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„In Memoriam Charles Dickens"

(post-)modernised film adaptations of

Great Expectations
and
A Christmas Carol

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Introduction

With the groundbreaking invention of film in the late-nineteenth century a new and exciting medium took the audiences by storm. Almost simultaneously with the emergence of film, the phenomenon of adaptations came into being. After a first few experiments resulting in short film sequences depicting simple storylines such as, for instance, people walking out of a factory, or the arrival of a train, the immense potential of films to render narratives in the form of images became more and more apparent. Right from the early days on, filmmakers were constantly in search of stories and narratives they could transfer to the new medium, which eventually resulted in the production of the first film adaptations at the end of the nineteenth century.

In 1957, George Bluestone set the first cornerstone in the field of adaptation studies with the release of his seminal work *Novels into Film*. Since the publishing of this first book-length treatise on film adaptation that adopts a strictly medium-specific approach, countless other collections of essays and case studies have been brought forth, giving voice to various approaches, gradually mounting up to the lively discussion that constitutes the discourse of contemporary adaptation theory and which is characterised by seemingly neverending debates about fidelity, hierarchy and canonicity.[1] Some of the later works on adaptation, however, have proved really innovative, giving new directions to the field. Indeed, more recently, adaptation theory has experienced a significant "wave of innovation" (Murray 2008) manifesting itself in the importation of a number of postmodern concepts from other disciplines into the field of adaptation studies. Currently, then, adaptation studies are on the verge of undergoing some major transformations and reconceptualisations. In the first chapter of the present study I will provide a brief overview of these latest developments, right after a short introduction to the main approaches to adaptation that have emerged in the last fifty years.

The subsequent case studies investigate two recent Hollywood adaptations of two Charles Dickens stories, namely first, Charles Dickens' famous novel *Great Expectations* and, second, his highly influential novella *A Christmas*

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[1] Cf. Leitch 2008: 76.

Carol. Both adaptations are characterised by the recontextualisation of their respective 'source' text into a postmodern American setting, revisiting or remembering the Dickens texts from their specific cultural and socio-historical points of view.[2] The fact that an adaptation "'re-functions' both the form and content of its source text so as critically to address the changed cultural and political circumstances of its own time" (Brooker 2007: 114) seems to be particularly the case with adaptations pursuing the outright intention to divert from the source text in order to modernise it. Hence, bearing in mind that movies mirror social history, I will lay the main focus of my analyses on insights that are offered by the respective adaptations through their reflection of prevailing discourses at stake at the times they were produced in.

It is important to mention that the two adaptations chosen for analysis are sharing more common ground than the fact that their respective 'source' texts are written by same author. Interestingly enough, also the same screenwriter and the same producer were at work in both productions, which doubtlessly creates a close link between the two films. Not to forget is the fact that both adaptations are "filmed in accordance with the Hollywood codes and conventions familiar to the modern American market" (Jeffers 2006: 21).

The model adopted for the purpose of analysis, then, can be best described as a "cultural studies perspective on cultural artefacts," implying

> notions of contextualism, such as the conviction that artefacts relate to discursive structures which frame them. Discursive structures are defined as abjects of situations and institutions within which artefacts exist. (Seidl 2003: 15)

In the first analysis, which more or less consists of two parts, I will take a close look at Alfonso Cuarón's *Great Expectations* (1998). The first part deals with intertextuality and Cuarón's handling of Dickens' first person narrator (in comparison with Lean's 1946 film), reflecting the elaborated technical equipment available in the 1990s as compared to the still limited film techniques David Lean had at hand in the 1940s. The second part of the analysis focuses on the postmodern discourses that are reflected in the film, such as 'consumerism', 'commodity culture', and 'the gaze'.

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[2] Cf. Seidl 2007: 37.

In the second analysis I will deal with the film *Scrooged* (1988), directed by Richard Donner. Particularly considering the socio-political background of the adaptation, I will analyse the film with regard to 1980s Reaganism and the yuppie phenomenon. Further focus will be given to the "marketability of particular stars" (Grainge 483) in the eighties, such as Bill Murray, as well as to the meaning Murray's persona in the eighties comedy scene adds to his character in the film. Finally, I will discuss how the increasing commerciality of Christmas is reflected in the film, especially focussing on the tradition of gift-giving as representing relations between people.

1. Theory of adaptation

Film adaptation is often seen as the connective link between literature and the younger medium film. Therefore, it proves a difficult field of investigation due to the diverging points of view adopted by film theorists and literature critics, each of whom prioritising their respective medium. Unsurprisingly, these differing standpoints have led to the emergence of different approaches to film adaptation. In the following chapters I will attempt at giving a brief overview of the main approaches to adaptation and, subsequently, I will discuss the latest trends within adaptation theory.

The first subchapter deals with the medium-specific approach, most significantly advocated by George Bluestone, who is arguably one of the most influential adaptation theorists and, with his book-length work *Novels into Film,* has provided a thorough grounding in adaptation theory, which constitutes the base for practically all succeeding works in the field.

In the second subchapter, I will provide a synopsis over the main ideas representative of the comparative approach, which is arguably the most prominent approach, particularly in popular film criticism. As I shall illustrate, there are various trends within the comparative approach, from the hotly disputed fidelity criticism to the views of Brian McFarlane, who, strictly opposing fidelity criticism, developed and sophisticated the comparative approach in his book *Novel to film* from 1996, suggesting a narratological approach.

In the last years, various attempts at resetting adaptation studies into new frames and developing new methodologies for analysing film adaptations led to a number of new approaches, taking into account a broad spectrum of postmodern and cultural discourses such as psychoanalysis, feminism, gender studies and so forth. In view of these latest trends, Sarah Cardwell speaks for the adoption of a 'pluralistic' approach to adaptation, which she elaborates in her 2002 treatise *Adaptation revisited: Television and the Classic Novel*. However, the present study makes use of the term 'cultural studies approach'[3] to refer to the latest wave of innovation[4] in adaptation theory.

1.1. The medium-specific approach

George Bluestone was one of the pioneer theorists in the field of film adaptations and the first one to give a book-length treatise on the subject. His seminal work *Novels into Film* is generally considered a cornerstone in adaptation theory. Although the treatise is already dating back to 1957, many of the concepts Bluestone postulated are still widely acknowledged and arguably set the grounding for contemporary adaptation theory.

With *Novels into Film,* Bluestone primarily sought to challenge the prevailing comparative approach to film adaptation in the mid-twentieth century, which is clearly traceable in his line of reasoning. His disfavour of the predominant practice of comparative analysis was arguably due to his implicit preference of the linguistic over the visual medium and the fact that "the 1950s marked a major shift in the rapport between film and literature," in the course of which literature commenced "to loose its hierarchical control over film" (Corrigan 1999: 48, quoted in Aragay 2005: 14), a development that resulted from film's raise in "its cultural status from entertainment into art" (Aragay 2005: 14) and placed literature and film in antagonistic positions. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that the 1950s witnessed the advent of the entirely new medium television, which greatly appealed to the masses and, in that way,

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[3] Cf. Seidl 2003, 2007.

[4] Cf. Murray 2008.

significantly contributed to the elicitation of public interest in film.[5] The consequential increasing popularity of film (and television) represented an immediate threat to the superior position of literature,[6] which Bluestone assumedly intended to evade by stating that literature and film constitute two completely different things that are mutually incompatible, for each medium "is characterized by unique and specific properties" (Bluestone 1957:6). According to Bluestone, the two media are not only irreconcilably disparate "because the materials differ but also because the origins, conventions, and audiences differ as well" (Bluestone 1957: 62). In other words, the difference between the two media first and foremost results from "conventions which have historically distinguished literature from the cinema and made of each a separate institution" (Bluestone 1957: 45) as well as from the fact that "each medium presupposes a special [...] audience whose demands condition and shape artistic content" (Bluestone 1957: 31). Therefore, "differences in form and theme are inseparable from differences in media" (Bluestone 1957: 2).

In a frequently cited statement Bluestone further emphasises that

> changes are *inevitable* the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium. [...] The end products of novel and film represent different aesthetic genera, as different from each other as ballet is from architecture. The film becomes a different *thing* in the same sense that a historical painting becomes a different thing from the historical event which it illustrates. (Bluestone 1957: 5)

Hence, Bluestone's argument, reformulated in the words of Jean Mitry, declares that "the means of expression *in being different* [...] express[es] different things – not the same things in different ways" (Mitry 1971: 1) and, consequently, although novel and film seem to be quite similar at the surface, they are each a separate and unique medium, whose respective specific "nature gives rise to forms of artistic expression distinct from those in other media," while giving shape to "the medium's conventions and setting

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[5] Cf. Boyum 1985: 11 and Aragay 2005: 14.

[6] The mid 20th century was marked by "a deep-rooted belief, implied or overtly stated, that literature is an inherently superior medium to television and film, and that this relative superiority ought to be defended" (Cardwell 2002: 32). This "distinction between 'high art' (literature) and 'mass culture' (television and film)" is still widely spread. "Only recently has the advent of relativist, pluralist approaches to culture begun to challenge this hierarchical structure and validate new aspects of 'popular culture'" (Cardwell 2002: 31).

limitations regarding the possible forms of representation available in that medium" (Cardwell 2002: 44), which inevitably renders the two media incompatible. Bluestone refers to this as the "fitful relationship between novel and film: overtly compatible, secretly hostile" (Bluestone 1957: 2).

For the purpose of pointing out the hidden hostility between the two media, Bluestone opens his 1957 argumentation with juxtaposing two citations of Joseph Conrad, the novelist, and D. W. Griffith, the filmmaker. In the preface to *Nigger of the Narcissus* Joseph Conrad writes: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you *see*" (Conrad 1896: preface, quoted in Bluestone 1957: 1). Conrad's statement is echoed in almost the exact same words by director D. W. Griffith nearly twenty years later: "The task I'm trying to achieve is above all to make you see" (Griffith, quoted in Bluestone 1957: 1). The juxtaposition of these two statements, which are cited time and again in the discourse of adaptation theory,[7] serves Bluestone to point out the distinction between the two different ways of seeing prevalent in literature and film, in that he continues arguing that, despite Conrad and Griffith basically follow the same intention, they are talking about two different ways of 'seeing': while reading a novel stimulates the imagination of the reader and, in this way, evokes an image in his mind, the 'seeing' Griffith is referring to is of a different kind, namely visually, i.e. directly through the stimulation of the eye. As Bluestone claims, "between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image lies the root difference between the two media" (Bluestone 1957:1).

In these premises, film, as in contrast to literature, is generally

> found to work from perception toward signification, from external facts to interior motivations and consequences, from the givenness of a world to the meaning of a story cut out of that world. Literary fiction works oppositely. It begins with signs (graphemes and words) building to propositions which attempt to develop perception. (Andrew 1984: 465)

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[7] The juxtaposition of these two quotations seems to have established itself as the traditional opening to discussions on film adaptations and is typically referred to in a vast number of books and essays, cf. Bluestone 1957: 1, Spiegel 1976: 4, Beja 1979: 52, McFarlane 1996: 3-5, Cartmell & Whelehan 1999: 4, Giddings *et al.* 2002: 1, Cardwell 2002, Seidl 2003: 35, Jeffers 2006: 16, and Hutcheon 2006: 53.

In Bluestone's words then, "the moving picture comes to us directly through perception," whereas "word-symbols must be translated into images of things, feelings and concepts through the process of thought," and thus, have to "be filtered through the screen of conceptual apprehension" (Bluestone 1957: 20). In reference to this, Seymour Chatman points out that "a film doesn't say, 'This *is* the state of affairs,' it merely shows you that state of affairs," hence, "in its essential visual mode, film does not describe at all but merely presents; or better, it *depicts*" (Chatman 1980: 499-450), i.e. "where the novel discourses, the film must picture," which leads to the consequence that "the rendition of mental states – memory, dream, imagination – cannot be as adequately represented by film as by language" (Bluestone 1957: 47). What is more, images are unable to communicate tenses in the way written texts can, and therefore, while "the novel has three tenses, the film has only one" (Bluestone 1957: 48), which constitutes a further major difference between the two media.

Seen with regard to adaptation theory, Bluestone's reasoning, which is clearly following the argumentation of traditional medium-specificity, leads to the conclusion that practically none of the textual features of the written 'source' can "be recreated on film or television, because these characteristics arise from the verbal form of the written text." By the same token,

> literary textual characteristics cannot be reproduced from the completely different technical foundations of film; this consequently disallows almost any similarity between novel and film texts, and, of course, between novel and adaptation. [...] Only basic 'events' in a novel can be re-presented on screen, and this re-presentation constitutes a completely new, incomparable artistic representation which is an essentially different artistic entity, its features arising from the technology of the film/television medium itself and (almost entirely) the medium alone. (Cardwell 2002: 47)

However, as early as in 1944, Sergei Eisenstein attempted to find parallels between novels and films and, in his famous essay "Dickens, Griffith and the film today," which is cited in film theoretical texts on a regular basis,[8] claims that hints for film directions can be detected in the works of Charles Dickens.

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[8]   Cf. McFarlane 1996: 5-6, Whelehan 1999: 4, Seidl 2003: 37.

According to Eisenstein, Dickens' illustrative language, visual descriptions and particularly his "use of the device of parallel action" (Whelehan 1999: 4) have inspired Griffith to the employment of the technique of parallel editing and, moreover, Dickens' "cinematic techniques" have also anticipated "such phenomena as frame composition and the close-up" (McFarlane 1996: 5). With his essay, Eisenstein intended to point out that "the two media share similar conventions and forms of representation which are read by audiences in a similar way" (Seidl 2003: 37). However, as McFarlane emphasises, Eisenstein's discussion is lacking to give "adequate consideration to the qualitative differences enjoined by the two media" (McFarlane 1996: 5).

Noteworthy, Bluestone's belief in the incompatibility of literature and film was shared by many other theorists following in his footsteps. Edward Murray for instance, like Bluestone, argues that "the novelist uses words, the film-maker uses pictures; therein lies the simple but major difference between the two art forms" (Murray, 1972: 109, quoted in Cardwell 2002: 36). Two further supporters of the same view in the mid-twentieth century were Ingmar Bergman, stating that "film has nothing to do with literature; the character and substance of the two art forms are usually in conflict" (Bergman, quoted in Beja 1979: 51), and Siegfried Kracauer, resting his studies "upon the assumption that each medium has a specific nature which invites certain kinds of communications while obstructing others" (Kracauer 1960: 1, quoted in Leitch 2003). Taking into consideration that "each art form has its own domain of expression and exploration [...] determined by the nature of the medium" (Carroll 1996: 26, quoted in Cardwell 2002: 44), the resulting conclusion is, that "each art form should pursue ends distinct from other art forms. Art forms should not overlap in their effects, nor should they imitate each other" (Carroll 1985: 7).

However, as Sarah Cardwell points out, the problem with medium-specificity and its "overt distinction between words and images" is that it is connected with "instinctive feelings about the two media," which have led the study of adaptation into a particular direction, "setting up an antagonistic relation between the written word and the screen image" (Cardwell 2002: 36). There is an implicit favour of written words over visual images that can be sensed in

metaphorical expressions like: "camera-vision cripples the use of the mind's eye [...] it is all there for us to see, not to imagine" (Edel 1974: 182, quoted in Cardwell 2002: 36). Moreover, the differentiation between literature and the visuality of the medium film "is rooted in a tradition that fails to recognise the importance of sound (diegetic sound, music and dialogue) to films and television programmes" (Cardwell 2002: 37).

All in all then, the problem that comes along with medium-specificity is, first and foremost, the subliminal prioritising of one medium (novel) over another (film), which results from the fear that the younger medium will replace the older one; or at least, there is an ambivalence that goes hand in hand with medium-specificity. On the one hand, it might "encourage conclusions which postulate the 'natural' (intrinsic) superiority of the literary text over its visual adaptation (the impossibility of adaptation and the valorisation of one medium over another)," but on the other hand, "it could equally instill open-mindedness and willingness to appreciate the film/television text as a work of art in its own right" (Cardwell 2002: 44).

However, in consideration of the fact that, in the recent years, the increasing importance of postmodern discourses, such as intertextuality and intermediality for instance, have noticeably wielded influence on attitudes towards the issue of adaptation, Bluestone's strictly medium-specific approach seems to be somewhat out of date nowadays. As a matter of fact, the change in attitudes has been accompanied by the emergence of new approaches that are making more allowances for insights from other disciplines, particularly cultural studies. Nevertheless, Bluestone's essential ideas are still valuable and of great importance to twenty-first century adaptation theory.

1.2. The comparative approach

Whereas medium-specificity presupposes "that different representational practices [...] have individual material and formal structures that distinguish and differentiate them from other[s]" and, consequently, the process of adaptation "implies a translation between 'languages' that will always be only

approximate" (Corrigan 2007: 31), the comparative approach to adaptation primarily proceeds on the assumption that, since literature and film share 'narrative' as a common feature, they are to some degree compatible. Thus, 'narrative' constitutes the connecting link between the two media and, to a certain degree, can be directly transferred from novel to film and vice versa. Comparative criticism, then, "chiefly employ[s] the tools of structuralist narrative theory and the tools of semiotics," and accordingly distinguishes "between transferable parts of a narrative, such as story and plot, and medium-based ones, customarily called *narration* or *discourse*" (Seidl 2003: 41). This trend of importing concepts developed by theorists like Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, and Christian Metz into adaptation theory started in the late 1970s with particularly the works of Cohen, Beja, Andrew and Klein and Parker,[9] who embarked on the "structuralist-inspired quest to isolate the signifying 'codes' underpinning both literature and film," which "had the worthwhile aim of dismantling received academic hierarchies" (Murray 2008) of media, within which literature was placed in a superior position with regard to film. The influence of structuralism and semiotics in adaptation studies furthermore

> recast adaptation as a two-way dynamic, where novelistic narrative techniques not only influenced film, but certain filmic devices were avidly imitated by Modernist writers well-versed in an increasingly visual culture. (Murray 2008)

Keith Cohen, for instance, dedicates his study from 1979, *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange*, to this mutual dynamic, drawing on Christian Metz' theory of semiotics and dealing, as the title of book already suggests, with the "dynamics of exchange" that are at work "both ways between film and fiction" (Aragay 2005: 18).

The most prominent branch within comparative criticism, which "was historically predominant from the early 1970s until the late 1990s" (Cardwell 2002: 12), is unquestionably fidelity criticism. The hotly disputed practice of analysing filmic adaptations with regard to their faithfulness to a literary 'source' more or less established itself as the primary approach within

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9   Cf. Murray 2008.

popular criticism.[10] Although the question of fidelity is widely refuted today and there are many theorists challenging this approach, it is still a prominent issue within adaptation theory, stirring up a lot of controversies, especially because the comparison and valuation of films with regard to their ostensible literary 'sources' is arguably the most frequent reaction to adaptations, particularly by people who are well acquainted with the text the film is based on. However, not only individual viewers tend to evaluate adaptations by comparing them with their 'sources', but also a vast number of film critics apply faithfulness as a touchstone when reviewing adaptations, especially adaptations that are based on texts considered as literary 'classics',[11] and often express disappointment if, as they say, a film is not true to the 'original'. Many film adaptations are claimed to fail in communicating the 'spirit' of a novel, or even to 'betray' their literary sources. As Imelda Whelehan points out, the underlying problem with this kind of criticism is that

> for many people the comparison of a novel and its film version results in an almost unconscious prioritizing of the fictional origin over the resulting film, and so the main purpose of comparison becomes the measurement of the success of the film in its capacity to realize what are held to be the core meanings and values of the originary text. (Whelehan 1999: 3)

In fact, the "conventional language" of the so-called fidelity criticism "has often been profoundly moralistic, rich in terms that imply the cinema has somehow done a disservice to literature," such as, for example, "'infidelity,' 'betrayal,' 'deformation,' 'violation,' 'vulgarization,' 'bastardization' and 'desecration'" (Stam & Raengo 2005:3, Stam 2005: 3). This inherent prioritisation of the written over the filmic text within fidelity criticism led to the consequence that, in the 1980s, adaptation studies underwent a major transformation and theorists like John Ellis, Dudley Andrew, Christopher Orr and a number of others refused to accept fidelity as a justified measurement for the value of adaptations.[12] Dudley Andrew's famous statement,

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[10] As James Naremore 2000 claims, "unfortunately, most discussions of adaptation in film can be summarized by a *New Yorker* cartoon that Alfred Hitchcock once described to François Truffaut: two goats are eating a pile of film cans, and one goat says to the other, 'Personally, I liked the book better.'" (2)

[11] For discussion on the topic 'What is a classic?', cf. Seidl 2003.

[12] Compare Aragay 2005: 21. See also Andrew 1980, Ellis 1982, Orr 1984.

