

Partly because of the ambiguities that hover about it, adaptation poses questions about authorship. I want to suggest that authorship as such, while very far from dying a post-structuralist death, is (as

ever) caught up in processes of (historical) change, and in such ways that among the things that adaptations adapt (or reveal as being in continuous adaptation) is authorship itself — certainly its representation and perception. This is, in ways that have been widely explored, a formalist question to do with the media and genres in relation to which the concept of authorship may be applied, and, in being applied, refined and redefined. But it is also an historical question, and specifically, I would contend, a question of a relation between social and cognitive form.

<div align="center">* * *</div>

The concepts of authorship that we're most familiar with (often the least theorized ones), have developed in relation to print, and specifically to the printed book. But before coming to the affinities that may have developed between print with its networks of production and distribution, and authorship and the modern state (e.g. in its production of statutes, standing orders, authorised texts of sacred and other books), I want to glance back to a Europe before the advent of print culture.

It's a world in some ways more unified than ours, especially at the level of high culture and religion. But it's also a world of divided, conflicting, overlapping jurisdictions. It's a world in which positive legislation has a more limited significance than it's acquired since — in part because, even where there is something that looks more like modern positive legislation, it's often contending with other kinds of law-making, such as common law, or the essentially contractual law that regulates relations between the king as feudal overlord with his vassals. Legislation is often deemed an attempt to clarify what in some sense has always been the case, and properly always should be, in that it ought in principle to be in conformity with divine or natural law. At any rate, there's less of our sense that duly authorised persons, having gone through the requisite procedures, can make law up.[9]

Human acts of writing tend to be conceived as contingent

(especially upon other acts of writing), and particular. Before print, the creation of a text is tied, both for the writer and the reader, to the creation of a specific copy, although *copy* is a misleading word here. Texts may owe a lot to each other, but, for all the labour of copyists, they're never exact copies. The Platonic logic that readily impinges on one's perception of print (pointing to the idea of some original whose ideal stability underwrites the uniformity of all the copies of a printed edition) doesn't apply when books are individually made. Concepts of authorship are correspondingly various. In the 13th century St Bonaventure outlined four ways of making a book (and the practical physicality of the process, the sense of engaging with matter, is intrinsic to the medieval understanding): as copyist, compiler, commentator and author.[10] It's striking that these are *all* modes of adaptation of other texts: the author is simply the writer who adds most in the process (as one etymology of authorship, from *augeo*, implies).

This is not to suggest that an *auctor* (especially one from which one was working) couldn't be seen as an authority — though I realise I'm emphasising imitation modes at the expense of inspiration to make a point — or that these forms of authorship were kept rigorously distinct. On the contrary, some writers would claim to be one kind of writer while actually doing something else: sometimes to be an adapter or mere copyist, while actually making drastic changes and additions. Chaucer does this in *Troilus and Criseyde*, repeatedly referring things to his source (or blaming his source) for things that he's made up. He can do this partly because in this world stories and other kinds of cultural material are deemed common possessions. Thus authorship and adaptation are not distinct, because there's no concern to prove exclusive rights or original creation (and still less to articulate an inner sense of self, singular and apart from its various engagements with others). Indeed, in the absence of intellectual property law, there isn't the legal possibility of proving these things. Thus most writing can be seen as some kind of adaptation, with even the *auctor* working from other texts.

Writing generally has a palimsestic quality to it: it's interstitial, social, and specific in more perceptible ways than would later be the case.

Writing and texts are, of course, caught up in the processes by which various authorities function and legitimate themselves — especially the Church, whose power is closely related to its role in supplying the literate personnel on which administration depends. But though there may be some notional point of resolution of all claims to authority (the Church in particular was fond of claiming to be the sole font of authority), and though clearly the Bible as sacred text has a special status, and a notionally ultimate divine authority can be set over against any particular forms of authority, actual claims to authority are not articulated in ways anything like as textual or originary as will later be the case. For all its sacred status, the Bible is in principle legitimated by the Church, not the other way around. Tradition and inheritance concretely embodied in particular ongoing arrangements loom larger than notions of original authority.

