Adaptation Studies
New Approaches

Edited by
Christa Albrecht-Crane
and Dennis Cutchins

Fairleigh Dickinson University Press
Contents

Acknowledgments 7

Introduction: New Beginnings for Adaptation Studies 11
CHRISTA ALBRECHT-CRANE and DENNIS CUTCHINS

Part I: Fidelity, Ethics, and Intertextuality

Being Adaptation: The Resistance to Theory 25
BRETT WESTBROOK

Turning Japanese: Translation, Adaptation, and the Ethics of Trans-National Exchange 46
MARK O’THOMAS

The Ethics of Infidelity 61
THOMAS LEITCH

“We’re off to See the Wizard” (Again): Oz Adaptations and the Matter of Fidelity 78
KATE NEWELL

Part II: Literature, Film Adaptations, and Beyond

Visualizing Metaphors in Brokeback Mountain 99
ANDREA D. FITZPATRICK

Jane Austen and the Chick Flick in the Twenty-first Century 121
PAMELA DEMORY

Converting the Controversial: Regulation as “Source Text” in Adaptation 150
RICHARD BERGER

Sausage Smoke Leading to Mulligan’s Breakfast: Film Adaptation and James Joyce’s Ulysses 160
DAVID A. HATCH and DAVID C. SIMMONS

5
Shane and Man on Fire: George Stevens’s Enduring Legacy of Spirituality and Violence 180

Dennis Cutchins

Part III: Adaptation as Departure

Talking Pictures: Language and Emotion in Lubitsch’s The Shop Around the Corner 197

Nancy Steffen-Fluhr

Quiet, Music at Work: The Soundtrack and Adaptation 221

Glenn Jellenik

Lost Highway as Fugue: Adaptation of Musicality as Film 244

Christa Albrecht-Crane

Assemblage Filmmaking: Approaching the Multi-Source Adaptation and Reexamining George Romero’s Night of the Living Dead 263

Kyle Bishop

“Valere Quantum Valere Potest”: Adaptation in Early American Cinema 278

W. D. Phillips

Notes on Contributors 294

Index 298
Turning Japanese: Translation, Adaptation, and the Ethics of Trans-National Exchange

Mark O’Thomas

*Everyone around me is a total stranger*
*Everyone avoids me like a cyclone ranger*
*That’s why I’m turning Japanese*
*I think I’m turning Japanese*
*I really think so . . .*

—The Vapors, “Turning Japanese”

# TURNING JAPANESE

IT'S 1980 AND IN “TURNING JAPANESE” THE POST-PUNK, NEW WAVE group The Vapors are singing about the isolation and pain of being in love, of being made to feel so culturally different that the singer’s gaze becomes refracted into a myopic view of the world around him—a direct allusion to the physiological narrowness (in comparative terms) of Japanese eyes. Some fans have claimed the song is about masturbation inside prison, others have made a bid for its latent homosexuality (“I have to kiss you when there’s no-one else around”) but whatever the impetus for “turning Japanese” back in 1980, the orientalist Vaporised other remained but a short hop from social exclusion albeit brought on by infatuation. Fast forward twenty-three years and Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson are *Lost in Translation* in a shiny new twenty-first-century Japan, where Japan inevitably means Tokyo and Tokyo translates into a swanky hotel. Despite Murray and Johansson being the strangers in a strange land, the film portrays the Japanese locale as essentially foreign and quirkily different—the toilets are made for ridiculously small people, the Japanese eat bizarre food, talk odd and just don’t get how funny Bill Murray really is. Thank God Bill and Scarlett find each other. Thank God for hotels, not sites of international exchange, but virtual drop-in centers of national mutual validation. Where “Turning Japanese” references a marginal other by stopping in the name of love, *Lost in Translation* references a majority other by positioning its ultimate otherness in relation to the comfort and kind-
ness shared by two American strangers. Cultural difference is something that both sets us apart and brings us together—it defines who we are in relation to who we are not. Thus what better place for lovers to be thrown together than in the discordant, glary maelstrom of otherness found in a culturally dystopian Tokyo where the East is all but a backdrop to a pantomime. The East of *Lost in Translation* is just as it was at the turn of the twentieth century in the theatrical fanciful follies of Oscar Asche and his long-running orientalist musical extravaganza *Chu Chin Chow*.