"unquestionably the most frequent and most tiresome discussion of adaptation [...] concerns fidelity and transformation" (Andrew 1980: 12),[13] reflects this general attitude emerging in the 1980s. One major reason for the rejection of faithfulness as a criterion for analysing film adaptations is that, as Thomas Leitch puts it,

> fidelity to [the] source text [...] is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense. Like translations to a new language, adaptations will always reveal their sources' superiority because whatever their faults, the source texts will always be better at being themselves. (Leitch 2003)

As a consequence, the concept of the 'faithful adaptation' is frequently substituted "by the much more productive, culturally-constructed notion of the 'successful adaptation'" (Aragay 2005: 20), which unties the tight bond between the adaptation and its 'source' text and puts attention rather to the idea that "lapses of fidelity – the changes that occur in the passage from literary to filmic text – [...] provide clues to the ideology embedded in the [filmic] text" (Orr 1984: 73, quoted in Aragay 2005: 20). In keeping with Orr's reasoning, the term 'successful', or 'unsuccessful adaptation', respectively, is more appropriate, for it is "oriented not by inchoate notions of 'fidelity' but rather by attention to specific dialogical responses" (Stam 2005: 5). The success or failure of an adaptation then, is determined by the response of the audience, i.e. by whether the adaptation is appropriate for a certain audience at a certain time, in that it is addressing its audience directly, for instance by reflecting prevailing ideologies and issues at stake at a particular time. In this way, the adaptation can be seen somewhat more independently from its 'source'.

A further weak point of fidelity criticism is that it "depends on a notion of the text as having [...] a single, correct 'meaning' which the film-maker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with" (McFarlane 1996: 8). The impossibility of detecting the single correct meaning of a written text and translate it into film language lies in the fact "that every reading of a literary text is a highly individual act of cognition and interpretation" (McFarlane

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[13] Andrew, quoted in Jeffers 2006: 19 and Connor 2007.

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2007: 15) and, consequently, there simply does not exist a thing like the single and correct meaning of a text, but rather countless individual readings. Fidelity criticism inevitably disregards the fact that a text allows an infinite number of readings and that rendering all these individual readings in the film is simply impossible. Nevertheless, an explanation for the wide appeal of fidelity criticism might be that

> even amongst the most rigorously high-minded of film viewers confronted with the film version of a cherished novel or play, it is hard to suppress a sort of yearning for a faithful rendering of *one's own vision of the literary text.* (McFarlane 2007: 15)

However, what should be kept in mind is that not everyone who watches a film adaptation actually has read the novel the film is supposedly based on,[14] which restricts the assessability of an adaptation in terms of faithfulness to its 'source' to a particular group of people, namely the ones who are acquainted with the 'source' text at first hand. Consequently, fidelity is somewhat ineligible as a measurement for the value of adaptations, since it presupposes that the audience is familiar with the 'source,' which is definitely not the case with a considerable number of viewers.

What is more, fidelity represents a difficult venture not only in terms of the infinite possible readings and the consequential myriads of potential meanings a literary 'source' might bear, but also due to the fact that there neither is a single and unambiguous 'source' that feeds an adaptation. Rather it is the case that

> filmic adaptations get caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin. (Stam 2005: 5)

Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, which roots in Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogism' and can be briefly defined "as a dialogic process in which texts created within different semiotics [...] depart from where other texts stop" (Seidl 2003: 28), together with Genette's theory of 'transtextuality,'[15]

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14 Cf. Aragay 2005: 20 and Ellis 1982.

15 For a summary of Genette's model of 'transtexuality' see Stam & Raengo 2005: 26-31, Stam 2005: 4-5, and Leitch 2007: 94-95.

"stresses the endless permutation of textualities rather than the 'fidelity' of a later text to an earlier model" (Stam & Raengo 2005: 8 and Stam 2005: 4). According to Stam, adaptation is "less a resuscitation of an originary word than a turn in an ongoing dialogical process" and the fact that there are so many terms used synonymously with the word 'adaptation' within the discourse of adaptation theory,[16] "all of which shed light on a different dimension of adaptation," mirrors this "ongoing dialogical process" (Stam 2005: 4) within which adaptations circulate.

As Robert Stam further emphasises, Bakhtin's conception of "literature as a 'hybrid construction' applies even more obviously to a collaborative medium like film" (Stam 2005: 4). Within Bakhtin's notion of 'dialogism,' then, complete originality is impossible. The fact that the 'source' itself is less an 'original' than a hybrid construction conflicts with the assumption of fidelity criticism that adaptation is "a window into a text on which it depends for its authority and the business of viewers and analysts is to look through the window for signs of the original text" (Leitch 2003). This inevitably brings up the question of 'What is an author?'[17] and, connected with it, the "notions of 'authority' via the author and notions of 'authenticity' via the text," with which "the presence of an author seems to play" (Seidl 2003: 49). Within the discourse of fidelity criticism, "to adapt is understood as an intention to render the source-text author's intentions" (Cardwell 2002: 23) and, thus, to render the source text as 'authentic' as possible.[18] However, as Cardwell emphasises, "it seems both inaccurate and unjust" to reduce the author of an adaptation "to some kind of transparent medium through which the source-text author expresses his or her intentions" (Cardwell 2002: 23).[19] Barthes famously tackled the problem of 'authorship' in his essay "The Death of the Author," reconceptualising texts as "multi-dimensional space[s] in which a

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[16] Cf. Stam 2005: "translation, actualization, reading, critique, dialogization, cannibalization, transmutation, transfiguration, incarnation, transmogrification, transcoding, performance, signifying, rewriting, detournement" (4).

[17] A question that Michel Foucault dealt with in his famous essay of the same title from 1969.

[18] Closely connected to fidelity criticism and particularly pursuing the aim of 'authenticity' is the so-called British heritage cinema, a production trend that came to the fore in the 1980s and 1990s. For a detailed discussion on this phenomenon, cf. Higson 2003.

[19] See also Seidl 2003: 50.

variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes 1988: 170, quoted in Aragay 2005: 21). Thus, Barthes' influential essay, together with Bakhtin's conception of the author as "multi-discursive and resistant to unification" problematised authors "as stable and unitary entities" (Stam & Raengo 2005: 9). Seen with regard to fidelity criticism, then, "a film adaptation as 'copy,' by analogy, is not necessarily inferior to the novel as 'original'," considering that "the 'original' always turns out to be partially 'copied' from something earlier" (Stam & Raengo 2005: 8) itself. At the same time, "the foggy concept of the 'spirit of the original work' as that which an adaptation 'should be faithful to'" (Beja 1979: 81, Aragay 2005: 17) and which implies "the concept of the author as source and centre of the text" (Caughie, quoted in Cardwell 2002: 24), is challenged. As Stam remarks, presumed that "authors are fissured, fragmented, multi-discursive" entities, "how can an adaptation communicate the 'spirit' or 'self-presence' of authorial intention?" (Stam & Raengo 2005: 9).

Closely connected with the issue of 'authorship' is the concept of the original/copy binary, in regard to which the introduction of Derrida's notion of 'deconstruction' to adaptation theory is important to mention as a further significant innovation in the field, which amounted to the dismantlement of

> the hierarchy of 'original' and 'copy.' In a Derridean perspective, the auratic prestige of the original does not run counter to the copy; rather, the prestige of the original is *created* by the copies, without which the very idea of originality has no meaning. The film as 'copy,' furthermore, can be the 'original' for subsequent 'copies.' (Stam & Raengo 2005: 8)

Thus, through "the impact of (post)structuralist thought on literary theory and criticism" (Aragay 2005: 21), the notion of text was "released from the constraints of a single and univocal reading" (Belsey 1980: 134, quoted in Aragay 2005: 21), since every copy signifies an individual reading of the original.

All in all, the "proliferation of poststructuralist theories and critical practices, [the] emphasis on intertexuality as a key to textual intelligibility" (Aragay 2005: 21) as well as the inclusion of ideas and concepts taken from other disciplines such as, for example, psychoanalysis, history, feminism, gender

studies and others, amounted to what Aragay calls the "interdisciplinary crosspollination of both film and literary studies" (Aragay 2005: 21), which consequently also affected adaptation studies and lead to the undermining of the "formalist, binary source/adaptation straightjacket" (Aragay 2005: 18), in that the literary source-text was no longer

> conceived as a work/original holding within itself a timeless essence which the adaptation/copy must faithfully reproduce, but as a text to be endlessly (re)read and appropriated in different contexts. (Aragay 2005: 22)[20]

Fidelity criticism has experienced considerable opposition over the last five decades and is vehemently rejected by the majority of contemporary adaptation theorists. However, despite the fact that fidelity is generally not "considered a valid yardstick" for the evaluation of adaptations, "adaptation studies cannot afford to ignore the institutional and performative nature of the discourse of fidelity" (Aragay 2005: 20),[21] since it still constitutes the prevailing measurement of analyses "in film and television reviewing, in broader journalistic discourse," as well as "in everyday evaluations by the film-going public" (Murray 2008). Moreover, it is also still an issue in the academic adaptation criticism, as evidenced, for example, by two recent collections of essays; *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*, which is edited by James M. Welsh and Peter Lev and contains a number of analyses evaluating adaptations in terms of faithfulness, and *In/Fidelity: Essays on Film Adaptation*, edited by David L. Kranz and Nancy C. Mellerski, which directly addresses and heats up the debate. As the editors of the latter point out, despite the most recent trends within adaptation criticism and the influences of poststructuralism in literary departments, fidelity criticism is still at stake and worth debating. For the sake of constructive dialogue, the panel presentations and discussions at the end of the volume provide arguments for as well as against fidelity criticism.[22]

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[20] Compare Sanders 2006: 26, Jeffers 2006 and Leitch 2008: 74-75.

[21] See also Giddings & Sheen 2000: 2-3.

[22] Cf. Kranz & Mellerski 2008: 197-228. Panelists Linda C. Cahir and David Kranz are both supporting fidelity discourse, while Thomas Leitch and Walter Metz argue against fidelity criticism and offer suggestions how to "reframe questions of adaptation." The ensuing discussion "revolves around such issues as the evaluation of film adaptations, the

In order to work against the practice of evaluating adaptations with respect to fidelity, there is a strong tendency within the comparative approach to make use of taxonomies, categorising adaptations into "modes of faithfulness" (Murray 2008), determined by their "degrees of proximity" (Cartmell & Whelehan 2007: 2) to the respective literary sources, so "that fidelity to the original loses some of its privileged position" (McFarlane 1996: 10). Thus, these attempts of classifying adaptations signify more or less "a variation on the outright rejection of fidelity as directorial goal or critical norm" (Murray 2008). As Cardwell remarks,

> comparative theorists recommend that the fairest, most objective way to study adaptation is to implement a systematic categorisation of the kind of adaptation being studied, in order to ascertain each adaptation's intended relationship with its source text. (Cardwell 2002: 59)

The most frequently applied taxonomies categorise adaptations into three different classes, according to their degree of fidelity to the source text, like, for instance, Geoffrey Wagner's suggestion of a basic division of adaptations into transposition, "'in which a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference;" commentary, "'where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect;" and analogy, "which must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art" (Wagner 1975: 222-227, quoted in McFarlane 1996: 10-11, Aragay 2005: 16). Dudley Andrew proffers very similar categories under the headings of borrowing, intersection and transformation (Andrew 1984: 98); and Klein & Parker, as a third example, also stick very close to Wagner's traditional tripartite division of adaptations, suggesting the categories of "fidelity to the main thrust of the narrative;" adaptations that retain "the core of the structure of the narrative while significantly reinterpreting or, in some cases, deconstructing the source text;" and, finally, adaptations that see "the source merely as raw material, as simply the occasion for an original work" (Klein & Parker 1981: 9-10, quoted in McFarlane 1996: 11). In more recent works, particularly the ones directed to undergraduate students, this

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taxonomy of adaptation, and the relation of cultural shifts in reading and literay to questions of adaptation." (Kranz & Mellerski 2008: 9)

classification of adaptations into three categories is still pursued,[23] as evidenced by Desmond and Hawkes' classification of close, loose, and intermediate adaptations (Desmond & Hawkes 2005: 3) as well as Cahir's differentiation between literal, traditional, or radical adaptations (Cahir 2006: 17). Kamilla Elliott even extends the tripartite to a taxonomy of six categories: psychic, ventriloquist, genetic, de(re)composing, incarnational and trumping (Elliott: 2003: 133-183). Generally, these classifications are "accomplished through determining which of the elements that *can* be transposed from novel to film *have* been so transposed" and, moreover by the evaluation of "how the adapter has chosen to 'properly adapt' the discourse that characterises the novel" (Cardwell 2002: 59).

While McFarlane suggests that the various attempts at categorisation "represent some heartening challenges to the primacy of fidelity as a critical criterion" (McFarlane 1996: 11), it is rather the case that the classification systems are problematic in themselves, as there "are value judgements and a consequent ranking of types, normally covertly governed by a literary rather than cinematic perspective" (Cartmell & Whelehan 1999: 2) inherent in these taxonomies.[24] However, according to Thomas Leitch, such taxonomies are not necessarily evaluative in the first place, though there is certainly a tendency that they get "entangled with gratituitous value judgements that are not required by the taxonomy but sneak in under its cover" (Leitch 2008: 64).

A further problem with categorisations is that they are "firmly grounded in a model of adaptation which sees in the source the prime parameter for comparison," and, consequently, implies the "idea of an 'original' as a starting point" (Seidl 2003: 41). In other words, such taxonomic models rely "on the centrality of the literary source or 'original'" and, thus, automatically imply a "literary source/filmed adaptation" (Aragay 2005: 16). Classification systems, then, "are closely related to issues of fidelity," as, on the one hand, "they are thus useful for classificatory purposes but," on the other hand,

> have no heuristic value themselves. They tell us something about how an adaptation differs from what is regarded as its point of

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[23] Cf. Leitch 2008: 69.

[24] See also Seidl 2003: 41 and Leitch 2008: 64.

origin. They, however, do not tell us anything about why adaptations emerge the way they are under specific circumstances within the contexts of production, regulation or reception. (Seidl 2003: 42)

The most prominent name associated with the comparative approach is arguably Brian McFarlane, as with the publishing of his seminal book *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* in 1996, introducing a narratological approach to film adaptation, the comparative approach was reinvigorated considerably. By means of his revised methodology for comparative analysis of adaptations, McFarlane seeks to challenge medium-specificity as well as fidelity criticism, claiming that a comparative approach does not necessarily involve the question of faithfulness. In the preface to his influential study, McFarlane states that with his book he aims at

> offer[ing] and test[ing] a methodology for studying the process of transposition from novel to film, with a view not to evaluating one in relation to the other but to establishing the *kind* of relation a film might bear to the novel it is based on. (McFarlane 1996: *preface*)

Accordingly, McFarlane's approach is fundamentally based on "questions of narrativity" (Aragay 2005: 24), which constitutes the field that "crosses film and literature studies" (Jeffers 2006: 16), or, in other words, represents the connecting link between the two media. Thus, "narrative deconstruction offer[s] an analysis of both film and book" and, therefore, supposedly creates "a more equal relationship between the two, instead of a hierarchical relationship between 'original' and 'version'" (Cardwell 2002: 52). Methodologically, narrative deconstruction often goes hand in hand with semiotic analysis, which offers "an even more suitable method for studying filmic elements that are non-linguistic, such as lighting, mise-en-scène, etc." (Cardwell 2002: 52).

In his narratological approach, McFarlane distinguishes between elements that are transferable "from one medium to another (essentially, narrative)" and elements that are "dependent on different signifying systems" and "cannot be transferred (essentially, enunciation)" (McFarlane 1996: *preface*) and, therefore, require what he calls "adaptation proper" (McFarlane 1996: 23). McFarlane's ideas are taken up by many theorists, such as Robert Stam,

who accordingly claims that "the art of filmic adaptation partially consists in choosing *which* generic conventions are transposable into the new medium" and, moreover, in determining "*which* need to be discarded, supplemented, transcoded, or replaced" (Stam 2005, 6).

However, whereas narratology, on the one hand, "remains an important tool for analysing certain formal aspects of film adaptations," on the other hand, "an exclusively narratological approach simply leaves out crucial contextual and intertextual factors" (Stam 2005: 41, quoted in Aragay 2005: 24). What is more, it "does not acknowledge the hybrid nature of adaptation as an art that bridges the verbal/visual or word/image divide" (Elliott 2003: 12, quoted in Aragay 2005: 24). Thus, comparative approaches are problematic, since they

> are often marred by implicit value judgements: although critics offer very thoughtful general remarks on adaptations, they still revert in their detailed comparisons to the terminology of gains and chiefly losses that occur during the transfer of one medium to the other. (Seidl 2003: 43, quoting Cardwell)

1.3. A cultural studies approach: setting new frames

The increasing importance of poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminism and cultural studies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century brought forth new perspectives and parameters in the humanities, which, unsurprisingly, also left their traces in the field of adaptation theory. This new "wave of innovation" (Murray 2008), which Stam refers to as "The Impact of the Posts" (Stam & Raengo 2005: 8, quoted in Murray 2008), "broke down one part of the self-isolating critical wall built around the text, and opened adaptation studies up to concepts of audience agency" (Murray 2008). In consideration of the new insights and paradigms, many theorists nowadays feel the need to go beyond medium-specificity or a comparative approach and "break out of the imprisoning discourse that has often limited adaptation studies" (Leitch 2008: 76), a tendency that manifests itself in the various attempts at reorienting and reframing adaptation studies and the development of a number of new models, some of which have heavily "stirred the pot, provoking a welcome outburst of diverse work on adaptation"

(Leitch 2008: 63). In the following, I will outline some concepts that are playing important parts within a contemporary cultural studies approach to adaptations. First of all, it seems reasonable to ask 'What is (an) adaptation?'[25]

Before attempting an answer of this question, however, it has to be considered that there are two concepts behind the term 'adaptation.' Within the context of adaptation theory, 'adaptation' might either refer to the *end-product* of an adaptation, that is the actual film as an artwork in itself, or to the *process* of adaptation, that is all the necessary steps that have to be undertaken to get to the end product.[26] Traditional comparative approaches to film adaptation, typically put their focus on the process of adaptation, i.e. mostly analyse adaptations in terms of what elements can be transferred directly from the novel to the film, or what changes have to be undertaken. However, "foregrounding the process of adaptation cannot provide a viable explanatory framework for discussing the end-product itself," meaning "the process of adaptation, by which an adaptation comes into being [...], does not provide a sufficient definition of what an adaptation is" (Cardwell 2002: 12). Thus, more recent models, in contrast to comparative analyses, are

> not first and foremost interested in the processes of adaptation in the sense of the changes that need to be made because of the specific properties of each medium. What is also of minor importance are the changes that need to happen because of the specific materiality of each medium, such as the intrinsic technical possibilities of verbal texts or filmic texts. (Seidl 2007: 37)

The interest lies rather in "describing the relationship of meaning between 'source text' and 'adaptation'" (Seidl 2007: 37).

As Cardwell explains, a "traditional conceptualisation of 'cultural' adaptation," as adopted by comparative approaches, "is best imagined as having a base or centre, from which all subsequent adaptations (versions) arise" (Cardwell 2002: 13), each of which is standing in direct relationship to the centre, i.e. the 'original.' However, the difficulty such a "centre-based conceptualisation of adaptation" brings with it, is that

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[25] Cf. Cardwell 2002: 9-30.

[26] Cf. Cardwell 2002: 10.

> it denies the linear, textual history of adaptation available to each new adapter, and the relationships through time that an adaptation might bear to other adaptations; at the same time it often fails to appreciate the historical gap that separates the source novel from the adaptation in question, seeing the meanings expressed in both novel and adaptation as somehow transhistorical and unalterable. (Cardwell 2002: 14)

In order to challenge the centricity of authored texts, Cardwell suggests to proceed on the assumption of "a more open, polysemic and intertextual series of texts which draw upon each other," rather than taking "intentionality as a prescriptive basis for interpretation." Besides "recognising that we retrospectively assume the author's intentions primarily through our reading and interpretation of his or her work," it is particularly important to consider "the impact of other sources upon the text and of 'what is there' as opposed to 'what was intended to be there'" (Cardwell 2002: 25). Hence, the recent non-comparative approaches are much more convincing than a comparative approach because of "their very decentredness, comprehensiveness and flexibility," and because of the fact that they place "adaptations within a far wider cultural context than that of an original-version relationship" (Cardwell 2002: 25).

Within adaptation models that take into account the concept of intertextuality, the literary texts that adaptations are supposedly based on "are rather deemed resources than sources" (Seidl 2003: 26). Assuming the model of a mutable and ever-developing 'meta-text', which "recognises that a later adaptation may draw upon any earlier adaptations, as well as upon the primary source text" (Cardwell 2002: 25) and which, therefore, is depending "on the accumulation and generation of meanings across texts" (Seidl 2003: 28) over time, as well as according to the view that adaptations "subvert the original meanings of the novels in order to perpetuate particular, contemporary ideologies through the films" (Cardwell 2002: 65), the "reasons of the choice of a source and the manner in which its mode of representation bears traces of dominant ideas of the time of adaptation" (Seidl 2003: 27) become of major importance in contemporary adaptation studies.

Closely connected to the notion of intertextuality is the rather new concept of 'Intermedialität', which only emerged in the last few years and is primarily

discussed in the German-speaking world. As Huber, Keitel and Süß, who are the editors of a recent collection of essays under the heading *Intermedialities*, claim in their introduction to the topic: while "traditionally, every medium is seen as having its own specificity deriving from its individual forms of expression and genre conventions," it is important to note that "each medium also has the capacity to absorb and synthesise other art forms." The term "intermediality," or "intermedialities," which stands for "the thematic and/or formal links between individual art forms," describes these "intertextual processes of negotiation and exchange" (Huber *et al* 2007: 1). This 'intertextual dialogism,' to use Bakhtin's term, constitutes a challenge to strict medium-specificity, as well as comparative approaches, which nowadays seem inappropriate as well, and should "be neglected in favour of a focus on the adaptations themselves and not on the process of adaptation" (Seidl 2003: 37-38), considering that each adaptation constitutes a work of art in its own right and only "revisits" its supposed 'source' "from the specific vantage point of a historical moment" (Seidl 2007: 37).