It's only with the interaction of humanist scholarship and the Reformation emphasis on getting back to an original, primitive Christianity, on the independent authority of the Bible as the work of divine authorship, and on devotional practices of a highly textualized nature (to say nothing of printed politico-religious propaganda) that all this changes. For Max Weber, the mediaeval world is one in which the potential for rationalization, which he sees implicit in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, is in abeyance. But it resurfaces with a vengeance with the Reformation, and thereafter takes increasingly secularized forms. And the printed book as a form of knowledge has, as many have argued, implications for what henceforth will count as knowledge: it implies a completeness, an orderliness, a degree of consistency, and a relative indifference to local, circumstances. The geographically distributed book, with its identical pagination, with its Renaissance IT (indices, tables of contents, subdivisions and classifications), and with its stable text

implies something very different to its reader about the reader's relation to the contents of the book and their basis. This technology also makes it possible for a single author to speak with apparent directness to extraordinary numbers of people, even though the printed text in which it was possible to do so was shorn of the most obvious signs of his or her handiwork, in that it was no longer hand-produced by her or him, but mediated through standardized, impersonal type. But it's precisely the standardization and the impersonality of the artefact in these respects, that makes the apparent persona of the author an object of such fascination — not least because it can now be circulated and distributed with a previously unmatched intensity. Luther was perhaps the first to exploit this.

But it's with the emergence of sovereignty, and the increasing dominance of the sovereign territorial state as the main political unit (and, after the treaties of Westphalia that concluded the Thirty Years War, virtually the only one that mattered) that the concepts of authorship coded into social relations, at least as a normative idea, change markedly.[11] Jurisdiction in the sovereign territorial state is in principle consolidated as it had never been under mediaeval arrangements. As Hobbes presents the process, it's a this-worldly realisation of a kind of absolute authority which has previously been conceived only in divine terms. In *Leviathan* the Sovereign is (however paradoxically) a 'mortal god'. Locked into the form of the sovereign territorial state is a theory of authority, authorship (in a general, rather than a specifically literary sense) and representation (in a political sense, albeit one not entirely distinct from literary and cultural senses). The Hobbesian sovereign is created by an act of authorization (on the part of the populace). But the sovereign then authorizes all others in his turn — this is the point at which the savagely competitive natural men are reconstituted as the artificial man of the commonwealth. Thus the dispersed power of individual people passes through the lens of the Sovereign's authorial singularity, and emerges internally and definitively

consistent, purged of the possibility of self-contradiction and thus of
civil strife. Among the things over which the Sovereign's power is
most likely to be exercised are words. For it is the Sovereign who
will define all contentious terms, and who, in the act of command,
engages in an absolute authorship. Unlike the mediaeval legislator,
the Sovereign may write as s/he will in the book of law. Admittedly,
there are things Hobbes calls natural laws — but these are just
principles which a Sovereign might wish to act upon for prudential
reasons. The only laws that count are the Sovereign's positive laws,
in which words get the only backing that really counts: the backing
of the sword.

At one level this presents an idea of absolute authorship and
authority which is now located within the human world (unlike the
divine authority it mimics), and which is quite unlike the mediaeval
versions of these things. Their definitiveness and singularity
correlate to the stability and normative coherence of print.

The definitive act of authorship is that of the sovereign law-
giver. Yet this figure, for all its assertiveness, proves oddly prone
to disappearance, or to substitution, and a variety of figureheads
and symbols mark the sovereign lawgiver's vacated space. Carl
Schmitt lamented the way in which the Hobbesian Sovereign seemed
doomed to be dissolved in the operation of the mechanism over
which it presided, and for whose orderly mechanical motion it had
legislated.[12] For, of course, a set of rules can become so orderly as
no longer to require a ruler. After all, the ruler is in one sense an
anomaly: in that key Schmittian word, it is the exception (besides
being the decider of the exception). If it runs for long enough, such
a system may even come to appear spontaneous and natural — at
least to some.

Where the Renaissance, pre-Westphalian author is a shaping
intelligence authorized by the collective and accumulated authority
of tradition and probable opinion, an author working according to
this new kind of authority (the seemingly natural, spontaneous kind)
will invoke a different kind of authority, and a different kind of

probability — a modern, more impersonal, sometimes scientific, usually less conspicuous kind. This difference plays out in the very form in which treatises are cast. One kind of text is largely woven out of quotations, allusion and imitation — just the kind of thing a tutor would criticize in a student's essay. At the opposite extreme to this one has *Leviathan*: a text which suppresses its debts, on the grounds that truth is truth, no matter who believes it. This may seem obvious, but in this status-obsessed society, it was not: for example, on Shapin's intepretation, mid-seventeenth-century scientific authorship usually needed the support of extra-scientific social or political prestige to validate itself.[13] Yet something was arguably changing — something registered in Orgel's finding that by the late seventeenth century, in a literary culture in which *imitatio* still loomed large, charges of plagiarism were becoming more serious and more frequent.[14] Since then, giving appropriate references has become largely a matter of respecting other people's intellectual property — significantly different grounds from the earlier ones for referring to authorities. The textual apparatus of the modern treatise is an image of bureaucracy: cross-references neatly filed, all in order; not too conspicuous, but available whenever called upon. Indeed, ironically enough, *Leviathan* was written according to a card-index plan, even if Hobbes preferred to style himself, in Wolin's interpretation, as a kind of epic hero of discourse in the way he presented his text — a lawgiver, in fact, and rival to the sovereign he delineates.[15]