*LOST IN TRANSLATION*

Cultural difference has long been a central concern of translators whose bread and butter work is the business of striving to find sameness where none really exists. Ethically charged with the duty of importing a writer or director’s work into a new cultural domain, translators are virtual gatekeepers in cross-national traffic. But their social, political, and cultural decisions remain concealed within the newly constructed target text. Fidelity to an original is the modus operandi for any translator whose mainstream mission remains to provide pathways into another culture through the soft landing of a domesticated textual whole. This “fidelity” is one based on a notion of equivalence, that two languages and cultures have direct correlations with each other—that *sayonara* simply means “goodbye” and what falls by the wayside, gets “lost” in the translation just as in the Murray/Johansson film what falls by the wayside is far greater than what is retained in any kind of cross-cultural understanding. Adaptation, like translation, similarly shares concerns of fidelity to an original text where the metalanguage of adaptation criticism has inevitably revolved around questions of “loyalty” and “betrayal.” Here anteriority rules supreme—if you said it first, it’s got to be better than someone else trying to say it later, and differently, because all they are really trying to do, after all, is say it again. From *Pride and Prejudice* (it’s always Jane Austen in adaptation studies) to *Fight Club*, first is always best. However, recent poststructuralist turns in both translation and adaptation studies have begun to problematize the practice of both domestication in translation and fidelity in adaptation where the work of Venuti (1998), Stam (2005), Stam and Raengo (2005), Leitch (2005) and others have sought to promote the role of the translator and adapter beyond its service provider/copier/second-hand understudy reputation to the elevated status of a creative artist in its own right. But while adaptation studies has essentially concentrated on content in its cam-
paign against fidelity as an outmoded and ultimately conservative concept, within translation studies Venuti, in adopting a stance advocating a translation strategy based on foreignizing, in some senses argues for a practice of rewriting that foregrounds a fidelity of form. In this essay, in considering the ethics of engaging in transnational adaptations with particular reference to Western adaptations of Eastern sources and vice versa, I will focus my discussion on both film and theatrical adaptations where the translative and intercultural practices of the latter will be explored in order to contextualize and critique to some extent those of the former. During this essay, the emphasis will not be so much on what gets lost in translation, but on the challenges and potentiality for artistic and dialogic engagement between cultures.

Adaptation Across Cultures

Most adaptations take place across media rather than cultures—literature into film, diary extract into stage play, etc.—where the medium specificity of each particular form has historically played a significant part and has been instrumental in its theoretical analysis. While adaptations may be generated from a range of different media, one adaptation mode has dominated academic study—something that corresponds closely to its prominent position in economic terms within a global cultural marketplace. The transformation of literature into film, then, in terms of both its process and product, underlies an unspoken definition of “adaptation” for many scholars working in the field. George Bluestone’s often invoked comment that “the end products of novel and film represent different aesthetic genera, as different from each other as ballet is from architecture” represents in itself a reflection of the assumed primacy of cinematic adaptations of fiction, that this mode of adaptation is privileged above and beyond all others. In viewing adaptation as a cross-cultural process, however, the importance of considering different typologies, where the “translation” of literature into film may form just one element of many, becomes clear.

Embracing translation theory’s distinction between source and target language (a distinction that itself connects with the domestication/foreignization binary), it might be possible to begin to engage with adaptation in a way that promotes a kind of cultural ethics as well as the particular specificity of each medium.

Adaptation, viewed in terms of target and source culture as well as target and source text, can be classified into three broad groups (see fig. 1). The first are those adaptations that do cross media but are monocultural, such as Rob Marshall’s film adaptation of the stage mu-
Adaptation: Text and Culture

The adaptation remains firmly within its source culture and the rewriting that takes place is inevitably structured around fitting the narrative into its new medium.

The second grouping of adaptations are those that do not cross media but do cross culture (for example, NBC’s remake of BBC Television’s *The Office* or Hong Kong Cinema’s *Infernal Affairs* in its United States incarnation *The Departed*). Here even when there is a high degree of equivalence between the original and target texts (to use the metalanguage of translation theory), the transfer process results in a range of cultural changes. Thirdly, there are those adaptations that cross both medium and culture, such as the multifarious stage adaptations of Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* or Amy Heckerling’s (far from) *Clueless* film adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Emma*. In ethical terms, adaptations in the first category may well wish to jettison fidelity as an aim, based on what is now widely acknowledged as ill-founded assumptions about originality and medium specificity.