The emergence of recent conceptions under the heading of performance theory, significantly coined by language philosopher J. L. Austin and strongly advocated by feminist theorist Judith Butler, also influenced contemporary views on adaptations and significantly "contributed to undermining the formalistic, binary paradigm within adaptation studies" (Aragay 2005: 27). Central to performance theory are the concepts of 'performance' and 'performativity', which, as Seidl emphasises,

> open up closed systems and introduce the idea of instability, difference and change. In the context of a theory of adaptation the workings of the concept of performance de-construct the solid conception of the source text, the point of origin which stands in a linear relationship to later re-workings. (Seidl 2003: 30)

By "theorising the connection" between 'source' and adaptation as well as "taking into account the performative and iterative effectiveness" of a literary 'source', Monika Seidl suggests a "pragmatic model" for the study of adaptations that "goes beyond a comparative approach" (Seidl 2007: 37).

Performance is defined as an "act of memory" as well as an "act of creation" that "recalls and transforms the past in the form of the present," in that it

"involves not the replaying of an authorizing text, a grounding origin, but the potential to construct that origin as a rhetorically powerful effect of performance." Performance, then, "reflects the transformative nature of the cultural transmission of meanings" (Worthen 1998: 1101, Aragay 2005: 27) or, in other words, performance "modifies the meaning potential of that which is repeated" in that it "retroactively adds new meaning to the text and keeps the text alive." Following this line of thought, "repetition also carries within itself the potential for change as every repetition means another performative act which will differ from all the earlier repetitions." Within adaptation theory, then, a so-called 'classic' is "constituted by its iterability, by its paradoxical status between stasis and change, which is at the core of repetition and thus performance and performativity" (Seidl 2003: 30).

A further concept that comes into play in this context is the notion of 'retroactivity' or 'Nachträglichkeit'[27], which originates from psychoanalysis 'retroactivity' and challenges "the idea of a temporal linearity in the sense of a fixed chronological order between text and interpretation/adaptation" (Seidl 2003: 44). With the idea of retroactivity in mind, "the core text is best understood as meaning potential, i.e. as a virtuality that needs activation in order to become effective" (Seidl 2007: 38), basing in Mieke Bal's ideas in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, in which it is argued that "the meaning potential of concepts changes when they travel," since they "acquire new meanings" as well as "change their heuristic value when they are re-used and re-applied in a context different to the one they come from" and, consequently, also "serve as analytical tools for specific cultural questions" (Seidl 2007: 38).

In *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*, Kamilla Elliott suggests "a reciprocally transformative model of adaptation, in which the film [...] metamorphoses the novel and is, in turn, metamorphosed by it." Adaptation, then, is understood as a cyclical process, as a "mutual and reciprocal inverse transformation"

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[27] For a brief summary of the Freudian concept of 'retroactivity,' cf. Seidl 2003 and Seidl 2007: "Within the psycholanalytical paradigm an event or a set of events, imagined or real, are assumed to exist which have triggered off a neurosis, noticeably via neurotic effects. Psychoanalysis furthermore assumes a temporal separation of cause and effect. [...] psychoanalytical analysis starts out with the present evidence that may be theorised as a phenomenology of symptoms." (Seidl 2007: 39)

(Elliott 2003: 229, Aragay 2005: 30), championing the idea that "memory works both ways, forwards and backwards" and, therefore, "there can be no real return to origins." As a result, "film adaptation changes the books films adapt" (Elliott 2003: 230-231, Aragay 2005: 30). Hence, Elliott argues similarly to Seidl, who claims that "the view that no original exists without a copy reverses the temporal logic that origin comes first and copy comes second," so that it, in a way, any adaptation "in the present then exerts an influence on its source text from the past" (Seidl 2007: 38). Following this train of thoughts, it might be said that "each adaptation renews the meaning potential" or, in other words, "actualises the virtuality of a source text" (Seidl 2007: 38). Within Seidl's pragmatic model, then, the starting point of investigation is not the 'source', but the respective adaptation, from which the analyst looks back to the 'source' and which provides "the relevant evidence" (Seidl 2007: 39).

1.4. The discourse of adaptation: latest trends and perspectives

Taking a close look at the most recent works and collections of adaptation studies reveals a general tendency away from the traditional media-specific and comparative approaches towards the adoption of a pluralistic approach that makes allowance for "concepts from post-structuralism post-colonialism, feminism, and cultural studies" (Murray 2008); a trend that manifests itself in the various attempts at redrawing and reconceptualising the field. However, contemporary adaptation theory is still characterised by a broad spectrum of approaches and points of view. Thomas Leitch's latest essay "Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads" provides an overview of the most recent and studies innovating the field. Aragay and Gemma López, for instance, see adaptation as "a prime instance of cultural recycling, a process which radically undermines any linear, diachronic understanding of cultural history" (Aragay 2005: 201, Leitch 2008: 68). Kranz and Mellerski, again, suggest in their volume *In/Fidelity: Essays on Film Adaptation*

> that a plurality of critical approaches (rather than the infinity of perspectives promoted by relativistic post-structuralism or the reductive and evaluative approach represented by near-absolute

fidelity criticism) will allow adaptation studies to thrive in the future. (Kranz & Mellerski 2008: 5)

Leitch moreover recommends to "shift evaluative problems the field has inherited from literary studies – fidelity, hierarchy, canonicity – from the praxis of adaptation studies to part of its subject" and demands a closer look "at the ways adaptations play with their sourcetexts instead of merely aping or analyzing them" (Leitch 2008: 76).

Taking *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*, a further recent collection of essays on adaptation theory and a number of case studies edited by James M. Welsh and Peter Lev, as evidence, Thomas Van Parys argues "that the immediate main problem still is bridging the gap [...] between theory and practice" (Van Parys 2008). Thus, whereas "an attack on the model of fidelity criticism as an inadequate schema for appreciating the richness of and motivations driving adaptations" nowadays seems to constitute an essential part of "virtually all academic studies of book-to-screen adaptation" (Murray 2008), the appertaining case studies are often not in consonance with the suggested theoretical framework, but quite frequently fall back on the question of faithfulness in one way or the other. Alluding to Dudley Andrew's famous statement about the weariness of fidelity discussion,[28] Van Parys claims that

> the most obnoxious issue in film adaptation studies remains undoubtedly that of fidelity, but nowadays less for the reason that it is an inherently faulty principle and criterion, than for the simple fact that in the last decade many books in the field seem to be obliged to debunk it. Since almost each of their authors thus pretends to be the first to denounce fidelity and thereby to reform adaptation studies, one would surely imagine that the concept is critically outdated by now. (Van Parys 2008)

Nevertheless, despite the ongoing debates the discourse of fidelity is still at stake, not only as the remaining prevalent model "in film and television reviewing, in broader journalistic discourse, and in everyday evaluations by the film-going public" (Murray 2008), but also within the academic circle, as evidenced by the most recent collection *In/Fidelity: Essays on Film*

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[28] Cf. Andrew 1980: 12.

Adaptation, edited by David L. Kranz and Nancy C. Mellerski, which was published 2008 and heats up the debate anew.

2. Case studies

2.1. Alfonso Cuarón's *Great Expectations* (1998)

Though already dating back to 1998 Alfonso Cuarón's postmodern film version of the Charles Dickens classic *Great Expectations* still attracts a good deal of attention. In fact, the most thorough treatises dealing with the film appeared only during the last five years.[29] While the film provoked rather mixed responses by the critics immediately after it was released, ranging from disappointed statements like "Modern 'Expectations' Anything But Great"[30] to very positive comments about Cuarón's admirable direction and Lubezki's stunning camera work, the film seemed to have gained new appreciation over the last few years.

Michael K Johnson suggests that "with the recent critical and commercial success" of director Cuarón, "the time has come for a reevaluation of Great Expectations" and we have to take "into account the skills and artistry of director Cuarón and his longtime collaborator, cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki." Johnson further points out that

> the film's visual elements suggest interpretative possibilities only implied by the script – [...] the carefully designed camera work of Cuarón and Lubezki contributes to the meaning(s) of the film in ways that critics and scholars have not adequately explored. (Johnson 2005)

However, besides Cuarón's gifted direction and film style, which he himself describes as "believable, but with its own set of rules"[31], as well as Lubezki's artful camera work and the aesthetic *mise-en-scène*[32] the film bears a lot

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[29] See Katz 2003, Johnston 2004, Johnson 2005 and Antinucci 2006.

[30] Stein 1998.

[31] See "Great Expectations World Wide Web Site."

[32] Terminology cf. Bordwell 2008, Monaco 2005 and Chandler 1994.

more points of interest that are worth investigating and have not been payed close enough attention so far.

2.1.1. Film synopsis

In Cuarón's 1998 version of *Great Expectations* the setting of this well-known Dickens classic is transferred from the late 19th century Britain to the late 20th century America. Thus, the changes undertaken do not only involve a transfer to contemporary times but also a transfer to another continent and, therefore, place the basic story into the frame of a completely different cultural and temporal background.

The film's opening scene introduces the protagonist – Pip renamed as Finn Bell – with slow pans across the Florida Gulf coast showing the young boy wading in the shallow water, recording his impressions with drawings in his sketchbook. Long Shots (LS) and Medium Shots (MS) displaying Finn drawing into his book alternate with Close-ups (CU) of his sketches and the respective objects that are attracting his attention. This gives us a first idea of one of the major and recurrent themes in the film: Finn's personal conceptions and visions of the world surrounding him in contrast to the way it actually is. This important element of the film is already indicated in the first sentences uttered by the voice-over that establishes Finn as an unreliable narrator with a subjective point of view:

> There either is or is not a way things are.
> The color of the day.
> How it felt to be a child.
> The feeling of saltwater on your sunburned legs
> Sometimes the water is yellow.
> Sometimes it's red.
> The color in memory depends on the day.
> I won't tell the story the way it happened.
> I'll tell it the way I remember it.[33]

Throughout the film the world is presented the way Finn experiences or rather remembers it. Cuarón applies a number of techniques in order to

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[33] All quotations from the film are taken from "Great Expectations Script – Dialogue Transcript."

achieve the impression of or, in terms of comparative adaptation theory, a 'cinematic equivalent' of Dickens' first person narration.

The slow pans across the beautiful and peaceful Florida landscape opening the film are abruptly interrupted by a quick-paced series of short and rapidly alternating CUs und MSs showing Finn making his first spectacular acquaintance with the escaped convict Arthur Lustig, who unexpectedly crops up from under the water, grips the boy and forces him to assist him with his flight from the police. Lustig, who turns out to be the murderer of a reputed mafia boss is recaptured nevertheless, but deeply touched by the boy's helpfulness, he makes it his business to support Finn as a secret benefactor.

Being an orphan raised by his sister Maggie and her partner Joe in a small fishing village on the Gulf coast, Finn's prospects of a promising future are rather limited since the family is poor. Yet everything changes when Finn is invited to the wealthiest woman in the neighbourhood, Ms Nora Dinsmoor, who is in need of entertainment.

Ms Dinsmoor, an eccentric old lady left by her fiancé in front of the altar thirty years before and thereafter wallowing in self-pity and vice, eager to take revenge on the male world, inhabits the impressive Paradiso Perduto, a huge mansion doomed to decay, where Finn encouters Ms Dinsmoor's gorgeous but snobbish niece Estella. Drawing his first portrait of the ravishing beauty Finn discovers his feelings, or rather obsession, for Estella, encouraged by the taunting comments of Ms Dinsmoor. The sequence of shots in this painting scene resembles very much the progression of shots in the opening scene when Finn is drawing in his sketchbook, and is repeated again at a later point in the film in Finn's apartment in New York. The subsequent first kiss between Finn and Estella, inspired by screenwriter Mitch Glazer's own childhood experience of a "magical, sensual kiss at a water fountain,"[34] too, is the predecessor of a very similar scene in Central Park in New York later in the film.

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[34] See Glazer, quoted on "Great Expectations World Wide Web Site."

For seven years Finn visits Ms Dinsmoor and Estella every weekend, learns how to dance and gets an insight into the rich people's world, until one day he cannot find Estella there because she has left to study in Europe. Several years pass with Finn paying no more visits to Paradiso Perduto and helping Joe, deserted by Maggie, in the fishing business.

One day, lawyer Jerry Ragno appears on the scene and, out of the blue, offers Finn a one-man show in the famous Erica Thrall gallery in New York. Finn, at first suspicious, supposes that the secret benefactor behind this great opportunity has to be Ms Dinsmoor wanting him to win over Estella, so he gratefully accepts the offer.

Finn heads to New York and starts his successful career as a star in the Manhattan art scene. In Central Park, he meets Estella, who has returned from Europe, by chance. To his disappointment he finds out that she has a fiancé, Walter, who compared to Dickens' violent Bentley Drummle is a harmless intellectual with "commitment problems."[35] However, Finn is not discouraged easily and finds new strength to do the utmost to capture her heart, which leads to another situation where Estella is posing for him, this time in the nude. The "obligatory sex scene" (Katz 2003: 99) every Hollywood romance seems to require nowadays, follows shortly after.

However, Finn's passionate night with Estella has no influence on Estella's plans to marry Walter. After the successful opening night to his exhibition and the unexpected appearance of Joe – a significant scene that depicts Finn's transition into a snob and his embarrassment of his past – Finn rushes to Estella's dwelling with the intention to confess his love to her and to prevent her from marrying Walter. Instead of Estella he finds Ms Dinsmoor who informs him that he is already too late. After all the years of waiting the day of her revenge has finally come. But when Finn repeats the very words she has uttered herself earlier on in the film ("Do you know what this is? It's my heart. And it's broken") she starts to regret everything.

Crestfallen, Finn returns to his art studio where he is surprised, again, by an unexpected visitor. By re-enacting their first encounter, Lustig calls his

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[35]   See Berardinelli 1998.

identity back to Finn's mind and reveals that he is the secret benefactor. Finn dislikes the idea of it, but eventually helps Lustig to escape some rivals who are after him. A clichéd mobster chase follows that ends with Lustig dying in Finn's arms.

In the final scene Finn is returning to Paradiso Perduto after several years. Once more he meets Estella, though this time she has a little daughter. Estella is divorced by now and has changed over the last years. Remorsefully, she asks Finn for forgiveness. The final shot shows the two of them from behind, holding hands.[36]

2.1.2. (Post-) modernisation: inspirations and intertextuality

The point that distinguishes Cuarón's adaptation from a number of others is that it resets the story into a completely new cultural and temporal frame. This requires reinventing the story entirely, creating a postmodern tale – an approach termed "re-semantization" that "most significantly shifts the focus from the primacy of the original text to the receiver's semantic universe" (Antinucci 2006: 293).

Many of the updates in *Great Expectations* (1998) seem to be inspired by childhood experiences of screenwriter Mitch Glazer, who, just like the main character, grew up in Florida and later moved to New York:

> I came up with the idea of the 'Pip' character being a fisherman's nephew and stumbling upon this eccentric Palm Beach matron. [...] My family used to vacation in Palm Beach and I remembered these former showgirls, millionaire women, trapped in huge mansions. They looked like they were eighteen-years-old – until they turned around. I thought they would be a great way to update the 'Miss Havisham' character. Once I had that, the rest of the story fell into place.[37]

Indeed, Anne Bancroft's appearance in the film perfectly realises Glazer's recollection of those Palm Beach women. The scene introducing the eccentric Ms Dinsmoor character closely follows Glazer's descriptions: at first

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[36] For a detailed summary of the film see Wikipedia: "Great Expectations (1998)."

[37] Cf. "Great Expectations World Wide Web Site."

we are only given an aural clue by the voice-over telling facts about her. The next piece of information that is passed on to the audience is her voice singing along to a record of *Besame mucho*, which creates certain suspense. The first time we actually get to see her she is standing with her back towards the camera in a little distance. While she is holding an exaggerated dance position the camera is approaching her, until she suddenly turns around and her heavily painted face is caught by an MS. The subsequent reverse shot depicts Finn's startlement that he probably shares with the audience. With the heavy make-up, the habit of drinking of Martini, and the constant dancing and singing to *Besame Mucho*, which, by the way, is the name of Cuarón's production company, Ms Dinsmoor becomes a bizarre character whose cynicism also evokes comparisons to Mrs Robinson in *The Graduate*, a character performed by Bancroft earlier in her career.[38]

Another interesting change made in the film is the renaming of Dickens' protagonist Pip to Finn Bell, which immediately evokes associations with *Huckleberry Finn*, the central character in Mark Twain's novel of the same title that is considered by many critics as the American equivalent of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations.* The similarities between *Great Expectations* and *Huckleberry Finn,* which was published almost 25 years after the former, are rather obvious[39]: both novels are written in first person narration and tell the story of a young orphaned boy who wants to break free of his social situation to find personal liberty.

Undoubtedly, a link has been established between the two characters, as well as the two authors, before. Nevertheless, the fact that the young artist in Cuarón's film is called Finn tightens the bond between Huck and Pip even more so, inasmuch as it subverts the temporal order of reference: the postmodern Finn Bell alludes to both Pip and Huck likewise and, thus, the figure of Huckleberry Finn, allusive to Dickens' character, in reverse also contributes to our contemporary perception of Pip in a way.

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[38] "With Anne Bancroft in this part, it's easy to imagine that Nora Dinsmore [*sic!*] could be Mrs. Robinson gone bonkers, thirty years later" (Berardinelli 1998).

[39] For studies on similarities between *Great Expectations* and *Huckleberry Finn* see Ridland 1965, Wirth-Nesher 1986, and Allingham 1992.

While the link between Huckleberry Finn and Finn Bell is almost obvious we might find further, less apparent connections to other well-known protagonists in classic literature. Raffaella Antinucci, for instance, suggests that Finn's full name – Finnegan Bell – also creates an intertextual link to James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*[40].

However, any association that comes to our mind will add meaning to our experience of the film and, more importantly, will also affect our conception of the 'source text' the film is activating[41]. Pip might have been renamed Finn totally on purpose in order to provoke connotations like the ones mentioned above. But it might just as well have been a mere coincidence. In his cynical memoir *What just happened? Bitter Hollywood Tales from the Frontline* producer Art Linson claims that there were discussions and disagreements about the name of the boy. According to Linson Ethan Hawke, the lead actor, eventually took the final decision and it is open to speculation whether the principal character received his name after a dog Hawke possessed when he was young.

Glazer's childhood memories, Bancroft's former role as Mrs Robinson and Hawke's late dog are only three out of a vast number of examples how the personal histories of screenwriters, directors and actors might inspire significant modifications in a film. As becomes clear, the end product of the process of adaptation, i.e. the finished film, might bear traces of the biography of virtually any person that was majorly involved in the making of the respective film. Whereas novels are usually written by one person only, films are the result of a cooperation between a considerable number of people and, therefore, it can never be totally predicted what the film will look like in the end. The director might have a personal creative vision, but sure enough so do the screenwriter, the cinematographer and the producer. These visions might be worlds apart, as it is the case with the film investigated in this study. The ideas of director Alfonso Cuarón, who, due to his Mexican background, was more interested in presenting Finn's social rise within a class-shaped society through a principally non-verbal, visual

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[40] Cf. Antinucci 2006: 317.

[41] Cf. Seidl 2007: 40, cf. also Seidl 2003.

embodiment of the story conflicted with screenwriter Mitch Glazer's script, who, along the line of Hollywood tradition, focused almost exclusively on the romantic element of the story. These discrepancies led to numerous rewritings of the filmscript during the shooting and, eventually, the film turned out to be so incoherent that a voice-over had to be added in hindsight.[42]

However, *Great Expectations* (1998) does not only stand in intertextual relation to the biographies of the people involved in the production, but also places the text before the background of topical discourses at the time it was produced, creating intertextual links to a vast number of other texts. Shari Hodges Holt points out that the various updates and appropriations for a contemporary audience

> create a postmodern sense of historical dislocation by relocating Dickens' text within a new context of wildly diverse references. The film recalls numerous American tales of coming-of-age and cultural disillusionment, from Huckelberry [*sic!*] Finn to DeNiro's mobster films, from The Graduate and Sunset Boulevard to Reality Bites. (Holt 1999)

Particularly comparisons to other modernised versions of literature classics produced in the 1990s, such as Baz Luhrman's MTV-style version of *Romeo + Juliet* and Amy Heckerling's *Clueless*, a flashy interpretation of Jane Austen's *Emma,* were brought forth by several critics. Whereas the former rather focuses on the adaptation of the cultural context but still displays the dialogue of Shakespeare's play, the latter bears more similarities to Cuarón's film in the sense that the language and characters were modified considerably as well.

Coincidentally or not, one of the key scenes in *Great Expectations* (1998) – the one where Estella is posing for Finn in his apartment in New York – very much resembles the pivotal scene in James Cameron's *Titanic*, which also shows an impoverished artist drawing his wealthy lover that is posing for him in the nude. The blockbuster was shot at the same time as the Dickens adaptation, though broadcasted one year earlier since it was considered as of greater importance as Art Linson bitterly recalls:

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[42] Cf. Linson 2002: 126.