The situation is complicated by the emergence within the architecture of the sovereign state of civil society and its supporting body of liberal political thinking. But while subsequent liberal, constitutional and democratic modifications have qualified the original model of sovereign authority, they have not entirely displaced it. Indeed, while retaining the sovereign state, liberal theory is inclined also to posit the sovereign individual as the only kind of being who can justly make claims against it. If anything, this intensifies the impulse to identify particular authors as underwritten

by a kind of sovereign self. There's a repeated insistence here on a monadic quality — something arguably at odds with the actual social relations and processes of writing — which supplies one way (among several) of conceiving authorship.

This idea of legislative, founding authorship persists into the eighteenth century. It informs Rousseau's treatment of the mysterious figure of the legislator in *The Social Contract*. This figure, as Rousseau presents it, has the authority *only* of authorship, since sovereignty proper for Rousseau is necessarily popular. Yet the people depend upon the charismatic authority of a lawgiver who is nevertheless not a lawmaker, to frame the constitutional architecture which will express their general will. Machiavelli, writing at a much earlier phase of the civic republican tradition, of course envisages a similar figure — save that it never crosses his mind that the refounder of the state should be anything other than powerful. By comparison Rousseau's 'legislator' has to establish laws, but in such a way as not to impair the sovereign individuality of those for whom the laws are made, and therefore has no place in the constitution he or she has framed. The legislator is said to have to be "capable, so to speak, of changing human nature", but at the same time occupies an office that "nowhere enters into [the state's] constitution", and thus constitutes "an authority that is no authority" — not so much an unacknowledged legislator as an unplaced one.[16]

Absent lawgivers haunt neo-classical genres and criticism. Those who define a genre may be accorded the status of lawgiver in relation to that form of writing. The laws they give (or the precedents they set), their successors hesitate to break. To work within such an authoritatively defined tradition can look reassuring; but it can also inhibit creative adaptation of those forms, since they have been notionally stabilized by this legislative authority. Thus, with the increased anxiety about plagiarism that Orgel notes, rather than adapt, the author is reduced to what can feel like *mere* imitation, while being haunted by a much vaster, authoritative notion of what an author might be, or ought to be. The fear is of engaging in a

pointless mimicry of reality or of earlier models, where the reader might be better off going straight to the originals. Hence Dryden's potentially despairing rhetorical question in an early preface, "…how can it be imagined that the picture of human life can be more exact than life itself is?" and his obedience of the rules established by "the first inventors of any art or science" who are entitled "in reason, to give laws to it".[17]

The idea of that kind of authorship starts to haunt not just the authors (such as Edward Young, who asserts his right to it),[18] but several of their texts — not least because it is simultaneously impossible and craved. The result is an illusory doubleness of authorship, or a kind of displacement of it. If adapted works are twice born, these haunted works have an air of being twice authored. Ironically enough, one can see this even in Hobbes: for Hobbes creates an image of the Sovereign as the definitively authoritative authorizer of all others, but Hobbes himself defines the Sovereign.

In England the author emerges as a public figure with a legitimate interest in asserting ownership in her or his work as the state consolidates itself into its sovereign territorial form.[19] One might tentatively suggest an affinity between this consolidation and clarification of state authority on the one hand, and on the other a concept of authorship which acquires its fullest artistic form (albeit somewhat paradoxically) in the Romantic artist-hero, but which, in more worldly ways, is inscribed in legislation to secure intellectual property, and the use of the state's exclusive authority to back the author's claims — though, in fact this both reinforces the idea of the author as isolated source of meaning, and, on close inspection, complicates it, since in practice the legal arrangements that constitute authorship in law are various both within and across jurisdictions, so that authorship in connexion with copyright is one thing, and in connexion with slander it's another; and it also varies from state to state.[20] This multifariousness implicitly recognizes the social location and specificity of actual authors, conceived as having responsibilities and liabilities in relation to others and in