However, it is in the last two categories—where changes of culture take place—that the poststructuralist anti-fidelity project runs into trouble as, in seeking to justify the rewriting of anterior texts from other cultures just as it does for all adaptations, charges of colonialism or what Venuti has called “ethnocentric violence” to the original
abound.\textsuperscript{5} It seems too convenient to assume that all texts, be they
source or target, are on an equal socio-economic footing, wherein in
a relativistic postmodern world simply everything is available for re-
writing, remaking, reinterpretation and renewal.

Although this is invariably schematic, what this form of categoriza-
tion makes transparent is the intricate web of crossing cultures
through different modes of cultural production. It seeks to highlight
the political as well as the methodological aspects of the transforma-
tional process and has the potential to be developed further as a tool
for analyzing the impact of such modes. Of course, adaptation like
translation necessitates a degree of colonialism.\textsuperscript{6} No text can ever be a
simple norm-free copy of another, as Venuti concedes: “Not only does
a translation constitute an interpretation of the foreign text, varying
with different cultural situations at different historical moments, but
canons of accuracy are articulated and applied in the domestic culture
and therefore are basically ethnocentric, no matter how seemingly
faithful, no matter how linguistically correct.”\textsuperscript{7}

Adaptations that cross cultures, too, inevitably offer interpretations
of those cultures, but it is in the making of qualitative value judg-
ments about those adaptations—how good they are as works—that a
professional ethics enters the arena. Venuti, like Berman,\textsuperscript{8} approaches
ethical issues in translation through Schleiermacher’s differentiating
principle between domestication and foreignization in translation\textsuperscript{9}
where a domesticating translation drags the source culture to the tar-
get culture by eradicating as much of its original source as possible and
making the rewritten text sound as natural as it can in its new lan-
guage. Foreignization, however, seeks to do the opposite—the new
text is positioned within the target language as one that indicates its
source through perhaps the otherness of its lexical structuring, or even
the anti-canonical choice of the text in the first place. For adaptation,
as Robert Stam has noted, the cross-national enterprise is a form of
reaccentuation where “a source work is reinterpreted through new grids
and discourses,”\textsuperscript{10} but the question of the power relations between
source and target culture within those grids Stam neither defines nor
explores. In talking of an ethics of cross-national adaptation, the ideo-
logical and historical relations between cultures cannot be simply ig-
nored or factored out. It is not just a question of upholding an ethical
base to fidelity where the original must be kept intact as far as possible
in the adapted new work. What is needed is an ideological interroga-
tion of the process and product that forges adaptations that eradicate
the cultural integrity of the original in a narratological mission of
.crash and burn. And it goes deeper than just nationhood. Gender too
can be seen as a loser in the cross-cultural transfer process where the
whims of a culture’s predilection for certain gendered practices can bear influence over an adaptation or translation in a censorious manner.\textsuperscript{11} The postcolonial theorist Tejaswini Niranjana has explored such power relations within translation practice, noting the existence of a clear hierarchy between source and target. Seeing this relationship in terms of colonised/colonizer, translation (and by inference cross-national adaptation) can be seen to serve hegemonic versions of the colonized, in Said’s terms “objects without history.”\textsuperscript{12} Niranjana, then, like Venuti, favors a translation approach that seeks to be a site for resistance and transformation, where translation is an ideological act both of and for itself. Examples of such work within postcolonial literature are not in short supply,\textsuperscript{13} but within the wider realms of adaptation it is theatre rather than film that appears in the vanguard of utilizing adaptation as a means of resistance. It was the French Canadian theater practitioner Robert Lepage who first coined the phrase “tradaptation” as a means of describing the annexing of old texts to new cultural meanings where the intentionality is not to censor or make palatable the original for the target culture but in a sense to force the target culture to confront itself through its exposure to the rewritten ‘original.’\textsuperscript{14} Productions like the British Asian theatre company Tara Arts’s reworking of a range of classic texts present real examples of this mode in practice where for example Sophocles’s \textit{Oedipus Rex} is “tradapted” into a tragic story of an immigrant’s hubris. Might the capacity of a cross-cultural or trans-national adaptation to situate itself through these oppositional ways be one approach to making an ethical value judgement about its true worth? By foregrounding both its relation to its own culture as well as the culture and text of the original, the adaptation could provide a new, foreignized voice that speaks in a language other than, but paradoxically of, its own.