> By the time we were in release, critics, and no doubt half the paying audience, were commenting that this must be the year of the young artist who paints his girlfriend naked (Linson 2002: 112)

This general response is not surprising at all, considering that there was yet another movie in the cinemas at that time and featuring a similar scene, namely James L. Brooks' *As good as it gets*, which was released in 1997.

This overflow of films depicting young artists drawing their muses might, besides the romantic aspect, be due to a flourishing art world at the particular time they were produced. The 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of "new museums and art galleries, putting on exhibitions that attract[ed] increasingly large crowds" in Europe, Japan and the USA. Contemporay art was progressively considered as part of popular culture and artists were celebrated members of society. Moreover, "successful artists [could] expect a considerable income, even in their youth, and some [became] almost as famous as show business stars" (Bocola 1999: 567). The main reason for such a development can be found in the establishment of a prevailing commodity culture in the postmodern era that goes hand in hand with a more and more consumer-oriented society.

Filmmakers, who have the courage to do an adaptation of a classic are always confronted with the problem of how to deal with the 'source' text, or rather the 'source' *texts*, it is based on, since "each individual adaptation invokes many precursor texts besides the one whose title it usually borrows." (Leitch 2003) Alfonso Cuarón is certainly not the first director interested in *Great Expectations*. As already mentioned, there have been various attempts of adapting this Charles Dickens novel to the big screen. As early as at the beginning of the 20th century we can find films named after the novel. On the whole, there have been more than ten film and television adaptations of *Great Expectations* between 1917 and the late 1990s, when Cuarón's version was produced[43]. David Lean's version of 1946 is without doubt the most prominent one and "may have a stronger presence than the novel in the critical unconscious as a privileged and prior original text against which later

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[43] Cf. "Internet Movie Database" for a list of film and television adaptations of *Great Expectations.*

copies are measured" (Johnson 2005), since it is considered as a (film) classic itself.

In Cuarón's *Great Expectations* one can feel Lean's influence particularly strongly, since it refers to Lean's earlier film in an almost pastiche-like manner at times, as for example in the very first sequence of the film showing Finn leafing through his sketchbook – a scene that undoubtedly mirrors the opening sequence in Lean's film, where the audience is presented somebody's hand leafing through the pages of the actual book of Dicken's novel[44]. Another feature of Lean's film that we can rediscover in the more recent film is Lean's way of finding a cinematic equivalent of Dicken's first person narration.

As Michael K Johnson points out in his essay Cuarón's film is "clearly aware of and playfully allusive to both the novel and the earlier film" (Johnson 2005) directed by David Lean. Lean's attempts to enable the audience to share Pip's consciousness by creating something similar to Dickens' first person narrator are undeniably echoed in Cuarón's film. However,

> [b]y emphasizing the way Finn constructs the world (and the narrative of the film) through his own subjective gaze, *Great Expectations* (1998) goes farther than the earlier film in creating a cinematic equivalent to the novel's first-person narrative. (Johnson 2005)

In the subsequent section I will analyse Cuarón's artful ways of creating subjectivity and point of view in detail. There are many means to be discovered in the film that establish Finn as the character who shares his point of view with the audience and Cuarón has found a great variety of ways to express Finn's inner life. First, I will discuss which of these techniques were already applied by Lean in his 1946 version. Subsequently, I will investigate Cuarón's additional inventive methods that go beyond Lean's then rather limited possibilities.

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[44] Cf. Johnson 2005

3.1.3. Subjectiveness and narration in *Great Expectations* (1998)

Charles Dickens' famous 'bildungsroman' *Great Expectations* that embodies the so-called 'source' text for all later adaptations or 'copies' and, hence, also for Cuarón's postmodern adaptation, was first published in the years 1860 to 1861 in serialised form. As a typical 'coming of age story' it is written in first person narration, a common literary technique. Since first person narration is a distinct feature of prose fiction and therefore cannot be simply transferred to the image-based world of visual texts, filmmakers have made an effort to find a way of creating a 'cinematic equivalent' to the literary first person narrator. Such attemps are also manifested in Lean's as well as in Cuarón's rendering of the Dickens classic. There are a number of possibilities for filmmakers to create a subjective point of view, mainly through camera work, and to let the audience experience the world through the eyes of the main character. However, it takes more than that to achieve the same effect as the literary narrator, as there is still the problem of how to make the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters accessible to the audience. While in literary texts feelings and thoughts are simply described by written words, in the audio-visual medium cinema-specific techniques have to be found to convey the inner life of the characters on the big screen. In his in-depth analysis of David Lean's 1946 adaptation of *Great Expectations* Brian McFarlane mentions four methods the director has utilised to imitate the first person narrator of Charles Dickens' novel: (a) the use of a *voice-over*, (b) the presence of Pip in the on- or off-screen space in virtually every scene (*omnipresence* of the main character), (c) *subjective camera work*, and (d) creating subjectivity by making use of the screen space (*Composition of screen space*)[45]. I shall deal with these methods in more detail in the following paragraphs, since they are all present in Cuarón's film as well,[46] though further developed and sophisticated.

Most of the techniques Cuarón takes advantage of to achieve subjectivity are already apparent from the first scene on. Hence, it seems reasonable to start

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[45] Cf. McFarlane 1996: 122-127.

[46] Cf. Johnson 2005.

with a close analysis of the opening sequence in order to gain insight into the mechanisms at work to create subjectiveness in the film.

As already described in the synopsis the film opens with introducing the audience to the main character Finn Bell, followed by his first encounter with the escaped convict Arthur Lustig. In matters of representation, Cuarón sticks close to Lean's precursor film in that he uses a similar progression of shots and "the same technique of voice-over narration combined with subjective visual images to establish the cinematic equivalent of a first-person narrative" (Johnson 2005). Moreover, Cuarón's capture of the scenic backdrop in Florida resembles the Dickensian landscape in the opening of the Lean film in many aspects:

> An opening long shot of Finn in a small motorboat traveling through shallows recalls the initial appearance of young Pip, also a long shot that establishes the setting. The flat horizon of the ocean recalls the similar horizon of the marshes. Sound effects of crying gulls echo the creaking trees of Lean's graveyard, and the background sound of ocean waves likewise references the omnipresent wind effects in the earlier film. (Johnson 2005)

The peaceful and long-lasting shots establishing the setting are then interrupted by the sudden appearance of the escaped convict. In both films the cutting rhythm changes noticably when the convict looms up, as the cutting rate increases considerably, creating tension. Lean's film counts "25 shots linked by cuts and flanked by two long shots of the marshes, linked by dissolves, all in 3.44 minutes" (McFarlane 1996: 126) in this specific scene. Similarly, in Cuarón's film the cutting rate accelerates to "22 separate shots in 22 seconds of screen time" whereas "one of those shots lasts six seconds" (Johnson 2005). Additionally, Lean, as well as Cuarón place the camera at the boy's eye-level, imitating his field of vision as he looks up to the threatening face of the convict from a low angle. Lean's reverse shot to capture Pip's frightened face is one of the "repeated shots in which Pip is seen dwarfed by large, looming, sometimes menacing adult presences" (McFarlane 1996: 126). Cuarón's reverse shot, as well, is shot from a high angle to signalise Finn's helplessness.

Other than Lean, Cuarón creates suspense already before the convict actually surfaces from the water: the camera is held at Finn's eye level while

he is searching the water for a motif worth drawing. The time he first spots the convict he is not aware of what the unidentifiable and vague reddish object underneath the surface of the water is, neither of the danger connected to it. The following shot, an MS, depicts Finn bending further down, trying to make out what it is that he sees in the blur of the water. Eventually, the matching shot following his strained look reveals the face of Lustig as it pops up from under the water, caught in a CU, followed by the quick-paced sequence of shots mentioned above, accentuated and intensified by the piercing sound of the screams of flushed seagulls.

As far as techniques creating subjectivity and point of view are concerned, the opening sequence of *Great Expectations* can be seen as representative for the whole film, since it already exhibits virtually all the techniques utilised. In what follows I will analyse the other methods mentioned by McFarlane, as well as the ones added by Cuarón, individually and explicitly.

According to McFarlane "the traditional cinematic equivalent of the novel's first person narrative is the technique of voice-over" (McFarlane 1996: 122), as it comes closest to the literary first person narrator and, clearly enough, is the easiest and most evident way of communicating the inner state of mind of a character. Theoretically, the written descriptions and comments in the novel could be simply transferred to the film, exchanging written words for spoken ones, granting almost the same effect. Though, this would make the film appear somewhat unnatural and certainly become more like an audio-book. Therefore, the voice-over is only used intermittently at occasional instances, serving special purposes.

In Lean's as well as in Cuarón's film opening scene the voice-over performs the task of introducing the audience to the main character, creating an audio-visual link between the aural virtuality of the voice talking and the person depicted in the frame, which is necessary to establish the young boy as owner of the voice perceived on the soundtrack and, hence, as the narrator from whose subjective point of view the story is told. While Lean's Pip simply gives away information about his name and how it came into being, referring directly to the Dickensian 'source', the voice-over in the later film has a somewhat different function in that it is employed to establish Finn as a

reminiscient as well as unreliable narrator. The audience is cautioned explictly that the portrayal of the story cannot be trusted fully but is only a biased presentation of the things that occurred: "I won't tell the story the way it happened. I'll tell it the way I *remember* it [my italics]." On a meta level, the words of the voice-over could also be seen as referring to the relationship between the film and its 'source': an adaptation is the 'activation' of a 'meaning potential'[47], that is, a way of *remembering* the 'source'.

Needless to say, the voice-over also appears in other scenes apart from the opening. In Lean's film it has a mere narrative function most of the time. "The mature Pip is heard on the sound-track offering a commentary on events," which mainly serves "to indicate the passing of time or to accompany a change of location." On several occasions it is also used "to make explicit Pip's feeling for Estella [...] and the disruptive effect she has on his life" (McFarlane 1996: 122). In the latter case the voice-over compensates for the fact that film "can show us characters thinking, feeling, and speaking, but it cannot show us their thoughts and feelings" and, thus, "the rendition of mental states – memory, dream, imagination – cannot be as adequately represented by film as by language" (Bluestone 1957: 48).

In *Great Expectations* (1998) the voice-over basically serves the same purposes as in the earlier film. Interestingly enough, the film was not intended to feature a voice-over in the first place. Cuarón's plan was to convey the story solely in the pictorial way and let the images speak for themselves. Nevertheless, as producer Linson accounts, the voice-over had to be added later on because the film was considered as lacking coherence – probably due to the fact that a lot of rewriting took place during the shooting of the film:

> Throughout, the dailies looked excellent, but the internal chaos had had a broader effect, one not easily detected during filming. When the editing of the picture was completed, some holes remained in the story. I still don't know if it was because of undetected glitches in Glazer's script or because of Cuarón's ceaseless reworking of the script, but the connective tissue that linked the story was sorely lost. It became apparent that we would have to supply narration to smooth the transitions. (Linson 2002: 126)

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[47] Cf. Seidl 2007: 38.

Thus, for the greater part, Finn's narration functions as a filler for narrative gaps in the story. Indeed, the occurrences of the voice-over that are concentrated at the beginning and towards the end of the film mainly give information about characters, things that have happened and how much time has elapsed.

However, in many instances the voice-over is also used to reveal Finn's interior: his thoughts, feelings and wishes are stated and made explicit to the audience. Things that cannot be captured with images are communicated audibly. Also the smell in Ms Dinsmoor's room is described by the voice-over ("Her room smelled of dead flowers and cat piss"), as it obviously cannot be mediated via images. Nevertheless, voice-over is not the only means of conveying Finn's sensations and states of mind applied in the film.

In order to project Finn's consciousness and open a door for the audience to empathise with him and his experience of the world, Finn's physical presence is perceivable in almost every single scene throughout the film. Either he is captured by the camera in rather neutral shots and over the shoulder shots, respectively, or he shares his perspective with the audience and, thus, is assumed to be located in the off-screen space. The more or less constant presence of Finn creates the impression that the audience is indeed experiencing the events in the same way as Finn does, meaning that it also has the same limited knowledge about what is happening around him. Hence, the audience does not have more information than the character himself, which reinforces the feeling that the film is presented from Finn's subjective point of view, intensified by a considerable number of shots illustrating Finn's perspective by framing his supposed field of vision.

In addition to the aural clues given by the voice-over describing Finn's thoughts and sensations and his omnipresence throughout the film, a further important means of effecting the conveyance of Finn's consciousness is achieved by the delicate handling of the camera. The placement of the camera "can create a visually subjective point of view to complement the auditory one" (Johnson 2005). Taking this into account Cuarón often places the camera at Finn's eye level, which allows the audience to literally witness the happenings from the character's point of view and experience the same

feelings of inferiority and superiorty, respectively, towards the characters Finn is interacting with. At times, the camera even seems to become one with Finn's eyes and seems to embody him completely. In such shots, parts of Finn's body are depicted within the frame as seen from his perspective, like in a scene in the Borough Club, where we can see his right hand reaching out to greet Estella's friends. Such depiction of bodily parts from the same perspective as they are usually visible within one's field of vision intensifies the feeling of the audience that they are sharing the character's consciousness. It is not without reason that the scene just mentioned reminds a bit of particular scenes in Spike Jonze's film *Being John Malkovich*, in which characters of the film slip into John Malkovich's head and are enabled to literally see and feel whatever he does. What makes this film special is that it largely contains scenes featuring so-called 'anthropomorphistic'[48] shots, which we can find in a few instances in *Great Expectations* (1998) as well. A scene where the camera literally embodies Finn, indicated by anthropomorphistic shots, is the already mentioned Borough Club scene where Finn meets Estella's friends for the first time in New York: Finn enters the Club with a swaying camera following him, applying an over the shoulder shot (OSS), across the room to the table where Estella and her friends are sitting. The gently wobbling motion of the camera imitates the slightly unsteady field of vision Finn has while he is walking. The inclusion of the back of his head and his shoulder in the frame ensures the audience that it is him who is approaching Estella. When he finally reaches the table the camera catches up with him and switches to the anthropomorphistic shot showing Finn's hand shaking those of Estella's friends.

In general, subjectiveness in *Great Exectations* (1998) is most palpable in two kinds of scenes: first, the ones showing Finn in artistic action and second, the ones featuring Estella. The former are chiefly constructed by a

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[48] Anthropomorphism is "the degree to which a camera is being used to simulate some feature of human embodment. One property of a camera, for example, that may be described as being analogous to a human property is based on the position of the camera in diegetic space: is such a position in space a possible or unusual place of viewing that a human observer might or would take in order to see a particular thing? Does the camera ave view and act in a way comparable to what we might imagine for a human observer?" (Branigan 2006: 37).

series of objective MSs showing Finn drawing and zooms into big close-ups (BCUs) to capture his facial expressions alternating with matching point of view shots (POVs) following Finn's glances, switching between the object of his interest and his artistic interpretation of it in his sketchbook. The scenes with Estella are even more controlled by Finn's consciousness:

> The whole *mise-en-scene* and camera movements are directed to exalt Finn's partial and distorted gaze through a great flexibility of movement and angle and an editing made with quick side shots and shot/reverse shots in almost all the sequences featuring Estella." (Antinucci 2006: 300)

With his extensive use of tilted shots Cuarón goes one step further than Lean in creating subjectivity and finds new ways to express Finn's mental states. The canted angles at various occasions contribute considerably to the filmic atmosphere of Cuarón's postmodern *Great Expectations*, in that the canting of the camera creates a feeling of vertigo. In this way the audience is involved directly in the action as they witness everything from the same distorted view as Finn. Whereas tilted shots are usually deployed in mystery films in order to make the audience feel at unease[49] in Cuarón's film they serve a completely different purpose, i.e. the downright communication of Finn's inner life to the audience:

> Using the camera to represent Finn's point of view allows us into the slanted reality of his love-soaked consciousness. In this way, the film uses something close to the literary technique of magical realism. (Katz 2003: 102)

The fantastical representation of reality especially in the scenes that convey Finn's obsession with Estella give the story a somewhat surrealistic touch, that probably provoked Berardinelli's impression that "for the most part, this motion picture feels like a contemporary fable"[50]. One shot in particular sticks out with regard to its surrealism: Finn is shown standing in a street in New York, raising his head and looking towards the sky. The camera follows his look to the dark and clouded sky, but then moves further up and through the clouds, approaching a passing plane until we are close enough to recognise the face of Estella in the frame of the lighted window. The plane seems to

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[49] Cf. Chandler 1994.

[50] Cf. Berardinelli 1998.

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stand still for a moment so we can witness Estella sadly looking down to New York. Then, the plane suddenly accelerates and disappears in a science-fiction-like manner, revealing the skyline of New York.

Besides moving the camera as a whole to follow Finn's looks and depict what arouses his attention Cuarón also takes advantage of another means to make visible what Finn is gazing at: the selective focus. Especially in the painting scenes he constantly makes use of the possibility to render parts of the mise-en-scène in sharp focus while keeping the rest in vagueness. In and out of focus shifts as well as racking focus following Finn's line of attention direct the audience's recognition to details within the frame that are attracting Finn's interest. In this manner the feeling that the audience is sharing Finn's very perspective is even intensified.

Hence, Cuarón exhausts all possibilities that are technically feasible to convey Finn's consciousness on the big screen. Most of the time he lets the images do a great deal of the talking and largely does without any dialogue, as in "one long, virtuoso shot employing [...] various camera movements and styles" including elaborate tracking and the use of a camera crane, where

> Finn arrives at a charity event and confronts Estella. He then follows her as she leaves with her fiancé in a limousine. Finn runs several blocks down the street in a pelting rain, arrives at a restaurant and steals Estella away for a dance. Finally, he exits the restaurant, embraces her passionately and runs down the street. The carefully constructed shot expertly evokes Finn's emotions.[51]

"You feel Finn's anguish and jealousy," claims cinematographer Lubezki. "The viewer becomes trapped in his feelings and feels his anxiety and all his energy as he pursues Estella"[52].

With the various artistic methods just discussed in mind, one has to conclude that Cuarón is really inventive in matters of conveying Finn's subjective point of view and individual perception of the world to the audience. Due to its pictoral and emotional presentation of events the whole film creates a dream-like and surreal atmosphere that reminds the audience that the story is merely the main character's partial account of a memory.

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[51] Cf. "Great Expectations World Wide Web Site."

[52] Lubezki quoted on "Great Expectations World Wide Web Site."

The emergence of new and inventive cinematic techniques as well as the elaboration of old conventions provided Cuarón with a range of possibilities that Lean could have only dreamt of. Nevertheless, Cuarón does not only rely on the advanced technical resources in the 1990s, but extends the methods already explored by Lean with excursions to a number of the other arts, using painting and music in particular, to achieve a still stronger sense of subjectivity. The use of other art forms like visual arts and music is certainly nothing new considering that "the cinema is engaged in a dialogue with the other arts" (Dalle Vacche 1996: 3). Such "thematic and/or formal links between individual art forms" are referred to as "intermediality" or "intermedialities" (Huber *et al* 2007: 1), a term that is becoming of more and more importance lately.

Internationally well reputed artist Francesco Clemente, a representative of the *Transavantgarde* art movement prevalent in Italy in the 1980s[53], provided all the paintings, drawings and sketches that are appearing in *Great Expectations* (1998) and are supposedly created by the young artist in the film. For this purpose he invited the main cast members to private sittings for the portraits.

The most prominent painting in the film is a portrait of lead actress Gwyneth Paltrow, which was also used as the picture covering the film poster and strongly resembles Francesco Clemente's *New York Muses*, "a 1993 series of portraits of women with long necks, big eyes and bee-stung lips that seem destined for a fashion magazine" (Smith 1999). Like Estella in the portrait they "wear stoic expressions, and their large eyes penetrate – as if hypnotizing or casting spells – looking at, through, and beyond the viewer" (Clemente 1999: cat. nos. 30-32). Clemente's account of the depicted women, who recall ancient Greek goddesses recast in a contemporary context and "with their enormous, close-cropped faces, possess their onlookers", sounds like a perfect description for Estella:

> There is a very unique, martial, New York woman, a kind of Amazon, who walks the street without looking left or right. She is

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[53] For more information on Francesco Clemente and *Transavantgarde* cf. Bocola 1999: 567-589.

strong enough to attract your attention, to not participate in 'the game.' To me that carries a sense of poetry. I draw these women larger than life. And though you feel very close to them when you are looking at them, the picture keeps a part of them private, because their bodies are left out. You're very close, but you're not seeing what isn't your business.[54]

Similarly to Clemente's *Muses* Estella literally possesses Finn and at various occasions plays with him, letting him come real close, until she suddenly turns away to leave him all dazed and confused. Finn, on the other hand, cannot prevent himself from running after her every time she humiliates him, worshipping her like a goddess. The dimension of his obsession with Estella becomes visible in his room in Florida and his New York apartment, which are both stuffed with paintings and countless recreations of her. Wherever you look you find Estella.