various ways. But at the same time, the idea of the author as embodying a particular and singular kind of authority recognisably gains ground — certainly in the eighteenth century, where the allure and the unsolvable problems of the idea of an author as source of meaning make themselves felt in several texts that either present an authorial or quasi-authorial figure, who is ambiguously both a figure in the text and a figure subtending it. Such are the paradoxes one runs into when one tries to suppress an awareness of authorship as the realisation of *social* potential. For example, Gray's poem 'The Bard' confronts Edward I with a Celtic poet; and crucially accords ultimate authority to the latter, whose words have prophetic power — an authority sealed with a proto-Romantic suicide, for self-annihilation or being nothing becomes, in paradoxical ways that Shelley, Ibsen and others were to explore, a fatally beguiling mode of authentic, self-identical, self-transcendent expression.

* * *

From the first, it proved difficult to adapt cinema to existing models of authorship, or vice-versa. Film is like theatre in its need to assemble people in groups to create and to respond to the work; but, where theatre is always tied to specific, local performances, film is like a printed text in its capacity to be distributed in identical copies across a territory — and not just one territory, but many.[21] In the processes of its creation, film, partly because of the technical nature of its production, comes to employ an industrial division of labour, consciousness of which is harder to ignore. The kinds of artisanal skill that were inseparable from each instance of a mediaeval text, but which were then conceptually quite separable from the content of printed text, and which Romantic conceptions of art also tend to marginalize, reassert themselves (if not in the way that Ruskin or Morris had hoped). Indeed, the consciousness of multiple contribution to the making of a film is something which at least by analogy the multiple sign-systems of the medium help to

alert one to. In the text one has a single line of signs (capable of being interpreted in all manner of non-singular, non-linear ways, but suggestive of a basic unity even so). In film one has image and sound (accompanying music before the era of sound-film); one might additionally have intercut captions or dialogue boards. The Japanese 'silent' cinema used to have narrators. And then within each frame, one has a multiplicity of simultaneous sign-systems in. But one can think of these various elements as acting and interacting not as a simple unity, but in social concert. That may be merely an analogy, but accounts of human intelligence that ascribe our capacity simultaneously to juggle complex and not obviously commensurate sorts of data to our sociality suggest it's more than that.[22]

There is, of course, an invisible contributor to film, the director, who accordingly becomes the prime candidate for the reimposition of Authorship on film. But *auteur*ism is a pointedly perverse response to the medium. The sheer polemical energy of its assertion (something all too often neglected in later accounts of it) implicitly testifies to the existence of other voices in the very act of trying to drown them out. Yet the director's invisibility makes it tempting to identify her or him as an *auctor absconditus*. But indicative of the instability of the *auteurist* assertion is the readiness with which it could flip over into what looked like its exact opposite, pausing only at the strange half-way house of *auteur*-structuralism, before dissolving the creative agency of the individual entirely: from sovereignty to death in a few frenzied years.

From my point of view there's not much to choose between these options. Some of the most Authorial authors had long yearned to be nothing: proclaiming the death of the author loses some of its point, when one notices that a lot of them are more than half in love with easeful death already. But this kind of instability points to a deeper instability, and also to a grimmer impasse (since instability does not necessarily betoken progress). This is registered in the way the hidden author of the film is matched by a hidden spectator. The highly uncertain value to attach to each is something that from

the cinema can be traced back to nineteenth-century naturalism, and the ways in which notions of scientific authority impinged upon artistic creation.

In *The World Viewed* Stanley Cavell presents a version of the spectator as the correlative of film's invisible *auctor absconditus*. Such an invisible author can be traced in the preference for showing over telling in some nineteenth-century fiction, and there are other accounts of cinema that point to ways in which, especially in its conventions, elements in nineteenth-century culture were, so to speak, pre-adapted for it (such as the picture-frame stage, and its preference for a notionally self-sufficient world behind the proscenium arch, through which stage actors were increasingly unwilling to break, and through which film actors of course couldn't break).