Adaptations that cross cultures inevitably deal with an \textit{other}, whether their intention is to foreignize, domesticate, or annihilate. Ethics is itself no stranger to alterity. Indeed the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in his rejection of both philosophy and ontology created a new kind of ethics, an ethics beyond morality which placed alterity central to his analysis of ethical thinking where “the glimpse of the beyond as something sublime and elevating happens in the traumatic encounter with the Other.”\textsuperscript{15} Adaptation, then, might serve as a location for a meeting point between cultures—what theater practitioner and performance theorist Patrice Pavis has called a “crossroads,” forming a dynamic base for cultures to engage in a benign process of exchange and transfer.\textsuperscript{16}
Adaptations in Theater: West Looks East

Looking East, trans-national theater and film adaptations have developed in different ways and it is worth considering why and how such developments have taken place. The twentieth century saw an increased fascination on the part of European theater practitioners with the East. As Brecht looked to China and its theatrical traditions, the French theater director and theorist Antonin Artaud became fascinated with the dance theater of Bali—a fascination that informed his work and manifestos for the rest of his career. These practitioners were the precursors to the intercultural performance training techniques of Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, who developed a whole philosophy of actor training based on a kind of universalism in its syncretic approaches to thinking about the body as a vessel for performance. This in turn informed the practices of theater directors like Peter Brook and his International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris. While Brook’s adaptations of Eastern classics like The Mahabharata have endured some criticism, their intention to thoroughly integrate different performance disciplines towards an end of creating a truly intercultural performance cannot be dismissed. Brook’s choices of adaptation are wide-ranging and global—they do not represent a move to cull the texts of different cultures, but rather demonstrate a spirit of engagement with those texts in a variety of performative and syncretic ways. This “spirit” is in marked contrast to many of the Western cinematic adaptations of works from the East where concerns for any kind of syncretic universalism are few and far between.

Adaptations in Theater: East Looks West

For Antonin Artaud, the East offered the potential to call into question the very practice of theater itself and the opportunity to radically produce new dramatic forms. However, theater practice in the East at this time was far from being in a state of stasis, and had its own transnational encounters to confront and negotiate. In China, before the onset of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), a theatrical reform movement emerged which was charged with the idea of replacing traditional Chinese modes of performance with Western-inspired spoken forms. In Japan, the Shing-geki movement of the early twentieth century was expressly focused on a modernization project of traditional theater where modernization inevitably meant Westernization as a range of plays were introduced by playwrights such as Chekhov and Ibsen. However, jettisoning the tradition in favor of the foreign
proved to be a temporary reaction where ultimately, the kind of intercultural meeting points and process-driven practices of European theater-makers such as Grotowski, Barba, and Brook were mirrored in Japan by groups like the “Little Theatre Movements” which emerged in the 1960s. Here a range of Western plays were adapted through a use of traditional acting forms which were not simply rejected out of a need for Westernised modernization, but explored within a contemporary Japanese context. In this sense, the practices of key Eastern and Western theater practitioners moved away from a strategy of explicit foreignization to one of partial domestication—a move towards the establishment of a bi-cultural syncretic underpinning to the work. Here the very act of performance is a form of transcultural adaptation where actors’ bodies are themselves sites of Pavis’s “crossroads of culture.”

Butoh remains as but one example of a whole theater/dance form—a hybrid—that has emerged over the last forty years in direct response to an intercultural meeting point between Western and Eastern forms.