Basically, Clemente's paintings perform two important functions in the film: on the one hand, they are the key to Finn's successful future as a celebrity in the New York art scene and, thus, enable him to escape his adverse environment in Florida. On the other hand, they fulfil the even more important task of serving Finn as a powerful vehicle to express his feelings and personal vision of the world surrounding him. Altogether, there are four scenes in the film displaying Finn drawing, which all serve special purposes and are essential for the progress of the narrative. Every time Finn engages in artistic action something severe and life-changing happens: either a person suddenly enters his life and therewith changes everything, or a new feeling is triggered by the action of drawing.

In the first instance, Finn is shown drawing into his sketchbook in the already discussed opening scene. Here, the sudden appearance of Arthur Lustig most notably has a life-changing effect, since the foundations for Finn's future as a successful artist are laid with the encounter between Finn and his later benefactor.

In the next instance the audience witnesses Finn portraying the young Estella in Ms Dinsmoor's mansion. While drafting the girl's face on a piece of

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[54] Clemente, quoted in and interview with Ingrid Sischy (1997).

wallpaper he discovers Estella's beauty and first tender feelings are prompted.

Another drawing session takes place in Central Park where Finn meets Estella again after several years. Once more, Finn's artistic activity is linked to the unexpected appearance of Estella, who thereafter more or less determines the tenor of events.

The most prominent scene featuring Finn giving vent to his artistic disposition is doubtlessly the one where Estella is posing for him in his apartment in New York, which constitutes the turning point and the climax, respectively, in the storyline. The outburst of artistic realisation of his emotions and imagination leads to pleasant as well as devastating consequences for Finn. At first, all his dreams seem to come true: he can give full scope to his obsession with Estella and reproduce her image again and again, his idealised vision of her materialising on the empty sheets of paper and him as close to her as never before. But then again, the sight of the numerous replications of Estella's naked body in Finn's apartment prompts Finn's rival Walter to eventually commit and propose to Estella.

Thus, I would argue that not only are Clemente's pieces of art utilised as a means of expressing Finn's feelings, dreams and visions, but they also turn into triggers for other character's actions and, therefore, have an important narrative function in more than one way. Lustig, for instance, is motivated to initiate Finn's career when he recognises the talent of the boy. When Estella regards herself in a portrait decorating Finn's room in Florida she is directly confronted with Finn's personal and idealised vision of her. The unusual experience of seeing herself from Finn's biased point of view encourages her to realise Finn's imagination by taking on the role of the idealised Estella depicted in the painting. For a few moments she speaks and acts in a way as if one of Finn's tacit fantasies has come true, leaving him the control over the situation, until she suddenly falls back to her former self and turns away to leave. Cuarón finds impressive images to communicate this transformation: a shot depicting Estella, first facing her replication like a mirror image, then turning around so that both Estellas – the real one and the idealised one in the painting – are looking at Finn, is followed by a shift of focus, keeping the

real Estella's face in sharp focus in the foreground, while her replication in the background is blurring. In this way Cuarón creates the illusion that the copy of Estella in the vague background slips out of the picture and materialises into the real one in the foreground. While Estella, or rather the embodiment of her flawless replication, slowly approaches Finn, the straight camera angle turns into a tilted one, intensifying the surreal and dream-like atmosphere of the whole scene. When after a few intense moments Estella has enough of the game and abruptly takes on her real self again the camera angle goes back to normal as well and, like a slap in the face, calls Finn back to reality. The scene can be understood as a kind of warning from Estella that Finn's imagination is far from the truth.

Hence, Finn's drawings and paintings perfectly convey his personal and often idealised conceptions of the world and the people surrounding him in contrast to the way they actually are. Especially the scene that depicts Estella within the same frame as her portrait, creating the preternatural sensation that her likeness on the canvas comes alive and literally "step[s] out of the frame and onto the screen and behave[s] in ways that Finn cannot control or that contest his vision of himself" (Johnson 2005), is very insightful and recurs twice in a similar way, featuring Joe and Arthur Lustig, respectively.

The scenes just described, creating the illusion of portraits coming alive, are not the only recurring elements in the film. Repetition of visual and aural elements and "seemingly endless layers of re-creation" (Johnston 2004: 177) constitute an inherent characteristic of Cuarón's film and serve in creative ways as a further important means of subjective narration.

> Cuaron's film proves really inventive in preserving and re-creating on the screen the symbolic and poetic power of Dickens's language by means of visual, narrative and musical repetitions. Reification, interpolation, self-reflexivity and intertextual playfulness are 'indexes of post-modernity' that reinvent Dickens's irony while qualifying Cuaron's inter-semiotic translation as 'heterotopian', a text hovering between different ontological planes. (Antinucci 2006: 294)

The most prominent instant of repetition is Finn's constant artistic recreation of Estella. Manically painted again and again, Estella becomes an ever-present phenomenon in Finn's world, which I suggest is impressively

demonstrated in a scene where Walter pays a visit to Finn's apartment to have a look at his artworks: the two of them are standing in the midst of countless Estella look-alikes while having a conversation about the woman that is literally standing between them.

However, Estella's constant presence in Finn's world is not only communicated by her physical presence and her likeness in Finn's paintings, respectively, but also symbolically by "the immanent presence of stars – both on Finn's canvas and in the scene (like the starfish in the ocean) – that patently allude to her name" (Antinucci 2006: 309). In addition to stars, I would argue that also the emblem of the ladybird[55] is used to refer to Estella. The first time Finn is visiting Paradiso Perduto the upcoming appearance of Estella is heralded by a ladybird that lands and scrabbles on Finn's finger and then flies away into the direction Estella is emerging from shortly after. The scene is repeated with the exact same progress of shots at the end of the film, where the grown up Finn is returning to the decayed mansion of the deceased Ms Dinsmoor. The only difference to the earlier scene is that this time Estella's daughter, who strikingly resembles the young Estella, is emerging from the overgrown garden.

Moreover, I suggest that, in the later scene the ladybird does not only function as a signifier for Estella's proximity, but also as a trigger for Finn's memories. By repeating a familiar sequence of shots Cuarón has found another powerful means to indicate Finn's mental processes. As Antinucci points out, "in line with post-modern and de-constructionist thought, Cuaron's film elaborates a narrative method that, [...] could be termed 'rememory'" (Antinucci 2006: 312-313). There are still two more recurrent scenes to be found in the film that serve the same function of indicating Finn's memory and are likewise referring back to an earlier event. One example is the scene depicting Estella's and Finn's first kiss at a fountain in Paradiso Perduto when they are still children, which is echoed at a later moment in the film when

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[55] The ladybird is commonly seen as a symbol for luck, but also for love. In Asian culture it is believed that if someone catches a ladybird and then releases it, the beetle will directly fly to the person's true love and whisper his or her name in the beloved's ear, after which the recipient of the ladybird's message will hurry to the former person. Compare "Your Guide to Symbols and Signs" 2008.

Estella is kissing Finn at a fountain in Central Park. The other instance is Finn's first encounter with Arthur Lustig already described in detail in a previous chapter. At a later point in the film Lustig literally re-enacts their first encounter from the opening scene in order to stimulate Finn's memory. In the following paragraphs this activation of Finn's memory and the way it is conveyed through images and the film's soundtrack will be discussed in more detail.

Since "pictures have no tenses" (Balázs, quoted in Bluestone 1957: 57) and are "unfolding in a perpetual present, like visual perception itself, they cannot express either a past or a future" (Bluestone 1957: 57). Thus, filmmakers have to think of other ways to refer to past or future events. As far as *Great Expectations* (1998) is concerned, Cuarón makes extensive use of visual and aural repetitions in order to create a sense of pastness. According to Bluestone, the soundtrack "may be used to counterpoint a present image" and suggest an event either in the past or in the future. "In this way, apparently, a succession of present images may be suffused with a quality of past or future" (Bluestone 1957: 57).

Such use of sound for the purpose of referring to the past can be observed in the scene where Finn is called on by Arthur Lustig in his loft in New York. Finn, who at first does not recognise Lustig as the escaped convict he encountered in his childhood, is effectively reminded of the past event by Lustig, who grabs him and shakes him in the exact way he did several years before, while whispering the same words he uttered at their first encounter. The echoing sound of his threatening words seem to activate Finn's memory of the traumatic encounter. Important to note is that those words, whereas uttered in the presence, distinctly refer back to the past and, in this way, constitute a quality of past counterpointing the present image, as according to Bluestone's statement. The activation of Finn's memory is further signified visually by a mobile made of paper birds as well as aurally by the distant sound of seagull screams. The sound of seagulls, whereas being somewhat out of place in the loft, is a very prominent feature in the opening scene and, thus, also serves the purpose of referring back to the past event. Hence, Cuarón creates a sense of pastness in this scene by reiterating prominent

visual and aural actualities of the earlier encounter, and, in this way, is able to imitate the complicated mental process of remembering.

Lighting and the use of colour constitute two further elements in Cuarón's great repertoire of techniques to create subjectivity in the film and contribute a lot to the film's chiefly romantic and dreamlike atmosphere signifying Finn's state of mind. Especially the extensive use of soft light and backlighting in scenes featuring Estella supports the conveyance of Finn's distorted perception of events. Already the first encounter between Finn and Estella in the overgrown garden of Ms Dinsmoor's mansion is marked by Estella's angel-like appearance, effected by the intensive use of backlighting, which lets her contours appear illuminated, creating "a halo effect" (Chandler 1994) on her long blonde hair, while obscuring her face. This romanticising effect of the backlight, which creates an aura of magic mystery about Estella, can be observed throughout the film, but is especially strong whenever she appears on the scene unexpectedly. Moreover, Cuarón often uses soft light to make Estella's face appear more beautiful and pleasant.

In contrast to Lean, whose film is shot in black and white, Cuarón also takes advantage of colours to support his narrative. Most noticeably, colours are used to highlight the contrast between the reposeful environment of the Gulf of Florida and the hecticness and hostility of New York. While Cuarón mostly uses bright and intense colours for the scenes shot in Florida, the colours in New York are prevailingly dark and obscure, which is due to the fact that most scenes in New York are shot at night and in the rain, which renders the metropolis in a somewhat stereotyped light.

Colour is furthermore used for expressing the mental states of characters. The most prominent example is Ms Dinsmoor, whose moods can be read off the colour of her hair. In the course of the film her hair changes twice, from blonde to red and then to white, which is her natural hair colour. The scene featuring her in Estella's dwelling in New York clearly communicates Ms Dinsmoor's moral change, indicated by a change of colours and her thereby unfamiliar appearance: not only is she wearing her natural hair colour, but she is also doing without the usual heavy make-up, and the whiteness of her clothes further signifies the change.

A change in the colour of clothing can be also observed with Estella and Finn. Generally, the prevailing colour in the film is green, a peculiarity that underlies "no logical explanation," as Cuarón explains, but is due to the fact that green "is just a color that [he] love[s] and ha[s] used in all [his] films."[56] As a result, all of Estella's and Ms Dinsmoor's Donna Karan costumes are held in green tones and also Finn is mainly dressed in that colour. But not so in the final scene where both, Estella and Finn, are wearing white, a colour that symbolises harmony and innocence. Here, just like in the scene featuring Ms Dinsmoor, I would argue that the whiteness of the clothes indicates a change in the characters' personalities: they are finally coming clean with each other.

3.1.4. Postmodern discourses reflected in *Great Expectations* (1998)

Besides earlier adaptations of the Dickensian 'source' and other intertextually related texts that can be referred to as 'hypotexts'[57] for the film under scrutiny, also the cultural and historical frame within which the adaptation has come into being, meaning the prevailing discourses at that particular time, are of significance for the shaping of the adaptation. Since any artefact reflects the 'discursive structures' within which it is operating[58], *Great Expectations* (1998) bears traces of the discourses at stake in the late 1990s. "Hollywood adaptations of foreign novels invariably foreground their particular nationalities and historical moments in ways their source novels rarely do" (Leitch 2003). The tracing of such cultural and historical markers in *Great Expectations* (1998) is the focus of analysis in this chapter.

Within the discourse of identity politics emerging in the 1980s and 1990s we can find an emphasis on "the cultural identity of authors and subjects as crucial aspects of the politics being articulated in texts." Thus, these critics are raising "the question of cultural difference and the question of who it is that speaks through a given text" (Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 253). In the

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[56] Cuarón quoted on "Great Expectations World Wide Web Site."

[57] Cf. concept of 'hypertextuality' discussed in ch.1.

[58] Cf. Seidl 2003: 15.

case of *Great Expectations* (1998) we can clearly sense the Mexican backgrounds of director Cuarón and his collaborator, cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki, since their approach "was significantly colored by this cultural difference" (Katz 2003: 95). Then again, the influence of the Hollywood industry is also clearly perceptible, especially in Glazer's romanticised screenplay. The difference between Cuarón's and Glazer's approach reflects the fact that in Mexico, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* has a different cultural rating and is of less importance in the literary canon as compared to its value in America and, certainly, Britain.

> I had none of the incredible solemnity about the great Dickens. I just liked him! But suddenly, I found myself working on a project that everyone had an opinion about. [...] I didn't obsess about being faithful. It was more important for me to find a way to use film images to portray the themes and atmosphere of the book. (Cuarón, quoted in Katz 2003: 95-96)

Thus, Cuarón was less interested in creating a faithful adaptation that sticks insistently to its 'source', but intented to pay more attention to the theme of society shaped by class, since "this would be [...] more in the Spanish tradition of tales about the journey from rags to riches" (Katz 2003: 96). However, Cuarón had to put back most of his "many ideas how to elaborate on Finn's and Joe's lower-class world" (Cuarón, quoted in Katz 2003: 97) in favour of the romantic theme of the story, meeting the requirements of Hollywood tradition, and to guarantee commercial success. Nevertheless, the theme of class, identity and success within postmodern commodity culture is unquestionably present in the film.

Growing up in a reposeful fishing village in Florida, Finn is bred in poverty and his future prospects are poor. New York opens a world of possibilities to him while at the same time it constitutes a daunting task for the common fisherman to establish himself in this competitive and hostile environment. In order to protect himself from the crazed world of celebrities Finn reinvents himself completely for the media, creating a protective mask by turning himself into a 'simulacrum'[59] that bears no relation whatsoever to reality

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[59] Cf. Sturken & Cartwright: "Unlike representations, which make reference to a real, simulacra stand on their own without requiring recourse to real objects or worlds elsewhere. Within Baudrillard's terms, the hyperreal overtakes the real, and simulacra

anymore. By recounting poignant details of his childhood he sells himself as the protagonist of a typical 'rags to riches' story, exploiting the media to attract puplic attention and, likewise, taking advantage of "a world lived at the level of consumption, images, media, and the popular" (Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 239). Finn successfully renders himself into one of those public figures who are "shorn of their earlier life world" and "are themselves commodified and transformed into their own images" (Jameson, quoted in Johnston 2004: 169). Presenting himself as a person who came all the way from a poor and miserable childhood, successfully fighting his way up to a life full of glamour and style, which "is one of the chief characteristics of a postmodern ethos" (Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 238), his media savvy and deliberate strategies to market himself into a household name could be compared to the methods of

> those politicians in the 1990s who used the media quite heavily in their campaigns. It can be argued, along the lines suggested by Beaudrillard's concept of simulacra, that they used the media to produce something other than simply representations of themselves. They actually produced themselves through myriad media images and texts, generating identities as simulacra – hyperreal identities with no recourse back to a real person, their composite media image being more real than real. (Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 238)

Finn goes a similar way as those politicians to generate the fictitious identity of Finn Bell, the promising artist and future star of the Manhattan Art Scene. He uses catchy publicity headers, like "Fisherman from the Gulf Coast Lands on Manhattan's Art Scene" and "Finn Bell – Fishing for Success", as hooks to attract the interest of the public and additionally embellishes his image by recounting invented incidents that allegedly overshadowed his childhood to a journalist of the *New York Magazine* who is writing an article about his forthcoming breakthrough:

> I was an orphan, raised by my sister Maggie and her boyfriend Joe. Maggie took off when I was still a kid. Joe was a big drug smuggler. Spent the '70s in the Raiford Penitentiary. I came home one day, I found him dead in the couch. He had OD'd. They took

rise, partly through new media forms, as the new forms of *postmodern* existence." (2001: 237)

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> the apartment away, so I spent the next years in a car. It wasn't that bad. (*Great Expectations* 1998)

Finn, at first effectively impressing the world with the repackaging of the story of his life into an appealing 'rags to riches' tale, later has to witness the fragility of the simulacrum he has created, when Joe unexpectedly appears at the opening night and blows Finn's cover in an embarassing scenario, a scene that demonstrates how far Finn has diverged from his true self.

However, Finn's dreams of being successful and sticking out of the crowd are not unusual in our postmodern media-affected society. The motivation behind the desire to reinvent oneself might be a "general striving [...] for material success, for power, fame and honor, which one finds today in countless forms" (Bocola 1999: 564). Finn's ambition for these social values significant for a postmodern world is mirrored in his account of the opening night to his show:

> The night all my dreams came true.
> Like all happy endings it was a tragedy, of my own device.
> For I'd succeeded.
> I'd cut myself loose...
> ... from Joe, from the past, from the gulf, from poverty.
> I had invented myself.
> I had done it cruelly, but I had done it. I was free.
> (*Great Expectations* 1998)

As Sue Johnston points out, "Finn's 'success' lies not in artistic recognition but in commodification: 'I sold all my paintings'" (Johnston 2004: 177). The striving for material success goes hand in hand with the consumerism characteristic of Western society today. The marks of postmodern commodity culture are clearly perceptible in the film: Finn more and more becomes what has been termed a 'commodity self'[60], that is "the idea that our selves, indeed our *subjectivities*, are mediated and constructed in part through our consumption and use of commodities" (Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 198). The expensive suits Finn starts to wear, the sunglasses, and so forth are all signs of the prevailing consumerism in contemporary Western culture. Designer clothes and countless accessories become more and more important in

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[60] A term invented by media scholar Stuart Ewen; cf. Sturken & Cartwright (2001: 198)

today's society, which, for instance, manifests itself in a dialogue between Finn and Estella on a bridge in Central Park:

> Finn: Don't jump.
> Estella: Would you save me?
> Finn: Not in this suit.
> (*Great Expectations* 1998)

Besides clothing, also "music, cosmetic products, and cars" as well as cigarettes and countless other things "are commodities which people use to present their identities to those around them" (Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 198). Unsurprisingly, commodities often function as social markers, signifying to which level of social stratification a person belongs. Particular societies differentiate themselves through the use of certain brands, which also becomes apparent in and even is boosted by advertisements, as they are directed to a special target group and call forth associations that are appealing to the respective group of people they are designed for.

The influence commodity culture wields on Cuarón's film, as well as the manipulative ways of advertising can be observed particularly clearly in the Borough Club scene already mentioned, when Finn asks for permit to smoke and at the same time holds up a packet of 'KOOL' cigarettes[61], captured by the camera in a close-up, so that the name of the cigarette brand can be made out without difficulty by the audience. This instance constitutes a typical case of 'product placement', a frequent advertising strategy and phenomenon of commodity culture that is in common use since the 1980s. Especially tobacco product placement was widely spread in the 1990s, and can be detected in a number of films of that time[62]. "Many of the messages that tobacco, as a prop, is used to convey", such as "rebellion, independence, sexiness, wealth, power and celebration" are associations that do not appear out of nowhere, but "are images that the tobacco industry has created to sell its products" (Mekemson & Glantz 2002: 89). In the case

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[61] "KOOL is a brand of menthol cigarette, introduced in 1933" by the American R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, "that has marketed itself towards the 'sophisticated man'." In the 1960s, KOOL "began marketing their cigarettes by linking the cool taste of menthol to cool outdoor scenes portraying water or snow. In the newest Kool ads, male/female encounters and sports references are prominent" (Wikipedia: 'Kool').

[62] Cf. Mekemson & Glantz (2002) and Shields *et al* (1999).

of *Great Expectations* (1998) the scene in the Borough Club does not only feature 'KOOL' cigarettes, but, as I claim, moreover is clearly allusive to a recent collection of advertisements depicting a disloyal woman exchanging a flirtatious look with a 'KOOL' man, whose presence is only indicated by the image of his hand holding a packet of the respective brand of cigarettes in his hand, while her unsuspecting boyfriend is sitting next to her.[63]

As demonstrated by the example of tobacco product placement, Cuarón's film is not only dealing with the issue of consumerism and commodity culture on a filmic level but *Great Expectations* (1998) is de facto a commodity itself and subject to the extraneous influences of a consumer-oriented world. It can be argued that Cuarón's postmodern adaptation of *Great Expectations* presents an "obsessive mise en abyme of commodity culture" (Johnston 2004: 177).

An important 'tool' within consumer culture is the concept of 'the gaze', which is also of major importance in the film under consideration. The concept of 'the gaze' roots in the ideas of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who mentioned and described 'the gaze' in connection to clinical psychoanalysis. Whereas in daily use the word 'gaze' simply signifies "a fixed intent look,"[64] in the Lacanian sense there is "no simple dichotomy between seeing and being seen but unstable roles that conflict and overlap" (Thomas 2001: 2). What is more, in contrast to the conventional meaning of the word, the Lacanian 'gaze'

> is not even dependent on, but split from, the eye because, as opposed to the subjective associations of the anatomical organ, the gaze is on the side of the object [...] which exposes the very conditions of visuality, the fact that, as we can see, we are also positioned as objects, spectacles, and consumers.
> (Thomas 2001: 2)

It is important to mention that 'the gaze', while being independent from the eye, "is not necessarily distinct from the 'I', the person who looks and is looked at", but is rather "a way of negotiating the relation between the self

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[63] For images and analyses of this collection of KOOL advertisements cf. "Not so Kool Kids" 2004.