The idea of the spectator's gaze, often with some reference to Foucauldian surveillance, is often discussed in such a way as to ascribe to it a controlling, even quasi-authorial power — especially when it's the male gaze. But for Cavell what's striking about this unseen see-er is its self-erasure: precisely the impotence with which it purchases the seemingly total visibility of the world it views. In this regard it's an apt partner for the self-erased author who shows rather than tells, who asserts transcendence by dumb self-effacement. The naturalistic author (if one takes an ideal-typical naturalism) is merely registering necessity in exposing the illusory autonomy of (represented) others. Of course, for this to work, and not merely to reveal this lack of autonomy as the result of these others being no more than the offspring of the author's imagination, one has to posit an absolutely transparent mode of representation. And where is one to find that? This kind of naturalism, in other words, is crying out for Pirandello from the first: for ways of including the manner of representation within the fabric of the representation — even if this means breaking naturalism's epistemological promises. But then what would it have meant to behold the spectacle of such necessity? To be an anomalously

conscious stone, ironically aware of the illusoriness of one's own autonomy? Or to be a presiding, if absent, god. And if we are all in the grip of necessity, what does it mean not merely to know it, but to be able to express it — indeed, to *want* to express it, and to *want* to respond to such expression? Isn't this to participate in a social excess that transgresses such necessity? And yet the participants have erased themselves as social agents, or at least displaced themselves. Hence the misleadingly individualist antithesis: absolute authority *versus* absolute nullity.

Of course the medium that looked as if it might supply the technical fix to this impasse, by supplying a supposedly transparent way of representing the world, was film. Not for nothing is naturalism most often qualified as 'photographic'. For Cavell, though, the invisibility of the spectator in film is to be seen as part of the medium's appeal not to transparent knowledge of the world, but the magical reproduction of another world:

> How do movies reproduce the world magically? Not by literally presenting us with the world, but by permitting us to view it unseen. This is not a wish for power over creation (as Pygmalion's was), but a wish not to need power, not to have to bear its burdens. It is, in this sense, the reverse of the myth of Faust. And the wish for invisibility is old enough… …In viewing films, the sense of invisibility is an expression of modern privacy or anonymity. It is as though the world's projection explains our forms of unknownness and of our inability to know. The explanation is not so much that the world is passing us by, as that we are displaced from our natural habitation within it, placed at a distance from it. The screen overcomes our fixed distance; it makes displacement appear as out natural condition.[23]

At one level what this points to (apart from the magical appeal of cinema which interferes with its naturalistic promise) is a (post-Romantic) sense of our ultimate inability to adapt ourselves to the

world, and of our being caught between the polarities of absolute freedom and utter determination, with film, in Cavell's account, eerily achieving both things for us at once. It's a dilemma film readily reflects back at us in part because of the oft-remarked tension in the form between an impulse to document the actual, and an impulse to fantasy and illusion.

In this regard, film looks as if it's trapped within one version or another of the monadic: the individual consciousness of most western epistemology, or the isolated consciousness of the spectating fantasist. It's a situation in which the social creativity implicit in the division of labour necessary to film production (and in fact necessary, albeit in concealed ways, to book production as well) is readily obscured. But it is possible to disrupt that obscurity, and from a slightly different point of view, one can find in human authorship a process that is always the realisation of social potential. If one sets aside the idea of sovereign authority (and even where the idea persists it's often, as I've suggested by glancing at Gray and Rousseau, already in a sense displaced), one may then discern a more fluid, interactive kind of creation.

Adaptation, especially as it's become more salient, is among the things that enable one to see this more clearly. For as the hierarchical idea of adaptation as the transfer of the privileged essence of some other work into a new form collapses, what one may see is the possibility of conceiving acts of expression and response in more situated, contingent ways, and in ways that mutually imply one another. If authorship is always, if only implicitly, the realisation of social potential, then that may be registered within the processes of making in the way in which writing implies reading (not just as subsequent to writing, but implicit in it); showing implies seeing; and a capacity to express implies a capacity to respond. In other words, no matter how asymmetrically these capacities may be called upon (given the ways of distributing and organising works in various media), there's a kind of society or concert of faculties at play both between individuals and within them.

Of course, earlier models of authorship persist, even when defied. Hence the irony of films that include the name of the author in the title, but which, having genuflected to authorial prestige, leave the author behind: *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, for example. However, adaptations are interesting here, partly because of a kind of combination of constructed continuity and disruption that they tend to mark. Film can seem disconcertingly self-given in ways that can be oddly potent, especially when they help the filmmaker claim a kind of authority. But adaptation can restore to view something of the negotiations between periods and media, and the processes of creation. Of course, the juxtaposition of literary authorship with film production begs questions — as is widely recognized. Especially in the Hollywood of the Studio System, the work of making films proceeds according to a technological and industrial division of labour — exactly the kind of work that Authorship (as Art) has often been set over against: the doing of one's own work, rather than alienated labour. But, turning this round for a moment, there can be something refreshingly demystifying in seeing a literary work go through a process of remaking in which creation is readily seen in terms of the materiality of craft and technique

* * *

I'm saying that the concept of adaptation in most current usage is poorly defined, and ripe for explosion, but strangely suggestive. As it explodes, it can reveal for us authorship itself as adaptation, and therefore, by way of conclusion, I want to look at a film by an arch-adapter of almost everything — even though the film I'm going to look at it is one of the few works that he didn't adapt from some recognisable previously published source.