Adaptations in Film: East Looks West

Film adaptations across cultures, and in particular from East to West and West to East, proliferate, and in a globalized, technology-driven world it is film rather than theater that has the greatest psychological, geographical and ideological reach. However, within cinematic adaptation, the story of cultures initially championing each other and then moving towards a kind of synergetic resolution through adaptation is not so well defined. With Oscar-winning adaptations like Martin Scorsese’s The Departed (2006), the enormous box office potential of rewritten classics from the Hong Kong cinema’s back catalogue is clear. Let us begin, however, by looking at film adaptation of Western sources in the East. Zhang Zhen’s survey of an early (1931) Chinese adaptation of Shakespeare’s The Two Gentlemen of Verona shows that trans-national film adaptations in the East got off to a promising start. Zhang argues for the notion of “cosmopolitan projections” as a model for looking at cinema that adapts across national boundaries—the creation of a virtual space in which “the original and the adaptation coexist with tension.” These projected acts do not just “translate” from one culture in terms of another they also create a “surplus of meaning” that can never be subsumed: “Adaptations of Western literature by non-Western filmmakers run the risk of mimetic identification yet also may seize opportunities to “reflect” on that mimetic act and appropriate the source material by mobilizing the aesthetic and expressive possibilities of cinema.”

Zhang’s proposition
of a Western adaptation seizing opportunities for reflection on the nature of its source comes close to Venuti’s foreignizing proposition for ethical translation, but how far does the reality come near to this optimistic view? Film theorist Brian David Phillips sees the Taiwanese film *Seven Wolves* (1989) as a kind of composite adaptation of a number of Western films, namely *The Goodbye Girl* (1977), *Flashdance* (1983), and *Streets of Fire* (1984). Here the use of these sources is acknowledged through a certain knowingness: a more than cursory nod and wink to a knowing audience, who can recognize the intertexts as filmic quotations. Invoking literary theorist Harold Bloom’s notion of “the anxiety of influence” experienced by “strong poets” (i.e., those writers deserving of aesthetic value who suffer a concern that their new “original” works might be tainted unwittingly by previous works they have read), Phillips finds that a high degree of referencing of the source texts within the film is matched with obliviousness where “…the Chinese filmmaker seems to be either indifferent to his sources or experiencing an anxiety for influence—he seems more willing for his audience to know that he is imitating his precursors.” This kind of syncretism can be seen to directly correspond to the intercultural practices of European theater makers cited above, so that Phillips’s assertion that “a tendency in Chinese society … to imitate directly from the West and in the very imitative process to transform what is being imitated and make it Chinese” might take a more postmodern turn that reflects back and questions both its sources and itself. Such a turn would bring into play an ethical dimension to the adaptation in the sense that its otherness is neither ignored nor wholly appropriated.

Japanese cinema, too, has experienced its own adaptations of Western film, theater, and literature, not least from the renowned filmmaker Akira Kurosawa, who has adapted *Macbeth* and *King Lear* from Shakespeare and the Ed McBain American crime novel *King’s Ransom* (remade as *High and Low*). Kurosawa’s adaptations are not founded on principles of Westernization. Like Chu Yen-P’ing—the director of *Seven Wolves*—his approach is rather to take aspects of the original and blend certain elements into Japanese narratives and typographies. *Ran*, for example, can be seen as a Japanese response to *King Lear* in its exchanging of the three sisters for three brothers, and its forging of the Lear protagonist to the legend of the medieval warlord Moori Motonari. His downfall is inevitably linked to his failed relationship as a father to his sons where the film’s stark visual imagery shows the personal turmoil literally projected on a national landscape. What is interesting and significant about these Eastern adaptations of Western films is their ability to domesticate through a direct response to the source work or works. Unlike the early twentieth century stage adap-
tations of Western plays, which sought to replicate Western acting styles and essentially naturalistic approaches to performance, these cinematic adaptations engage in a form of dialogism with their original works in new and interesting ways. In Ran, Kurosawa draws on a traditional Japanese style of acting known as nob theater for two of his principle characters—Hidetora and Lady Kaede—where by mixing naturalism with tradition he demonstrates an ability to hone a new domestic meaning from an engagement with both foreign and home sources in a carnivalesque act of reformation, revelation, and resurrection.

Lastly, of course, the growing interest of Bollywood in adapting Western cinema for its home market cannot be ignored. Sitting in the second category of the adaptation/culture typology cited above, Bollywood continues to appropriate Hollywood in new and interesting ways. Christopher McQuarrie’s landmark thriller The Usual Suspects (1995) tells a story of murder and intrigue when a group of crooks are arrested on suspicion of murder in San Pedro, California. Translocated to a snowy London on Christmas Eve, Vivik Agnihotri’s Chocolate (2005) sees a gang of Asian men arrested following a jinxed heist that produced dead bodies rather than hard cash. Taking on aspects of post-9–11 Islamophobia, the adaptation forces viewers to question their own motives around apportioning guilt. Because London is located literally between India and the United States, it provides something more than just a geographical location, giving the original new life and new meanings in a “subsequent performance” to use Jonathan Miller’s phrase) that allows the original to live on, to “adapt” in its biological sense, to its new cultural environment.