[64] Cf. Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary: 'Gaze.'

and the things that surround it" (Thomas 2001: 2). According to Lacan, the identification of the self takes place within this relation. Thus, in other words, "the gaze is not just a look or a glance. It is a means of constituting the identity of the gazer by distinguishing her or him from that which is gazed at" (Mirzoeff 1999: 164). Worth remarking, Lacan developed this theory of 'the gaze' having in mind what he called the 'mirror state', which refers to a phase in infancy "when the baby recognises its image in the mirror." In this context "spectatorship, [...] is more about how the subject is positioned by the visual than about how it has any agency to position itself" (Thomas 2001: 2), which implies a certain powerlessness of the spectator.

The notion of the viewer as being in a superior position was adopted by art critic and author John Berger in his highly influential work *Ways of Seeing,* which contains his famous statement "men act and women appear" (Berger 1972: 45)[65] that adverts to Berger's perception that in Western society it is principally the female who is "repeatedly positioned as an object to be looked at" (Thomas 2001: 8). The case of women as objects of 'the gaze' was discussed in more detail by Laura Mulvey, who brought the concept of 'the gaze', with special focus on 'the male gaze', into the discourse of film theory and scrutinised it from a feminist point of view. Her seminal and widely debated paper *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, first published in 1975, constitutes one of the first major attempts to introduce ideas of psychoanalysis to film theory. Mulvey's analysis of how "film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (Mulvey 1975: 837) can be seen as a turning point in contemporary film studies and has had a severe influence on later studies in the field. Her idea of the hierarchy of power in the male/female relationship is the following:

> Woman [...] stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (Mulvey 1975: 838)

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[65] Cf. Chandler 1998.

This means, that the pleasure of looking is more or less a one-sided affair that is primarily open to the male spectator, which particularly seems to be true in the context of Western cinema. As Jonathan Schroeder points out, "film has been called an instrument of the male gaze, producing representations of women, the good life, and sexual fantasy from a male point of view" (Schroeder 1998: 208). Mulvey further notes on the representation and inequality of men and women in the cinema:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (Mulvey 1975: 841)

Basically, Mulvey's 'gaze' identifies two aspects of pleasurable looking that stand to each other in binary opposition: One is referred to as 'scopophilia' or 'voyeurism' and "arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight," while the second "comes from identification with the image seen" (Mulvey 1975: 839). It is important to note here, that Mulvey's argumentation presumed heterosexuality as the norm.

In various scenes of *Great Expectations* (1998) the scopophilic aspect of looking is prevalent in Finn's 'gaze'. Since the audience is sharing Finn's point of view, Finn's 'male gaze' is imposed on the spectator in the cinema on many occasions, which becomes particularly clear in the scenes where Finn is drawing Estella. To give an example where the concept of the 'male gaze' is clearly at work in Cuarón's film I will now analyse the scene showing Finn drawing Estella in his apartment in New York, which is very revealing about the mechanisms of 'the gaze'[66].

In what Mirzoeff calls "the fetishism of the gaze, what is perceived is never exactly the same as what is there in a material sense," since ways of looking "are in themselves constructed by gender and sexuality" (Mirzoeff 1999: 162). This also applies to Finn's gaze, i.e. the gaze the audience is sharing.

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[66] From now on I will do without the inverted commas whenever I refer to the cinematic concept of 'the gaze'.

Although it could be claimed that Finn's gaze is directed by his artistic intention to transform what he sees into a piece of art, we have to be aware that he is still looking from a male perspective and, thus, his gaze is not solely directed by his artistic aim. Moreover, his portrayals of Estella are in discordance with what is presented by the camera. "In the fetishistic gaze, reality exists but has the viewer's desire superimposed over it" (Mirzoeff 1999: 163).

> For Finn drawing Estella means to possess her body and soul, to shape her image, to fetishize her figure in order to take control over her puzzling personality: by exaggerating and fragmenting parts of her body on canvas and on screen, the female is made less threatening. At the same time, the succession and juxtaposition of shots bringing Estella into and out of focus further undermines [...] the reliability of Finn's narration. Only the viewer, simultaneously confronted with Estella and her artistic transfigurations, can realize the numerous disjunctions between Finn's representation of Estella and her real movements and attitudes in the bedroom. The male gaze lurking behind the camera literally 'creates' the woman [...] while mirroring the role of the viewer as active 'co-creator' of the film-text." (Antinucci 2006: 301)

The most striking example of Finn's idealisation and partial representation of Estella is the fact that her habit of smoking, performed while posing for Finn, is not reflected in his renderings of her image.[67] Likewise, his strong accentuation of Estella's eyes, lips and intimate body parts is highly revealing about the way his desire is directing his gaze. Estella, on the other hand, is apparently enjoying being looked at and willingly takes on the role of the showgirl, asking Finn how he wants her to pose. Throughout the scene she is displayed as a sexual object, which "is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to striptease, [the woman] holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire" (Mulvey 1975: 841) Thus, the scene under scrutiny seemingly fits into the traditional stereotypical schemes of presenting the female body in patriarchal society. According to Mulvey,

> traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, [...]. For instance, the device of the showgirl allows two looks to be unified

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[67] Cf. Johnson 2005.

technically without any apparent break in the diegesis. A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative versimilitude." (Mulvey 1975: 841-842)

Nevertheless, although Finn, and thus, also the spectator in the cinema, seem to possess the power over Estella in this scene, in the end it is her who decides when and where she leaves the control to somebody else. It may be true that for the respective period of time all of her actions are directed by Finn and she positions her body according to his instructions, but then again, she is the one who suddenly puts an end to the session, gets dressed and abandons Finn, leaving him behind in the midst of his countless replications of her – a moment that perfectly conveys her control over the whole situation. In this manner, she clarifies that she has the final word and the authority to set the rules for Finn's pleasure of looking.

At a first glance Cuarón's postmodern versions of Pip and Estella seem to be adequate updates of the Dickens characters, but looking at them again it becomes clear that in the end they are not representative for the late twentieth century in every aspect, at least Estella is not. While she is up to date in terms of sexual permissiveness, which, as Cuarón states, is due to the impossibility of making "a contemporary film of a book about young people in love *without* sex" (Katz 2003: 97), she is rather old-fashioned in the sense that she does not seem to make a career for herself. In fact she does not even have a job in the film. As Pamela Katz points out, "as a powerful woman of the 1990s, surely a profession would only have enhanced her attractiveness to men" (Katz 2003: 98). Originally, Estella was intended to follow an occupation as art restorer, but the idea was rejected by the film studio, since a profession for Estella was considered as inessential for the storyline[68], which I suggest mirrors Budd Boetticher's statement that

> what counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance. (Boetticher, quoted in Mulvey 1975: 841)

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[68] Cf. Katz 2003: 98.

Thus, according to Boetticher, the Estella character merely acts as a stimulus for Finn's actions, which lets her appear as "a sexy leading lady with nothing to do, except *not* have (too much) sex with the leading man" (Katz 2003: 98). Nevertheless, Estella is somewhat powerful in the way she takes advantage of being in demand and she takes control over the men in her life. Cuckolding Walter and constantly playing with Finn's feelings for her, "Estella in the movie acts to achieve her own ends – seemingly renewing her acquaintance with Finn to make her boy friend jealous enough to propose" (Johnson 2005).

In my opinion, Estella's game of raising Finn's hopes to finally capture her heart and at the same time playing him off against Walter is best demonstrated by two consecutive scenes, which I will analyse now in more detail: the first one is shot in Central Park and depicts Estella kissing Finn at a fountain, which misleads Finn, and with him the audience, to the assumption that she is still solo. Finn's supposition that Estella is seriously interested in him is perfectly supported by the mise-en-scène, positioning the two characters in a way that clearly communicates that they belong together, showing the two of them framed by the column construction surrounding the fountain they are standing at. Finn is left in his misbelief until Estella introduces him to Walter in the subsequent scene in the Borough Club, whereby she only clarifies that she has a relationship with Walter after flirting with Finn for a while, with her fiancé sitting next to them, witnessing. The intimate moments between Finn and Estella, Walter's arising jealousy as well as Finn's subsequent disappointed understanding of Estella and Walter being a pair are convincingly communicated by a sophisticated progression of shots, which presents the whole conversation from the three different points of view of Finn, Estella and Walter. The POVs are more or less always correlating with the respective person who is taking the turn of speech. In this way, the love triangle of Finn, Estella and Walter is represented by the three main camera positions in the scene and the respective shots, which are all imitating one of these character's points of view. Finn's and Estella's POVs are mostly CUs and MCUs of each other, creating a sense of familiarity and intimacy between them. A prominent Two Shot (TS) from behind shows Finn offering Estella his last cigarette, while Walter, directly facing the camera, is

watching them unenthusiastically. The cigarette is cleverly used as a linking device, both metaphorically and visually, since offering a cigarette is a stereotyped way to approach women in Western society and the outstretched arms passing on the cigarette visibly create a further connection between Finn and Estella. In contrast to the shot/reverse shot patterns imitating the intimate exchange of looks between Finn and Estella, Walter's point of view is indicated by TSs of Estella and Finn from the front, depicting them in reverse angle, i.e. from the opposite side, a technique that is called "crossing the line"[69] and that creates a certain confusion by reversing the left/right relationship of Finn and Estella. The 180° rule is broken several times throughout the scene by constantly switching between different camera angles and camera positions along a full circle, each time depicting the character who is talking at the respective moment, creating a feeling of vertigo conveying the lively nature of the conversation. Characteristically, Walter's POVs intrusively break the intimacy of the shot/reverse shot exchanges between Estella and Finn. However, the most striking and revealing succession of shots in the scene is a BCU of Finn telling Estella that he would like to paint her again, followed by a reverse BCU of Estella, who first smiles at Finn, but then suddenly turns her head to Walter (the camera following her eyes with a pan to Walter's face), asking "What do you think, sweetheart?", which, again, is followed by a BCU of Finn, capturing his surprised and disappointed facial expression as he realises that the two are in a relationship.

The scene I have just discussed in close analysis doubtlessly reflects the prevailing moral concepts in terms of attitudes towards love, relationships and marriage in the 1990s. Estella's and Walter's relationship in particular seems to be representative for contemporary times. Whereas Estella might be described as one of those women who seem to have a certain power over men in the way that they "cultivate their looks, make themselves all the more appealing and siren-like, and lure men into a terrible fate – monogamy and

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[69] Cf. Wikipedia: "The *180° rule* is a basic film editing guideline that states that two characters (or other elements) in the same scene should always have the same left/right relationship to each other. If the camera passes over the imaginary axis connecting the two subjects, it is called *crossing the line*. The new shot, from the opposite side, is known as a *reverse angle*" (Wikipedia: '180 degree rule').

the marital home" (Coward 2001: 34), Walter constitutes her male counterpart, a career-conscious intellectual who is afraid of getting too involved by binding himself to his partner in a serious relationship, suffering from so-called 'commitment problems,' a frequently used expression and seemingly widespread problem in the 1990s, which is also reflected in Ellen Fein's and Sherrie Schneider's humorous book *The Rules: Time-Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right.* Interestingly, in the film Estella lures Walter into marriage and supposed monogamy by playing off Finn against him and being unfaithful to him, which again mirrors the complexity of contemporary relationships.

In the final scene Finn meets Estella again after several years. Being divorced and a single mother she reflects the generally increasing number of divorcees and single parents in the 1990s and, ironically, it is in this scene that she seems to be most up to date with contemporary times, representing the truthful image of a postmodern woman.

In comparison to Dickens' *Great Expectations* as well as Lean's earlier film Cuarón's contemporary adaptation of the novel conspicuously often features Estella, acted by Gwyneth Paltrow, allowing her to dominate a great deal of the screen time and, in this way, attaches central importance to the character even though she is presented in the passive role of the woman being looked at most of the time. The fact that Estella is clearly put in the foreground and "is particularly stylized" throughout the film, her face "usually photographed in an extreme (and extremely flattering) close-up" (Katz 2003: 102) is due to Gwyneth Paltrow's increasing fame as an actress and fashion model in the late 1990s, initiated by the great success of her previous film *Emma*, an adaptation of Jane Austen's novel of the same title, as well as her election to the next Calvin Klein model in 1996. Cuarón even had to add extra scenes featuring Estella after the film had already started shooting, since the production company demanded more screen presence of Paltrow, "because Paltow's career had exploded near the beginning of the shoot" and "any spare moment had to be handed over to the assured box-office draw of Paltrow" (Katz 2003: 99).

Being tall, thin and blonde, Gwyneth Paltrow's appearance perfectly fits into the Western beauty ideals in that she looks like a supermodel and her measurements are considered a designer's dream. Her body shape is further emphasised in the film by depicting her in various flattering poses, typical of fashion models, also the famous 'over the shoulder look' typical of celebrity stars on the Red Carpet is applied at various occasions, creating a glamorous aura about her. "Today, we are surrounded on a daily basis by images of fashion models whose looks conform to a rigid set of normative codes about beauty" (Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 82). Gwyneth Paltrow can be seen as an indicator of what this set of normative codes about beauty looked like in the 1990s.

Gwyneth Paltrow's constantly glamorous screen presence is not without consequences. By the way her perfect image is reproduced again and again on the screen with BCUs of her face and her body being represented "in fetishized parts – legs, lips, breasts, etc.," a certain message is conveyed to the audience. "Detached from the rest of the bod[y] and the [person] of whom they are a part, these body parts represent ideals" (Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 214) to the audience, which are often taken as a measure for comparison and put in relation to the own body, especially by female spectators, which consequently leads to the

> production of what Foucault called the *docile bodies* of the modern state – citizens who participate in the ideologies of the society through cooperation and a desire to fit in and conform. This happens in the vast array of media images that produce homogeneous images for us of the perfect look, the perfect body, and the perfect pose. [...] This means that the norms of beauty and aesthetics which they present, in standards that establish white and Anglo features as the desired look and thinness as the essential body type, can become part of the normalizing gaze that viewers deploy upon themselves. (Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 98)

Film and television as well as fashion magazines and so forth are very likely to communicate distorted ideals of beauty and the female body. Particularly "advertising in this society builds precisely on the creation of an anxiety to the effect that, unless we measure up we will not be loved" (Coward 2001: 38). Being no exception, also *Great Expectations* (1998) communicates a set of

ideologies mirroring the cultural and temporal frame it was produced in, and confronting its audience with the contradiction that

> photography, film and television offer themselves as transparent recordings of reality. But it is in these media where the definitions are tightest, where the female body is most carefully scripted with the prevailing ideals. (Coward 2001: 39)

2.2. *Scrooged* (1988) – A Christmas Carol revisited

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* inevitably returns every year in countless and various forms. The reason for the "endlessness" of the famous carol lies in "the story's identification with Christmas and in the repetition this identification ensures" (Jaffe 1994: 263). As a consequence, the novella

> has long been recognized as an exemplary commodity text for its unabashed celebration of excess and consumption, its alleged commercialization of the 'Christmas spirit,' and the seemingly infinite adaptability and marketability attested to by its annual reappearance as literary text, public reading, theatrical performance, television production, and film. (Jaffe 1994: 263)

Richard Donner's handling of the universally known Dickens novella resulted in a modern reworking of *A Christmas Carol* that is arguably one of the most successful and most popular Christmas movies of the last two decades, which becomes apparent through its box office figures and its annual broadcast on American and European television. What distinguishes Donner's adaptation from countless others[70] is that it sets the chain of events into a contemporary American holiday season and transfers the story into the genre of anarchic film comedy. The characters, therefore, are conformed to fit into the world of contemporary Western consumer culture and quite a number of special effects are included to revamp the story. However, Donner's film is surely not the first attempt to update the carol. *Eye on New York*, for example, which can be seen as the first modernised version of the carol amongst a series, is already dating back to 1955. According to Mark

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[70] For a list and brief descriptions of film, television and video adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* see Pointer 1996: 115-194 and Internet Movie Data Base.

Connelly, *Scrooged* is just "another Americanized reworking of the story in a modern setting" (Connelly 2000: 29).

Nevertheless, *Scrooged* is worth having a closer look at, as it reveals the social structures and discourses predominant at the time it was produced. Not out of the common for a Hollywood comedy of the 1980s, the film is starring Bill Murray, who was one of the best-known as well as best-paid comedians then and who is also famous for two other films often seen in connection with the carol; *Groundhog Day* (1993), which not only comprises elements of the Dickens tale but which is also interpreted as a further adaptation of it,[71] as well as *Ghostbusters* (1984), which also deals with the supernatural. Hence, it is not surprising that in America *Scrooged* "was marketed with references to the film Ghostbusters which had been a great success [four] years earlier in 1984." The tagline on the film poster even directly alluded to the previous film, reading "Bill Murray is back among the ghosts, only this time, it's three against one" (Wikipedia: 'Scrooged').

As already mentioned, *Scrooged* is not the only modernised adaptation of Dickens' most prominent work, neither is it the only adaptation that activates the text within the generic frames of anarchic comedy. In 1988, a further film that is clearly referring to the Dickens novella appeared, namely *Blackadder's Christmas Carol*, a persiflage on the carol that reverses the story, presenting an Ebenezer Blackadder acted by Rowan Atkinson, another popular comedian of the eighties. In this version, Ebenezer is successively transformed from a good and kind soul into a greedy and ruthless man after the spirit of Christmas leads him back to his ancestors and shows him two possible options of his future.[72]

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[71] Cf. Murray Baumgaren, who discusses the two Bill Murray films *Scrooged* and *Groundhog Day* as adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* in his essay "Bill Murray's Christmas Carols (2003: 63-71).

[72] Cf. Wikipedia: 'Blackadder's Christmas Carol.'

2.2.1. Film synopsis

Richard Donner's lunatic and anarchic comedy version of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* resets the world-famous Christmas story into the Reagonite America of the 1980s, rendering it in

> a topcoat of '80s-style postmodernism by having it revolve around the presentation of a live, multimillion-dollar, multinational Christmas special based on the same material. (Hinson 1988)

The grumpy and miserly old Ebenezer Scrooge, who is not able to see any profit coming out of Christmas, is modernised into Francis Xavier Cross, a young and ruthless TV executive with an appalling taste in programmes and a serious lack of social competence. Frank, other than Dickens' Scrooge, knows how to make profit out of Christmas[73], but loathes every other aspect of the holiday season that has nothing to do with its commercial benefits. Noticeably, 'Frank Cross' is a name that already reveals a lot about the main character's personality in the film: his first name proves allusive "to his unpleasantly direct manner with others, while his surname suggests the high level of anger in all his actions and pronouncements" (Paul 1994: 169). Most of the time, the updated Scrooge makes the impression of being "nothing but an expensive black suit who barks orders" (Wikipedia: 'Scrooged') at his subordinates, treating them in the most condescending ways. Frank's black secretary Grace, whose husband was shot dead several years before, and who has had to take care of and provide for her children all on her own since then, serves as the Bob Cratchit figure in the film, together with Eliot Loudermilk, a subordinate who Frank dismisses because he dares to express his opinion about the inappropriateness of Frank's suggestion for a brash commercial promoting the Christmas holiday programming of the channel. Grace's youngest son Calvin, who has not uttered a single word since the death of his father, constitutes the counterpart to Dickens' Tiny Tim.

Generally, the plot structure sticks rather closely to Dickens' 'source' text: Frank is visited by the ghost of Lew Hayward, his former boss and mentor, who remorsefully warns Frank of the erroneous ways his life is taking and

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[73] See Johanson 1999.

predicts the visit of the three Ghosts of Christmas, who then appear in the familiar order. The Ghost of Christmas Past turns out to be a crazed New York cabman with a terribly ruthless way of driving, who bestows a clichéd horror ride on Frank that brings him back to various stages of his life. The Ghost of Christmas Present, then again, is a childlike but somewhat violent woman, who "appears as a pink angel" and "takes every chance to beat him, sometimes quite savagely," which has the effect that "she softens him up for the transformation that will occur when he discovers his own mortality" (Baumgarten 2003: 62). The last ghost to visit Frank is the Ghost of Christmas Future, who seems to have come right there from Star Wars or a similar fantasy movie characteristic of the 1980s. He wears a screen instead of a face and his body is inhabited by alien-like creatures.

Eventually, Frank is transformed into a missionary for the spirit of Christmas, seizing the live broadcast to preach a lengthy speech about the miracle of Christmas Eve, and inviting the audience to get involved in this miracle. The film then finishes with the collective singing of the Annie Lennox & Al Green song 'Put a little love in your heart.'

A scene worth having a closer look at is definitely the opening sequence of the film, introducing the main character Frank Cross. It shows the hustle and bustle in Santa's Workshop on the North Pole and the sudden appearance of 'Six Million Dollar Man' Lee Majors, who, armed with a shotgun, bursts into the workshop which is supposedly seized by psychos, to rescue Santa Claus in a daring mission. As the camera zooms out, the frame of a TV screen becomes recognisable and a voice-over sets in to announce the upcoming broadcast of *The Night the Reindeer Died.* As it turns out, the first few shots are part of a TV commercial promoting the Christmas programming of the fictitious IBC International Broadcasting Company that Frank Cross is working for.