Orson Welles's career develops initially in tandem with the various groups of collaborators he assembles around him, especially the Mercury Theatre. Before making it to Hollywood, they do radio plays and adaptations, of which the notorious *War of the Worlds* is

perhaps the best known. In film, most of Welles's work is associated with adaptations of literary texts: as director or actor he works on *The Magnificent Ambersons* (adapted from Booth Tarkington's novel), *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Chimes at Midnight* (adapted from Shakespeare history plays, and from some of the chronicles Shakespeare himself adapted), *The Trial*, and *Don Quixote*; in addition, in more conventional Hollywood form, *The Lady from Shanghai* was adapted from Sherwood King's novel *If I Die Before I Wake*, and *Touch of Evil* from Whit Masterson's novel *Badge of Evil)*; and among the most notable of the films in which he only acted are *Jane Eyre*, *The Third Man*, *Moby Dick.* This is the man, who certainly more than any other American director, has been hailed as an *auteur.*

Of course, the way in which *auteur*ism is usually defined makes it quite feasible to regard all these adaptations, to the extent that they are adaptations in the conventional sense, also as auteurist works. That's why I'm going to look instead at *Citizen Kane* — as *auteur*ist a film as ever came out of the Studio System. It also occasioned a fruitless argument about its authorship. The nominal issue of the bout (the main contestants being Kael in Herman Mankiewicz's corner, and Bogdanovich in Welles's) was: Who was mainly responsible for the big conception of the film?[24] One of the reasons why this debate proved so unilluminating is that Welles's characteristic way of working consisted in taking material from his many collaborators (Mankiewicz, the RKO staffers, Gregg Toland, the Mercury Company — anyone with an idea worth having), and adapting it to the work in hand. To the extent that the elements were successfully adapted, the work achieves a certain kind of coherence: an implicit air of intentionality (the very thing Wimsatt and Beardsley warned against making the basis of one's interpretation of a poem: because it's simply something that quickens out of the way one perceives the work, but then appears to be distinct, alienated from it).[25] Terry Eagleton argues that the autonomous "bourgeois subject is modelled" on the seemingly autonomous, self-validating,

mysteriously unified work of art.[26] The work of art may then be taken circularly (and wrongly) as validating an implausibly self-given and coherent subject — especially when that subject's an author wanting the dignity of being the Author. But to notice this is not to deny the creative agency of rather more plausibly dishevelled and mutually dependent kinds of subject. Welles had an appetite for the kudos of genius; but where he was unusual was in the degree to which he didn't merely accept the expertise of the various departments of RKO in the form in which it was offered, but also adapted it — in the first instance by playing with it, and groping his way towards what it might be adaptable to.

There's no doubting, though, the value of the material his various co-creators in RKO and in the Mercury Theatre delivered. Look at what happens when their ranks thin, and he sets up as something closer to a one-man band, in fact as well as in image. He's still adapting, but now often adapting the material that chance throws at him, where previously he'd had the skilled and organised collaboration of several groups of people. Sometimes the results are serendipitous (the bath scene in *Othello,* for example, which was his inspired solution to the costumes not turning up), but overall they were erratic. Though in the extrinsic record of his life and work, there's enough indication of initiative resting with him most of the time, for it to make sense to speak of most of the films Welles directed as in some sense Welles's works (and, as it happens a fair degree of thematic and stylistic continuity — even though these are not the index of the kind of authorship I wish to defend), they're not exclusively his. But that's not to say that to the extent that other people made a contribution to the films, they are to that extent any the less the outcome of Welles's creative work. That false zero-sum logic is exactly the logic that was applied in the debate about who wrote *Kane*, and it's also implicit in the way artistic careers, rewards and reputations are secured in our kind of culture. And wrongly so. At the risk of paradox, Welles was more Welles the more collaborators he had, and the more expert they were.