Adaptations in Film: West Looks East

Western cinematic adaptations of Eastern sources have largely occurred within the same form, i.e. from film to film where these “remakes” literally re-make the source within a new cultural framework. One of the most successful of these has been the horror movie Ring series, which deals with a number of mysterious deaths related to the viewing of a video tape. Although the original film was in fact an adaptation of a Japanese novel, the American version is very much an adaptation of the Japanese novel—an adaptation of an adaptation. Accepting that while it is not particularly appropriate to study adaptation through the mantle of loss and betrayal—an invidious exercise of compare and contrast—what is significant about the adaptation of The Ring, as it changes culture and moves from Tokyo to Seattle, is that it
is amazingly (and ironically) so faithful to the source text. Fidelity and
domestication, then, are not opposite ends of a binary scale, but can
collude and collide in an act of cultural appropriation.

Moving from the horror genre to romantic comedy, *Shall We
Dance?* (1996) was a popular box office success in Japan. It explored
how the shy yet disciplined psyche of a happily married yet spiritually
lonely man discovers the sheer joy of being alive through secretly tak-
ing after-work ballroom dancing lessons. The film might seem to pose
problems for adaptation since the self-reflexive questioning of Japa-
nese national character appears so endemic to its narrative drive and
characterisation. The invoking of the otherness of the seaside nor-
thern United Kingdom town of Blackpool (of all places) where the an-
nual championships are held as a kind of spiritual nirvana for the
dancers, too, helps situate its own otherness even in the micro-world
of ballroom dancing. However, with Richard Gere in the lead role in
the United States adaptation, no problem is insurmountable, and the
film is remade as Tokyo becomes Chicago. Even the opening voice-
over of the film is retained, but rather than describing the potential
conflict between ballroom dancing and Japanese shyness it is simply
rewritten in the United States adaptation as a description of the his-
tory of ballroom dancing. The original themes of shyness, the need
for a public respectability and the ridicule of ballroom dancers who
keep their practices firmly in the closet are domesticated into the stan-
dard wholesome tale of an American family that almost crumbles until
the husband realizes what he might lose—it’s *Brief Encounter* meets
*Stepping Out*.

What is evident from these West/East adaptations is that unlike ei-
ther of their theatrical or their East/West counterparts, they are irre-
trievably ethnocentric. The original culture is there to provide a
narratological template for the target culture to map onto—as if the meandering roads of Jakarta, say, might become New York if the city
were razed to the ground and a replica New York City built in its
place. It might still be Jakarta but it would always feel like New York.
This is not to say that all Western cinematic adaptations of other cul-
tures are fundamentally ethnocentric in a way that neither theatrical
adaptations of Eastern works nor adaptations in the East of the West
appear to be. American cinema is not a fixed medium and causes of
optimism can be found in surprising places.

**ETHICS AND ADAPTATION**

In dealing with an ethics of trans-national adaptation, it is important
to move away from notions of “sameness,” despite the irrefutable dia-
lectic between identity and what is "identical." Emmanuel Lévinas, whose work went on to influence Derrida, moves ontology firmly into the realm of ethics with his preoccupation not with the ontological totality of being, but with what lies beyond this—the alterior, difference as opposed to sameness. The encounter with the other, then, is not about replication, mirroring, seeing yourself in the face of another, but

A calling into question of the Same . . . which cannot occur within the egotic spontaneity of the Same . . . is brought about by the Other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the Other by the Same, of the Other by Me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the Same by the Other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge.

I began this essay by referring to a film, *Lost In Translation*, that is not an adaptation, but whose very title suggests a pessimistic encounter with the East and whose relationship and view of the other might well be considered in Said’s terms orientalist. Another popular film which has been tagged with the same charge is the Quentin Tarantino saga *Kill Bill Volumes 1 and 2*. No stranger to adaptation (the films follow *Jackie Brown*, adapted from *Rum Punch* by Elmore Leonard), Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* series can in some senses be viewed as adaptations, or at the very least palimpsestian uber-texts. These texts revisit a host of genres, characters and—in the case of the character Bill, played by David Carradine—even carry a physical intertext where the actor’s presence is itself a signifier of orientalism. Treating the *Kill Bill* films as trans-national adaptations through our ethical frame offers up some interesting and surprising conclusions.