As the camera further zooms out, the IBC logo on the screen is multiplied by the appearance of additional screens surrounding the first.[74] The subsequent

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[74] At this point, *Scrooged* mirrors the "love affair with machines" characteristic of the 1980s. Characteristically, "the films of the eighties seem to be consistently offering images of screens within screens" (Palmer 1993: 14).

shot depicts six employees sitting at a long table, three at each side, with content faces. They are obviously responsible for the commercial. In the obscurity of the background the contours of another person can be made out. Simultaneously, all employees swing around in their chairs to face the person sitting behind them in the darkness, who turns out to be Frank Cross. Frank is introduced immediately after by a close-up of his disapproving and aghast facial expression as the reaction to the commercial just presented; a mien that continues to overshadow his face for almost throughout the film. After an over the shoulder shot showing him opening a drawer with a mirror inside to check if his eye is sinister enough, a second CU of Frank follows, depicting him with an even more sullen look. After an ensuing medium CU on his secretary Grace' worried face, two consecutive reverse shots depict his employees, three a time, still waiting for a response, but this time with quizzical and tense expressions on their faces and seemingly anticipating the troubles they are to get into.

By means of these few introductory shots it is already clearly communicated that Frank is in a superior position to all the other people present in the room. The fact that in the ensuing shots he is mostly presented in a standing position while the others are sitting points out his superiority even more. Director Richard Donner makes use of two main camera positions to communicate Frank's superiority: one represents Frank's point of view and is primarily signified by over the shoulder shots from a very high angle, making Frank appear like a giant compared to his employees, who are forced to look up at him. The corresponding reverse shots from the point of view of his subordinates are shot from a low angle, sometimes even from an extreme low angle, as Frank is standing directly next to them. In this way, Frank's condescension and inhumanity with which he treats his employees is illustrated. His superior position is established further by his yelling and the responding frightened looks of the others.

Frank's demonic appearance as he is standing in front of the multiple screens while his suggestion of a promotional trailer for the live broadcast of 'Scrooge,' an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* starring "Buddy Hackett as

Scrooge, mini-skirted ice-dancers the 'Scroogettes' and a female Tiny Tim who backflips rather than hobbles on the set" (Connelly 2000: 29), is running expresses his great power. Indeed, he almost looks like a devil in the extreme CUs of his face as he is contentedly watching the images of social and environmental catastrophes flickering over the multiple screens. The way he talks along with the voice-over in the trailer and imitates the screaming faces of the depicted victims creates the impression that he has the power over these catastrophes and is ordering them to happen:

> Acid rain.
> Drug addiction.
> International terrorism.
> Freeway killers.
> Now, more than ever...
> ... we must remember the true meaning of Christmas.
> Don't miss Charles Dickens' immortal classic *Scrooge*.
> *Your life might just depend on it.*
> (*Scrooged* 1988)

Frank's sledgehammer method of attracting the attention of the audience and literally terrifying the viewers into watching the live broadcast is surely only possible in a "dramaturgical" society, which is characterised by the use of "technologies of social science, mass communication, theater and the arts" in order "to manage attitudes, behaviors, and feelings of the population in modern mass society" (Young & Massey, quoted in Jeffers 2006: 39).

Having the film revolve around the IBC live broadcast of 'Scrooge,' a theatrical performance of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* within the film, is surely a striking feature of *Scrooged* (1988). However, the idea of including another production of the Dickens text within the film was already seized on in a previous adaptation of the carol, *Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol* from 1962, which is an animated musical version of the Dickensian 'source' adapting the well-known story "within a paratextual context" that is constituted by "the production of a Broadway musical in which Mr. Magoo stars as Scrooge" (Christensen 2005: 151).

Contrary to the main character in *Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol*, Frank is the supervisor of the live show and not an actual member of the cast, though he constantly interferes with the production, making a complete fool of himself

every time. Easily detected, the major theme of *Scrooged* is the juxtaposition of Frank Cross and Ebenezer Scrooge in the play:

> *Scrooged* stages a doubled psychological reading of Dickens's tale. Not only does the film include sections of film-within-a-film dramatization of *A Christmas Carol*, it also parallels the dramatization with Cross's experience, which adapts Scrooge's. (Baumgarten 2003: 62)

This means that Frank experiences his encounters with the three ghosts of Christmas, and accordingly the various stages of his transformation, simultaneously with Ebenezer in the live broadcast of the play. The connective link between Frank and Scrooge is Frank's confusion after each return from an encounter with one of the ghosts of Christmas, which leads to his constant interference with the TV production at instants when Ebenezer is at exactly the same stage of transformation as Frank; immediately after returning from his travel to the past, Frank rudely interrupts the performance at the moment Ebenezer is left by his beloved, for he feels directly addressed by the words of the actress and starts to yell at her. Later on, after his return from his encounter with the 'Ghost of Christmas Present,' he unexpectedly breaks through the backdrop of the play and finds himself standing in the midst of the set. Then, on the way to his office, he once more exposes himself to ridicule by attacking the actor playing the 'Ghost of Christmas Future'[75] in the belief that he is the real ghost. However, Frank's last and most significant intervention takes place at the end of the film: "At the film's climax Cross, having discovered a new way of seeing, knowing, and understanding, enters the televised dramatization of Dickens's tale," this time completely on purpose, "and speaks for its values of generosity, kindness, and connection" (Baumgarten 2003: 62-63). Significantly, Frank's "intervention and entrance into the television dramatization of Dickens's tale breaks the boundary between life and art" (Baumgarten 2003: 62), as Frank first steps into television space, after which he takes one step further and then moves "into cinematic space to address the viewer 'directly'" (Jaffe 1994: 255) in the final scene. Thus, as Bill Murray is preaching and pointing his finger directly into the camera, he is not only addressing the TV audience

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[75] In the 'source' text this ghost is named 'Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come'.

in the film, but also the audience sitting in the cinema hall and, therefore, is shifting between or rather is conflating the three interlaced ontological planes of the IBC live broadcast of 'Scrooge,' the filmic space of *Scrooged,* and the world of the cinema audience.[76]

> The point of this shift is, of course, to frame television space as fictional by seeming to move into a more 'real' space, and the point of his address is to direct spectators to do the same: to become engaged with the world beyond television. (Jaffe 1994: 255)

Interestingly, the medium which Frank tells the audience to stop engaging in is also the very medium that he makes use of to convey his message.[77] Hence, first and last Frank's final speech "is a psychological transformation but, even more, a filmic joining of character and audience in a visual and auditory expression of communal connection" (Baumgarten 2003: 63).

A further interesting aspect of the film *Scrooged* is the kind of humour it feeds on. Screenwriter Michael O'Donoghue, who died of a cerebral haemorrhage in 1994, "was known for his dark and destructive style of comedy and humor" (Wikipedia: 'Michael O'Donoghue'). As a leading writer for the *National Lampoon Magazine* and *Saturday Night Live* he was a key figure in the American comedy scene during the last thirty years of the twentieth century. According to various anecdotes of friends and colleagues, he might be considered as a perfect late-twentieth century version of Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge himself,[78] hence, accounts of his personality strongly remind of the character Frank Cross in *Scrooged*, who is "coarse, condescending, insensitive, brilliant, obsessive, blunt, and the perfect modernization of Scrooge in every way, as was Mike himself" (Movie House: 'Scrooged'). A particularly revealing anecdote is the one about O'Donoghue helping out

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[76] At the very end of the film, Bill Murray is explicitly addressing the audience in the cinema hall by inviting them to join the singing: "Let's hear it from all you out there. You know the words, come on! Let's hear it from this side. That's no good. Let's try the other side. How about just the men? Come on. All right. The real men. All right. The women this time. No, the real women. You know who you are. OK, you! YOU making all the noise! (*Scrooged* 1988)

[77] Cf. Jaffe 1994: 255.

[78] Cf. Movie House: "Scrooged (1988) from Johnny Web and a reader."

Saturday Night Live producer Dick Ebersol, who wanted to revive the sagging spirits of the show in 1981:

> O'Donoghue's volatile personality and mood swings made this difficult: His first day on the show he started yelling and screaming at all the cast members, telling Mary Gross she was as talented as a pair of old shoes, and forcing everyone to write on the walls with magic markers. This horrified Catherine O'Hara so much that she quit before ever appearing on air. [...] According to the book *Live From New York,* O'Donoghue tried to shake things up on that first day by saying 'this is what the show lacks' and spray-painting the word 'DANGER' on the wall of his office. (Wikipedia: 'Michael O'Donoghue').

The fact that Michael O'Donoghue was apparently a modern-day Scrooge himself adds one more layer to the film's *mise en abyme* of Scrooge personalities: a modern-day Scrooge writes the screenplay to a film about a contemporary Scrooge supervising a live TV broadcast of Charles Dickens' story about Scrooge.

Moreover, it is important to note that O'Donoghue's particular sense of humour, which was very dark and with a strong touch of sadism, certainly left its traces in the film. Together with his co-writer Mitch Glazer he created a rather dark and satirical screenplay approaching the 'source' from a "Franz Kafka school of comedy" (Movie House: 'Scrooged') perspective. However, in his biography O'Donoghue is said to have been really angry and discontent with the final version of the film, as he felt that only around 40 percent of his and Glazer's material was finally to be seen to the screen, "and even that got twisted" (O'Donoghue, quoted in Perrin 1999: 409). This is mainly due to the completely different approach of director Richard Donner, who "had the commercial touch" (Perrin 1999: 409) and focused more on the slapstick side of the comedy:

> [Donner] wanted laughs instantly and during filming tended to extract broad takes from the actors. O'Donoghue felt that Donner didn't understand humor, that to him loud and fast equaled funny. Thus the subtler material never made it on the film [...], and the scenes that were meant to be played straight received the Donner comedy treatment: mugging, yelling, elbows in the ribs. (Perrin 1999: 409)

The incompatibility of O'Donoghue's and Glazer's humour with Donner's conception of funniness eventually resulted in the film being a hotchpotch, "borrow[ing] from different traditions of comedy, mixing satire and slapstick in a haphazard manner" (Connelly 2000: 30). A further influential factor was certainly Bill Murray, who again had his own understanding of humour. The salient final speech in the film, for instance, was completely improvised by Murray. His "hyperactive finale" (Movie House: 'Scrooged'), which is of considerable length, sticks out of the whole film and generally evoked the feeling that the actor was having "an on-screen breakdown" (Ebert 1988).[79]

As Connelly suggests, *Scrooged* itself, in being the result of an exceptional collaboration and affiliation of various styles of comedy, "belongs to the same crass tradition of popular culture which it sets out to satirize" (Connelly 2000: 30).

2.2.2. The 1980s: Reaganism and yuppiedom

The 1980s witnessed an eight-year presidency of Ronald Reagon (1981 – 1989), with the consequence that a whole decade was dominated by the so-called Reaganism and the political initiatives the former actor set. "Reagan's victory in the presidential election of 1980 marked a fundamental shift in American politics, economics and culture," which was mainly characterised by his explicit turning away from the predominant liberalism in the 1960s and 1970s as well as his "strong support from the religious right. However, he was also opposed to state regulation of the economy and championed free-market capitalism" (Grainge *et al* 2007: 461).

As film historicist William Palmer observes, "the Reagan agenda changed everything in America and by as early as 1982 had also changed the very nature of Hollywood films" (Palmer 1993: 12). Hollywood acquired a specific style at that time, which is often referred to as 'high concept,' and which was "responding to key industrial developments [...], such as the widespread adoption of marketing research and the growth of ancillary markets" (Grainge

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[79] See also Perrin 1999: 408.

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et al 2007: 483).[80] Consequently, "high concept movies were often based on pre-sold elements such as a best-selling book or comic strip, and emphasised a distinctive style" in that they "mobilised bold images and music, and the marketability of particular stars, to maximise their presence and appeal" (Grainge *et al* 2007: 483).[81] Palmer points out that, "as a by-product of Reagan-era political conservatism," the 1980s were also characterised by "a growing cynicism toward America's moral stature in the world community" (Palmer 1993: 12), which was reflected by the accordingly increasing cynicism in the films of the eighties.

Unsurprisingly, the eighties "are often thought of as a period defined by excesses of style and consumption, a 'postmodern' moment where the aesthetics of consumer culture" (Grainge *et* al 2007: 483) were put in the foreground. Domestic consequences of the Reaganomics "took shape in a national fixation upon materialism as exemplified in the yuppie phenomenon" (Palmer 1993: 12). Consequently, a prominent image that was presented in comedies and film texts of the eighties in general was "America's cities being taken over by roving gangs of young urban professionals wearing three-piece suits," driving expensive cars, and "flauning their Gold Card wealth in an orgy of material acquisitiveness" (Palmer 1993: 280). Moreover, filmic texts about

> urban yuppie materialism also exhibited a neoconservative style fostered by Reagonomics. The yuppie drives to make large amounts of money quickly, to succeed in a ruthless competitive world, to acquire the most expensive material goods, [...] to sacrifice (especially human relationships) for one's job, mirrored the Reagan administration's deficit spending policies and hi-tech defence system acquisitions. Eighties yuppies saw their ruthless competitive work ethic and their consumptive materialism as hedges and buffers against an increasingly unstable terrorist- and nuclear- and deficit-threatened world. (Palmer 1993: 280)

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[80] The increasing importance of market research in the eighties is reflected in *Scrooged* with considerable cynism, when Frank's boss mentions a "study which shows that cats and dogs are beginning to watch television" and might become "steady viewers" within some years. His suggestion that they "should start programming" immediately and "occasionally throw in a little pet appeal" (*Scrooged* 1988) surely sounds quite ridiculous, but perfectly communicates an eighties attitude.

[81] Basing its plot on the universally known Dickens text *A Christmas Carol* and, moreover, starring 1980s comedy icon Bill Murray, *Scrooged* fully conforms to the 1980s Hollywood high concept.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that, in the 1980s, many filmic protagonists "were businessmen or marketing executives or advertising geniuses" (Palmer 1993: 280-281). A glance at showcase yuppie Michael J. Fox's filmography of the eighties, for instance, should reveal a considerable number of examples for such yuppie film texts. Indeed, the vast number of films issuing yuppiedom in the eighties resulted in the general acceptance of the youthful money makers "as part of the American landscape" by the end of the decade, though "not without some contempt" (Palmer 1993: 281). However, the mockery and ridicule lessened and films started dealing more seriously with the topic, issuing the problems and pressures yuppies were confronted with.[82]

With Palmer's and Grainge's *et al* accounts of America's political and socio-economic trends in the eighties in mind, I will now take a closer look at how Reaganism, and the phenomenon of the yuppies in particular, is reflected in the film *Scrooged*, chiefly by means of main character Frank Cross, a narcissistic yuppie of the 1980s and appropriate postmodern version of Charles Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge. As I suggest, the film is truly representative of the eighties comedy scene in the sense that it takes part in the decade's typical and "ongoing fascination for the intricacies and ironies of the yuppie lifestyle," which is not surprising at all, considering that "the satiric comedy [was] the most prominent vehicle for the representation of the excesses of eighties materialism" (Palmer 1993: xiv, 14) connected with the yuppie phenomenon.

> Every society reproduces its culture – its norms, its underlying assumptions, its modes of organizing experience – in the individual, in the form of personality. (Lasch 1979: 34)

This quotation, taken from American social critic Christopher Lasch's famous book *The Culture of Narcissism* from 1979, emphasises the significant influence a particular person's cultural background wields upon that person's personality, which constitutes a reciprocal action that, at the same time, also implies the representativeness of an individual of its respective culture. Seen

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[82] For more details on eighties films dealing with yuppiedom, see "The Yuppie Texts," Palmer 1993: 280-307.

in the light of the Reaganite eighties, the narcissistic yuppie might be considered as a typical representative of that period, as the prevailing Reaganism at that time left its traces in the personality and lifestyle of the yuppie. Hence, in the case of *Scrooged,* main character Frank Cross, a megalomaniacal yuppie, perfectly reflects the period the film was produced in. Moreover, the fact that Bill Murray is acting Frank Cross adds meaning to the character in terms of Bill Murray's status as a key figure in the 1980s comedy scene. Indeed, Murray is not an empty shell; there are many associations with his persona that consequently merge into his roles and contribute to the audience's perception of the characters he is playing. Thus, factors like Murray's former roles, his style of acting, and his personal history in general all become part of the meaning Murray adds on his roles, which inevitably goes hand in hand with certain expectations aroused by his screen presence. As journalist Timothy White notes, "the obvious question of whether Bill Murray can shine as someone other than himself is inevitably intertwined with the issue of who Bill Murray is" (White 1988), which is probably the reason why, according to *Tootsie* producer Sydney Pollack, the actor is "a completely believable comic illuminator" (Pollack, quoted in White 1988).

Bill Murray started his career as a participant of the *National Lampoon's Animal House* and, later, continued as Chevy Chase's successor hosting the American comedy show *Saturday Night Live* in the late 1970s. After two years on the show he moved into film business and, with the successes of *Caddyshack* (1980)*, Stripes* (1982), *Ghostbusters* (1984) and *Scrooged* (1988), became a key figure as well as one of the best paid actors in the genre of Comedy during the 1980s.[83] "As an actor whose screen persona is balanced between proletarian slob and egalitarian snob, he has become

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[83] In an interview from 1988, *Scrooged* producer Art Linson revealed that Bill Murray received a higher fee for the movie "than the producer, director and cast combined." Nevertheless, the actor was selected as the main character in *Scrooged*, because, as Linson put it, "his name across the marquee will sell over $10 million worth of tickets in the opening three of four days. The only two actors, serious or comic, who can guarantee that degree of turnout in 1988 are Bill Murray and Eddie Murphy. That factor is the source of Billy's power in Hollywood" (Linson, quoted in White 1988), which again mirrors the eighties as "a decade of commercial performance" (Palmer 1993: xiii) and the general attitude in the Hollywood of the eighties, where truth was "measured in box-office receipts" (Mathews, quoted in Palmer 1993: xiii).

something of an icon of the genre" (Paul 1994: 155). Interestingly, Murray's characters in the eighties are typically aggressive, mostly adopting a mocking tone, and "Murray inevitably and unironically moves into the power position in his movies," observes film critic William Paul in his study on Bill Murray's persona as "anarchic conservative" in the American comedy scene (Paul 1994: 161).

The anger and aggression typical of Murray's performances is also apparent in *Scrooged*, which, released in 1988, was produced in the heyday of the actor's career. At the beginning of the film

> Murray is all sadistic aggression, but (strikingly, in light of earlier films) the sadism here is given a pronounced narcissistic turn. Just as he is about to berate subordinates to the point of humiliating them, he pulls open a drawer as if to check for something. An overhead shot reveals him looking into a mirror to make sure that his expression is appropriately ferocious;

an action that "openly points to a vulnerability in the character, an uncertainty of any real strength" (Paul 1994: 168-169).

In his analysis *The Culture of Narcissism,* Christopher Lasch talks about "cultural narcissism as a response to anxiety, and a social strategy for people who lack a secure sense of their selves." This anxiety, in turn, is caused by prevailing social systems "that fail to educate and support people in being aware of their identities as human beings with rights and responsibilities," and, in this manner, "promote extravagant and grandiose behaviour," leading to "the evolution of the modern, technological, materialist, consumption-oriented, personally liberated, nominally egalitarian American society," in which "people are insecure because they are in fact vulnerable." As a consequence, evermore "people are adopting narcissistic strategies to protect themselves. One strategy is making a grandiose show of [them]selves" (Lasch 1979, quoted in Damlyn 2005) in order to compensate for their weaknesses, and in the hope that, in this way, they are able "to cover up or deny the threatening disturbance within their own being" – a strategy that is "typical of the so-called yuppies of the 1980s" (Bocola 1999: 564).

As the "youngest president in the history of television" (*Scrooged* 1988), Frank Cross leads a very successful professional life and can be considered a showcase yuppie; a typical "young urban professional," or "young upwardly-mobile professional," respectively, and element of the "market segment whose consumers are characterized as self-reliant, financially secure individualists" (Wikipedia: 'Yuppie'). Yet, however financially secure Frank may be, his yuppie lifestyle, signifying a "culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all," is directing his "pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self" (Lasch 1979, quoted in Rosen 2005). In other words, in Frank's world, there is only room for himself ("If you want to save somebody, save yourself" (*Scrooged* 1988)), and happiness is weighed up in dollar bills. He acts accordingly closefisted when it comes to his Christmas list, or when Herman asks him to help out with two dollars. Only after the visits of the three ghosts of Christmas, who show him that there exists a world beyond the boundaries of his egocentrism, he starts to develop a sense of empathy for the people around him.