The other thing one might notice about *Citizen Kane* is that the film itself problematizes authorship. For locked into the form of the movie are representations of surrogate authors, and images of misconceived works. Some works are vast, poorly integrated, and their borrowings inadequately adapted (think of Xanadu — and all the Romantic dilemmas about authorship and power that the name connotes). Others are debilitatingly related to questionable authorial motives (the insecure edifice of Kane's public career; the bizarrely private motivation for forcing Susan into Grand Opera in the cavernous auditoria of which, Kane is the only spectator find satisfaction). But principally, there's Kane himself, the would-be author of his own life, wrestling with unfinished and unfinishable projects; and, in contrast with Kane's extravagant conspicuousness, there's the shadowy, all but invisible figure of the reporter, Thompson, whose attempts to piece together the real Kane story constitute the thread on which the various narratives are strung. Where Kane has to adapt the various circumstances of his life in his efforts to create himself, Thompson has the more limited task of assembling the material with which to adapt the news organisation's initial attempt at Kane's obituary (the News on the March sequence, which, ironically the actor playing Thompson also narrates). Implicitly they tussle over rights to authorship, one visible and one invisible competitor — and film's throwaway implication is that they tussle over nothing. The secret? Rosebud! Just dollar-book Freud, as Welles remarked. Big conceptions, like the ones over whose ownership Kael and Bogdanovich scrap, don't really come that cheap. And if they seem to, they'll probably go up in smoke.

In other words, one way of reading *Kane* is to see it as the decisive, if proleptic contribution to the who-wrote-*Citizen-Kane-?* debate: as a complex reflection on, and example of, the interaction between a normative ideal of Authorship, and or the autonomous, sovereign individual, on the one hand, and, on the other, collective, creative agency or authorships. In the process the idea of the Author is both displaced (Kane, ghosted by Thompson), and, ironically, articulated

(Welles's persona as *Auteur* becomes oddly difficult to disentangle from Charles Foster Kane's). But a closer look reveals Welles doing, what Welles at his best normally did: adapting. And that co-operative work comes through both in the way the film is made, and as among the most positive things to be represented on screen.

* * *

Film, in its machinic connectedness suggests an industrial, systemic way of conceiving the co-ordination of the elements that contribute to it, in which people are so many components, intersected by forces. Meanwhile, it enacts a different kind of creation in its production of its own apparatus, which is readily seen as one manifestation of a will to technological power to be set over against any particular individual or even group or culture. Film *per se* can be seen in terms of drastic scepticism about the subject and about authorship. And, equally, it can try to assimilate itself to the distortingly monadic concept of Authorship that I've sketched here — something which the more wearisome aspects of discussions of adaptation in terms of fidelity testify to. Yet opposite as these two options seem (radical anti-humanism and the humanistic assertion of the originary author), there is a kind of underlying affinity between them, as Seán Burke has argued, for both are caught within what, in a discussion of Barthes' 'The Death of the Author', he terms the problematic of "the transcendental/ impersonal impasse of modernity".[27] In the term I've employed, both are kinds of monadic positions — in which, for example, differences readily collapse into difference, and particular others into the Other; in which Textuality takes the place of Authorship.

The phenomenon of adaptation, partly because of the ways in which it causes these various conceptions to jostle with each other can be revealing. In reflecting upon adaptations of Shakespeare for various media, one becomes newly aware of the ways in which his works are themselves adaptations of other material, to other circumstances. And though I'm far from discerning, and still less

advocating, a return to the middle ages, various strands in pre-Renaissance Europe are suggestive of ways in which our recent experience (of, say the last three or four hundred years) constrains our imaginations and perceptions in ways that are unhelpful. Adaptation reveals some concern to establish a sustaining relation to our past, whilst declining to remain trapped in it — for no matter how nostalgic films can get in recreating, say, literary classics, they are still films — translations across periods and media. Equally, in relation to authorship, discussion of adaptations is revealing of the bankruptcy of a certain kind of authorship (as originator), but also of the limited usefulness of kinds of critique which seek to dissolve authorship, and which are themselves perhaps symptomatic of our having reached the limits of a certain cultural paradigm — though it would be foolish not to pretend that a kind of Nietzschean/Foucauldian analysis, especially as applied to forms of life administered (and conceived) as technical problems, doesn't make a disquieting degree of sense (albeit, from my point of view, an unmeaningful kind of sense). Yet in certain adaptations, one glimpses authorship as the realisation of a kind of social and cultural potential — as never purely individual, and seldom purely dissolved in the play impersonal forces. In the eerie light of what may be a special moment of socio-political transition, one sees the possibility at least our ideas of authorship themselves being adapted — strangely enough as itself a kind of inventive and sometimes self-adaptation.