The *Kill Bill* films tell a story of revenge where “the Bride” sets out to hunt down and kill a group of people who themselves attempted to kill her (and her unborn child) during her wedding rehearsal. The group on her hit list are all either former or current assassins who have been trained in martial arts and are led by one man who is last on her list: Bill. The film flaunts its intertextual references in abundance, and chief among these are the Hong Kong action movies of the 1970s. Far from faithfully reproducing these references in an American context by simply replicating narratives, the Other is referenced in a range of ways. The iconic yellow jump suit worn by the motorcycle-riding Bride is a two-piece adaptation of the suit worn by Bruce Lee in *Game
of Death (1973). Subtitles abound in this film where a foreign language is not seen as an impediment to a dumbed-down audience’s understanding. Rather than mimic the poor dubbing that was used among such films in the 70s, Tarantino’s Bride, and many of the other American characters in the film, speak fluent Japanese. Moreover, just as European directors like Almodóvar have taken the risk of implanting long sequences in their films, in radically anti-Aristotelian fashion, that take the plot into completely different genre—a virtual film within a film—Kill Bill’s Tarantino goes manga and takes an eight-minute sidebar into the Japanese cartoon genre in order to elucidate the back story of the half-Chinese half-Japanese American assassin O-Ren Ishii. These are all clear attempts at articulating a relationship with the foreign within a domestic frame, where the encounter with the East is both dialogic and coherent, intertextual and trashy. In Tarantino’s world, turning Japanese is not about huddling together as a celebration of “me too” in a dystopian world of exotic craziness (Lost in Translation) or sticking masking tape on his Caucasian actors’ eyes to give them a quizzical expression of confusion (as in the Turning Japanese music video); it’s actually a site of cultural dialogue, albeit through the lens of the action movie genre.

These non-adaptations—Lost In Translation and Turning Japanese—demonstrate how the study of adaptation can be a convenient and useful trope for looking at cultural meeting points as well as an important ethical marker. In terms of a wider ethics of adaptation, Venuti’s assertion for translation, that such an enterprise lies not simply in the choices made during the process (of translating), but in the choice of what to actually translate in the first place, is wholly appropriate to adaptation. Zhen Zhang’s argument that Chinese cinema is now looking towards adapting work from the minority literatures of the Third World suggests that globalization may be an aid to trans-national adaptation which need not necessarily produce texts that marginalize or consume the other, but might seek new, dialogic relations between texts. In this sense, translation and adaptation are allied pursuits which can lead rather than follow in an ethically framed artistic practice of rewriting across countries, continents, and cultures.

Notes
2. There is an irony here. An argument made for a foreignized rather than domesticated approach to translation is that it is more faithful to the original by reflecting its foreign-ness. See Lawrence Venuti, The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference, London and New York: Routledge, 1998.


11. Homosexuality, for example, was airbrushed out of Robert Graves’s translation of Suetonius’s *Twelve Caesars* (Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility*) because of the sensibilities of the time.


17. Russian acting gurus Michael Chekhov and Vsevolod Meyerhold were similarly enthralled by the theatre of the East and attempted to embed what they saw into their own theories of acting and performance.

18. It is interesting to note that while Grotowski proposes an idea of the actor’s body as having an absolute presence which defies difference for the Levinas-inspired French philosopher Jacques Derrida, the play of difference is all there is.


24. Ibid, 146.

25. Ibid., 147.


27. Ibid., 197.

28. Popular Bollywood adaptations of Hollywood blockbusters such as *The Usual Suspects* and *Fatal Attraction* openly flaunt their appropriation of and their instrumental relation to their respective sources in this way.


33. David Carradine starred in the hit television series *Kung Fu,* which explored the life of an American-Chinese Shaolin monk who was trained in martial arts.

34. Yuen Woo-Ping even used the fight choreographer in the movie.

35. *Hable Con Ella,* DVD, directed by Pedro Almodóvar (El Deseo S.A., 2002).