Notes

1. On the shortcomings of the concept of adaptation, see, e.g., Robert B. Ray, 'The Field of "Literature and Film"' and Robert Stam, 'Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation', in James Naremore, Ed., *Film Adaptation* (London: The

Athlone Press, 2000), pp. 38-53 and 54-76.

2. '*Forbidden Planet* and the retrospective attribution of intentions' in Deborah Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, and Imelda Whelehan, Eds., *Retrovisions : reinventing the past in film and fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 2001)

3. *Novel into Film* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

4. Gabriel Miller, *Screening the Novel: Rediscovered American Fiction in Film* (New York: Henry Holt, 1980).

5. Though not always: see Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, Eds., *Adaptations: from text to screen, screen to text* (London: Routledge, 1999).

6. Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1988), p. 378.

7. Jack Jorgens, *Shakespeare on Film* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1977), ch. 1.

8. *The Motives of Eloquence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

9. On the various mediaeval concepts of law and law-making, see Walter Ullmann, *Medieval Political Thought*, rev. edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), and Alan Harding, *Medieval Law and the Formation of the State* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), esp. pp. 191-200.

10. J.A.Barrow, *Medieval Writers and Their Work* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), pp. 29-30.

11. See Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

12. Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: meaning and failure of a political symbol*, foreword and introduction by George Schwab ;

translated by George Schwab and Erna Hilfstein (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), chs. 3 & 4, esp. pp. 33-5.

13. See Steven Shapin, *A social history of truth: civility and science in seventeenth-century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

14. Stephen Orgel, 'The Renaissance Artist as Plagiarist', *ELH* 48 (1981): 476-95.

15. As Donald Pease notes, one may also relate this changed kind of authority, the arrogation of authority by an individual author in lieu of a complex negotiation with existing authorities, to the discovery in the New World of a place which clearly was not adequately to be understood by reference to traditional authorities ('Author' in Lentricchia & McLoughlin Eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (1990), rptd. in Seán Burke, Ed., *Authorship* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 265-6. There is, in the case of political theory, a more particular New World connexion, in the invocation of a State of Nature, variously conceived.

16. See *The Social Contract*, ch. 7.

17. Dryden, preface to *The Rival Ladies* (1664) and preface to *Albion and Albanius* (1685), in *Of Dramatic Poesy and other critical essays*, 2 vols., ed. George Watson (London: Everyman, 1962), I, 2, and II, 35. On the neo-classical inflection of *imitatio,* see Emerson R. Marks, *The Poetics of Reason* (New York: Random House, 1968), chs. 2 & 4.

18. See the excerpt from Edward Young 'Conjectures on Original Composition' (1759) in Burke, Ed., *Authorship*, pp. 37-42.

19. On the possible relation between the emergence of the nation-state (as a particular version of the sovereign state) and 'print-capitalism', see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* rev. edn. (London: Verso, 1991), esp. ch. 3.

20. See David Saunders, *Authorship and Copyright* (London: Routledge, 1992).

21. This feature of film, in tandem with its transnational, visual language, makes it possible to see it as destabilizing the relationship Anderson posits between print-

capitalism and the nation-state. As this happens, the sense of global interconnectedness slipping *beyond* the regulative capacity of any sovereign authority may, as Fredric Jameson has argued, give rise to a paranoid predilection in film for conspiracy. See *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). In the terms of this argument, the films Jameson discusses may be seen as a frantic attempt to reimpose monadic, if delegitimated form (of the conspiracy) in circumstances in which such monadic ordering is at the extreme limits of its plausibility.

22. See, e.g., Stephen Mithen's *The Prehistory of the Mind* (1996; London: Phoenix, 1998) in which our general intelligence is claimed to be the evolutionary correlative of our complex sociality.

23. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed,* rev. edn. (Cambridge Mass., Harvard UP, 1979), pp. 40-41.

24. See Pauline Kael, *The Citizen Kane Book* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971) and Peter Bogdanovich, 'The Kane Mutiny', *Esquire* (October 1972). For a summary of the argument from Bogdanovich's point of view, see Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum (London: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 494-502. On the complexly co-operative creation of the film, see Robert Carringer *The Making of Citizen Kane* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1985).

25. W.K.Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946) rptd. in W.K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: studies in the meaning of poetry* (1954; London: Methuen, 1970), pp. 3-18.

26. 'Self-Authoring Subjects' in Maurice Biriotti & Nicola Miller, Eds., *What is an Author?* (Manchester: MUP, 1993), p. 45.

27. Burke, Sean. Ed., *Authorship*, p. xxiv.