Rethinking Christopher Lasch's ideas on narcissism, Tony Dalmyn argues that there are different ways in which narcissism affects a person. Thus, narcissistic people either "appear to be neurotic, needy and passive-aggressive, or may present as a self-confident person, focussed to the point of being obsessed" and, like Frank Cross in *Scrooged*, "perhaps a bully or a predator" (Damlyn 2005). According to Damlyn, "in modern therapeutic literature, narcissism tends to refer to the more aggressive presentations" of the cultural phenomenon:

> Mental health professionals used to use the term megalomania as the formal DSM[84] diagnostic category for individuals with a personality problem marked by a grandiose sense of the self. The colloquial term was egotism. In 1980, DSM started referring to it as Narcissistic Personality Disorder. The clinical disorder is marked by lack of empathy for other persons, manipulative actions, grandiose fantasies and pretentious behaviour. Narcissism isn't an especially popular term, but it has gone into common usage to describe people who might otherwise be

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[84] DSM is short for 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders'.

described as vain, conceited, arrogant, pretentious, selfish, self-absorbed or manipulative. (Damlyn 2005)

In these premises, Frank Cross is the perfect narcissist. However, his self-aggrandising demeanour and the sheer condescending and mocking way in which he treats his subordinates – when he is not actually yelling at them – have to be seen as mere self-defence mechanisms, serving to hide his vulnerability and complete dependence on the adulation from his fellow people. In many ways, Frank's behaviour is reminiscent of a child, which is not very surprising considering that, according to traditional Freudian theory, such narcissistic patterns are usually observed with younger children:

> Radically dependent and frightened of being alone, the child tries to be recognized by adults, to control adults, and find a sense of peace and security. This explains the child's fears, demands for attention, fantasy life, and extreme emotions. This kind of process is normal in children, but abnormal for adults. (Dalmyn 2005)

Hence, Frank's often childlike behaviour in the film is indicative of his narcissistic personality dysfunction. "Narcissists [...] are so insecure about themselves that they constantly demand attention and constantly try to control other people" (Dalmyn 2005), a behaviour pattern that is clearly observable with Frank Cross. Like a young child he commands attention from his subordinates and his former fiancée Claire, and tries to impose his will on everybody by permanently yelling and shouting at everyone, which seems to work with his fellow people, though not with the ghosts of Christmas, as he has to realise very soon.

Frank's childlike and narcissistic behaviour can be observed particularly well in the scene where he visits Claire in the homeless shelter with the intention to take her out for Chinese food. His whining monologue on the way to the shelter is already highly revealing about his narcissistic view on life and his vulnerability and discontentment, which he seems to be particularly aware of after his unsettling encounter with the ghost of Christmas past:

> It's lonely at the top? It's not! Oh, maybe, round my birthday, and at sunset, and every couple of weekends, I needed a really normal person. That's me. I'm a widow of business! It's my life! I've chosen it! [...] When I want a wife, I'm gonna BUY one! She's gonna be devoted to me, to my wants and my needs. (*Scrooged* 1988)

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Later, when Claire, momentarily having other obligations of higher priority, tells Frank to wait a few minutes until she has handled some phone calls before she is able to accompany him, he gets into a huff because he is denied her full attention and leaves immediately, feeling deeply offended. Having to acknowledge that there are things that Claire gives priority over having dinner with him is highly irritating for Frank, and not acceptable for the completely self-centred yuppie, who does not seem to be aware of all the people around him that are in real need of attention.

William Paul, who in his book *Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy* dedicates an entire chapter to Bill Murray's screen persona,[85] argues that Murray's nature to be "driven by the demands of an infinitely expanding self that tries to gain control over every circumstance" is not only characteristic of him when playing Frank Cross in the film *Scrooged*, but in fact applies to his persona in general. Characteristically, "the incessantly mocking tone by which he gains control points to an inner emptiness, an inability to convey belief and a sense of commitment." As a consequence, he is constantly in need of being adulated by others in order to compensate for this inner emptiness and, thus, "Murray's connection to others is defined in narcissistic terms: the adulation they can grant provides a way of defining self." Observing closely, "a real sense of pain" can be detected in all this, which "occasionally surfaces in the masochism and the whiny tone in his delivery," as for instance in the monologue on his way to the homeless shelter mentioned above, "but it is always quickly camouflaged by mockery" (Paul 1994: 171). The most revealing example of the manner in which Bill Murray's narcissistic and power-crazed screen persona usurps the control in every situation is Frank Cross' final speech in *Scrooged*, whose ending "finds a thoroughly battered Murray pleading for a nation of goodwill and traditional family values." Although, at this stage of the film, "Murray has apparently changed his message from self-indulgence to reaching out, he once again has the force with him" (Paul 1994: 169), not only in the sense that Loudermilk is holding part of the crew as hostages on behalf of Frank Cross, forcing them to keep the cameras on him as he conveys his message,

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[85] Cf. Paul, chapter 9: "Bill Murray, Anarchic Conservative" (1994: 155-176).

but also in the sense that the people watching the live broadcast are apparently all "powerfully influenced by his message," and in the end are all "doing exactly what he urges them to do." As regards film technique, Murray's force is communicated by "a series of cutaways to people watching their TV sets," who all seem to be taken with his outburst of emotions. This gives "a very high pitch" to Murray's final rhetoric, "not just in Murray's speech but in the sequence itself, for the insistent cutaways try to convince us by actions much as Murray is trying to convince by words" (Paul 1994: 169). Yet, it is important to note that

> the rhetorical strategy is necessary not just for the movie to try to convince us of its sincerity, but to cover over a key problem with the plot at this point. Why should Murray find the chief means of showing his redemption by *preaching* to others? As the film presents it, he is just about the only character who *doesn't* understand the spirit of Christmas, so no one else but him really needs such preaching. Murray can signal his conversion solely by trying to impose his will on others, and in this regard the film has arrived at a fairly familiar strategy for Murray's persona. (Paul 1994: 169)

Correspondingly, Frank communicates his message in the quintessential Murray manner, which is in a partly ranting, partly whining tone. He invites everyone to celebrate and enjoy Christmas, and gives instructions how to take part in the miracle of Christmas Eve. However, his invitation sounds more like an order at times and, at one point, he even threats that everybody who does not take part in this miracle will pay for it: "It's really a miracle because it happens every Christmas Eve. And if you waste that miracle, you're gonna burn for it. I know" (*Scrooged* 1998).

At this point, it is important to call back to mind that Murray did not follow the screenplay in this final scene, but very much improvised "the bullying rhetoric of Cross's final exhortation," as already mentioned before. Hence, "the demanding aggressiveness with which he browbeats a nation of television viewers within the film and a nation of movie viewers in the theaters" (Paul 1994: 169-170) can be considered as an outburst of emotions coming out of Bill Murray rather than from the character he is playing.[86] As a consequence,

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[86] It is said that Bill Murray was very nervous before this final speech and he allegedly worried about how to perform it: "Murray felt he had to emote, but Glazer told him to just

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Bill Murray's persona becomes particularly palpable in the redemption speech, and is even dominating the entire scene, which consequently turns out somewhat contradictory, as, although "by the end of this version there is an attempt to believe deeply and fully in the message" that Dickens was trying to communicate in the 'source' text,

> the message has been turned into pure rhetoric by which the messenger himself is made more important than the message. The rhetoric is necessary to mask the inner hollowness that must never be allowed to surface in an era of image-making where one is what one appears to be, where belief can be achieved by enunciation. For Murray, if the rhetoric is strong enough to create belief in others – if it is presented in a sufficiently insistent way with all the puling aggressiveness he can muster (which is considerable) – then perhaps belief in the outside world can create a sense of belief in the inner world of self. (Paul 1994: 170)

2.2.3. The spirit of contemporary American Christmas

In what follows, I will first provide an outline of how American Christmas took on its contemporary shape and, subsequently, I will continue with a discussion on the influences consumerism and capitalism wield upon contemporary American Christmas as well as with having a look at how the festivities are represented in the popular media, illustrated by the example of Richard Donner's 1988 film comedy *Scrooged.*

Christmas, as it is celebrated today, is the result of an evolutionary process taking place over the course of centuries. Many of the contemporary Christmas practices and traditions are rooting in the pre-Christian era, when midwinter festivals were celebrated by the Romans and Germanic people in late December as a "time of feasting and drunkenness" (McGreevy 1990: 34). Evergreens symbolising everlasting life and bright lights that used to ornament the buildings can be seen as the forerunners of modern Christmas decorations.

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say the lines and to play the scene as written. When the scene was shot, Murray, who wanted a big acting moment, went emotionally wild; Glazer, standing with O'Donoghue off-camera, thought the actor was having a breakdown. The camera followed Murray as he ignored his marks and improvised his speech." (Perrin 1999: 408)

However important Christmas celebrations might be nowadays, none of the weight Christmas season holds today inhered in the festival in the earlier days, rather it "had very little significance when compared with the real heart of Christianity, the Resurrection" (Connelly 2000: 1). Indeed, the festival threatened to die out and sink into oblivion during Reformation and Renaissance, mainly due to the condemnation of the celebrations "as a popish, uncanonical extravagance" (Connelly 2000: 2) by protestants. From 1647 to 1660, Christmas was even banned in puritan England, and also in colonial America the celebrations were met with disapproval.[87] Only in the late eighteenth century and particularly at the beginning of the Victorian era, "the English rediscovered their past Christmas heritage" and started to "reinvigorate, investigate and revive" (Connelly 2000: 2) the festival, which led to the widespread but erroneous assumption that Christmas was invented by the Victorians. Nevertheless, it is by courtesy of the Victorians that the modern Christmas, as it is celebrated today in America, took on its very shape.

Christmas at the end of the eighteenth century was still very different from the contemporary celebrations, in that gifts were already given but, contrary to today's practices, they "moved outside the family in hierarchical structures" and "were generally food, often given as feasting" (Carrier 1993: 65). This changed with the rising of industrial capitalism in America, which brought about "a growing sense of the household as a realm of domestic affection distinct from the outside world" (Matthews 1987, quoted in Carrier 1993: 66). As a consequence, "the family and its relationships became the subject of seasonal celebration" (Carrier 1993: 66).

As "the festival gradually became more urban, more middle-class, and more commercial" (McGreevy 1990: 35) during the nineteenth century, Christmas eventually began to assume the basic forms in which it is celebrated today. At that time it was already a family feast, and the carol, decorations and Christmas trees, as well as the exchange of gifts were all part of the festivities. Furthermore, pantomimes became popular and "dining and partying flowered again" (Connelly 2000: 3). That the locality of Christmas

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[87] Cf. Wikipedia: 'Christmas.'

celebrations changed to the homes of the people in the mid-nineteenth century, has to be seen as "part of a fundamental transformation in American life" that "involved a new conception of the family, the home, childhood, and work" (McGreevy 1990: 37).[88]

Charles Dickens' universally known novella *A Christmas Carol* contributed enormously to the present-day notion of Christmas and the sentiments connected with it. Being a key symbol of the nineteenth century renaissance of Christmas[89], the carol was already extremely popular shortly after it first appeared in 1843, when "Dickens read from the work on long American tours, where many people reported being strongly affected by the sentiments he expressed" (Carrier 1993: 67). Hence, not only the English Christmas was influenced by Charles Dickens' image of the blithe family Christmas, connected with strong sentiments, but also Christmas in America, which "adopted many of these themes and took Dickens to its heart" (Connelly 2000: 3). Because it was so widely popular and important in the nineteenth century, *A Christmas Carol* often "is said to mark the onset of modern Christmas" (Carrier 1993: 67).

However, Dickens' carol was not only popular during his life time, indeed it is still inevitably connected with Christmas today, which becomes apparent by its annual reappearance in the most different forms. With *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge*, Paul Davis dedicated a whole book to the process of how "the story of Scrooge began as a text and became a culture-text" (Davis 1990: 5). According to him, "*A Christmas Carol* could be said to have two texts: the one that Dickens wrote in 1843 and the one that we collectively remember," which Davis refers to as the "culture-text." Hence, *A Christmas Carol* "is fixed in Dickens' words," whereas the collectivity of recreations of the carol since it first appeared, that is the culture-text, "changes as the reasons for its retelling change." Thus, "we are still creating the culture-text of the Carol" (Davis 1990: 4) assuming that, "reappearing in new guises from page to page and from age to age, Scrooge is a protean

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[88] For more detailed accounts of the history of Christmas in America and Christmas in general, see Connelly 2000, Miller 1993, Restad 1995 and McGreevy 1990.

[89] Cf. Connelly 2000: 3.

figure always in process of reformation" and, therefore, can be considered as "common cultural property" that "is deeply embedded in our consciousness" (Davis 1990: 5).

The fundamental message of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is

> that Christmas [is] primarily a family celebration focused on children, in contrast with the old celebration, which had been a public affair geared to the entertainment of adults. Dickens also emphasized the humanitarian aspect of the festival. Like many of his contemporaries, he refused to accept the prevailing social order as natural and inevitable: Christmas could be a time to juxtapose the world as it is with what it should be. (McGreevy 1990: 35)

Hence, *A Christmas Carol* does not simply tell the story of the conversion of a miserly and sour old man into a benevolent and benign person, who discovers the joys of Christmas, but it also implies an intense social critique. In fact, with help of the famous novella as well as his other Christmas stories, "Dickens and his readers created a Christmas whose prime concern was precisely the central problem of the new materialism," namely the concern of "how in a world of increasing commodification was one to enjoy the benefits of an escape from poverty" without being "lost in the reification and asocial abstractions of goods as commodities" (Miller 1993: 19) at the same time. In Ebenezer Scrooge, "Dickens personified the rising tide of materialism in the nineteenth century that has now reached flood stage in our affluent twentieth century society" (Wrigg 1959: 537).

As already discussed, in the Victorian era Christmas underwent the most fundamental transformations and, by the end of the nineteenth century, "a distinct set of rituals, expectations, and attitudes" was associated with Christmas that has "endured and perhaps grown stronger in the twentieth century." Thus, to this day, Christmas is predominantly a family feast, and in America it is still customary to "trim the tree, send cards, wait for Santa, feast, sing, shop for and give gifts to excess, and respond to pleas for charity and social harmony." Even though "changes in society and the economy have modified many of the particular ways in which [Americans] keep" Christmas traditions, "its larger themes retain a remarkable fidelity to those of the nineteenth century" (Restad 1995: 155).

Around the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, "Christmas became increasingly a public occasion in its own right," and the placement of a community Christmas tree as well as the arrangement of open air music during Christmas week became a common practice in the U.S. Hence, while still primarily a family feast, Christmas was celebrated more and more as a public communal festival, too, which "mirrored the patterns of home and, especially, church celebration" (Restad 1995: 156). Moreover, the character of Christmas was altered by "the exigencies of market-driven economics" (Restad 1995: 159) and, today, Christmas is primarily characterised by the three aspects of family, materialism, and syncretism.[90] In his essay "A theory of Christmas," Daniel Miller points out this syncretism of contemporary Christmas, which

> extracts the Christmas tree from the German tradition, the filling of stockings from the Dutch tradition, the development of Santa Claus mainly from the United States, the British Christmas card, and many other such elements. Folkloristic accounts of Christmas indicate that up to this time the festival is so permeated by specific local elements that it presents a picture of quite spectacular heterogeneity. (Miller 1993: 4)

Thus, contemporary American Christmas constitutes a blending of a number of traditional practices from various cultures. Through the influence of popular culture in the twentieth century, the American version of the festival has been, and still is spreading across the world and nowadays can be seen as a universal phenomenon. "Indeed Christmas is today *the* global festival" (Miller 1993: 5). However, the worldwide dispersal of the feast also leads to the consequence that the meaning of Christmas is constantly adapted to the requirements of different cultures, so that the feast is at risk to become more like a fashion or a trend without any religious profoundness in certain parts of the world.[91] Nevertheless,

> despite the tremendous dynamism of popular culture over the twentieth century, it is argued that Christmas has been relatively little altered. Rather each new medium has attempted to appropriate it, as we find with Christmas films of Christmas pop music. The main modern controversy has been whether the most

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[90] Cf. Miller 1993: 26.

[91] As for example in Japan, cf. Moeran & Skov 1993: 105-133.

powerful of these new forces, that of commerce, has been so successful in its appropriation as to overturn and then destroy the spirit of Christmas celebrated by Dickens. (Miller 1993: 4)

This commercial aspect of Christmas is particularly inherent in the figure of Santa Claus, who is typically used for commercial purposes. As Santa is omnipresent in shopping malls and department stores all over the world, even in countries where he is not traditionally part of the prevailing Christmas traditions, or where Christmas is originally not celebrated at all, he might be seen as a symbol for consumerism. In the introduction to his book *Unwrapping Christmas,* Daniel Miller even talks about the "evolution of Santa Claus as the 'deity' of materialism" (Miller 1993: 20). Santa's popularity is mainly due to his steady appearance in the popular media, as for instance in the endless number of Christmas films and in a vast number of commercials.[92]

Indeed, the commerciality of Christmas increasingly gained the upper hand from the nineteenth century onwards and, in these days, "many industries [...] and the consumer economy in general rely on Christmas sales to carry them through the year" (Restad 1995: 160). What is more,

> besides creating a spatial sense of Christmas that set the season visually apart from the remainder of the year, commerce also exploited the flimsy partition between the sacred and profane time at Christmas, beginning its quest for holiday profits in late November or still earlier at Halloween and before. (Restad 1995: 161)

The increasing "commerce and consumerism as a central feature of the American economy determined the customs of Christmas charity and, more obviously, gift-giving" (Restad 1995: 123). Every year, people flock to the shopping malls, where "stores and shops throughout the nation [offer] the consumer an ever-growing feast of choices, nearly any of which might be made a gift" (Restad 1995: 124). Nevertheless, Christmas shopping is often experienced as a difficult and challenging task, which is mostly due to the fact that "capitalism reduces all interpersonal relationships to a means of exchange or commodity" (Jeffers 2006: 34) and, thus, the choice of the

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[92] In the first half of the twentieth century, Santa already "pitched for a host of products, from socks to typewriters to Coca-Cola." (Restad 1995: 163)

present is highly important, considering that it serves as a symbol for the relationship between the giver and the receiver of the gift.

Gifts, then, are not merely neutral material objects, more importantly, "they express and recreate a range of social values" (Carrier 1993: 55), in other words, "gifts act as tangible evidence of ties between and among individuals" (Restad 1995: 125). Seen within the context of *Scrooged,* Frank Cross' choice of Christmas presents speaks volumes about his interpersonal relationships. The fact that his intention to give his brother a bath towel for Christmas is met with disapproval by his assistant Grace tells us that the gift is considered as inappropriate by her. Doubtlessly, the film aims at provoking the same feeling of disapproval within the audience, as this is part of the humour anarchic comedies like *Scrooged* are typical of. However, although Frank's actions in *Scrooged* are highly exaggerated and not supposed to be taken seriously, the film clearly conveys that there are certain expectations and unspoken rules in the tradition of Christmas giving. As can be easily read off Grace's facial expression, Frank's gift does not meet these expectations at all, which reveals a lot about his poor relation to his only brother as well his disturbed social values and morality. The reason for the inappropriateness of Frank's gift for his brother, and which conclusions can be drawn from his choice of gift about their relationship becomes apparent when seen within the frame of Marcel Mauss' theory of how social relations are expressed by gifts that are exchanged, especially at Christmas, which he introduced in his work *The Gift.*

Mauss distinguishes between 'gift relations' and 'commodity relations,' which constitute the two opposite poles of a continuum describing social relations. According to this view, 'gifts' are exchanged between people that are enduringly "linked to each other and to the things around them [...]. These links are the basis of people's identities and they define people's obligations to each other" (Mauss 1985, quoted in Carrier 1993: 55). Consequently, "gift relations are characterized by the transaction of inalienable objects," meaning they are "never completely detached from those carrying out the exchange," since the respective object is always "identified with the giver"

(Mauss 1990: 33, Carrier 1993: 56). Therefore, gift exchanges are almost entirely restricted to the core family and a narrow circle of friends.

The exchange of 'commodities,' then again, constitutes the link between

> isolated individuals whose identities spring from internal sources and whose relations with others are governed by personal will rather than interpersonal identity and obligation. (Carrier 1993: 56)

People exchanging commodities, hence, are "self-interested, independent individuals who exchange with people with whom they have no enduring links or obligations" (Carrier 1991: 121).

With Mauss' argumentation in mind, I suggest that the inappropriateness of Frank Cross giving a bath towel to his brother for Christmas lies in the fact that, although the relationship between the two brothers is naturally of an enduring kind, the present Frank gives implies that there is no such interpersonal identity between them and, in this way, their relationship is transferred to the commodity pole. It is not so much the fact that the object given is actually a bath towel that renders their relation a commodity one, but rather the fact that it is the very same object Frank is giving to his business partners. Thus, he puts his family on the same interrelational level as his partners and, in that way, isolates himself from his brother. This can be demonstrated by the fact that "objects in commodity relations are 'fungible',", meaning they are interchangeable with "another item meeting the requisite definition" (Carrier 1991: 127), while personal gifts are not, as they are unique and only exist in the very form they are given at one specific point in a certain ritualised way, i.e. they are "specified by the people exchanging [them] and the unique moment of the exchange" (Baudrillard 1981: 64, quoted in Carrier 1991: 126). Consequently, the bath towel is only an impersonal commodity, since it is fungible and could be exchanged by any other bath towel out of the great number available to Frank. Neither is it specified by a certain moment of exchange, since Frank is sending it by mail. Consequently, Frank's gift for his brother clearly is not representative of their relationship, since brothers are culturally considered as "brothers because of their very biological substance [...] and neither can be replaced by anyone else" (Carrier 1991: 127). Therefore, the towel is completely inappropriate as

a gift when seen within the cultural frames of Western society. What makes the gift even more inadequate is the fact that it is only the bath towel and not even the VCR, [93] which Frank gives to some of his important business partners.

The reason for Frank's inability to chose a proper gift for his brother is that he cannot distinguish "between gift and commodity," a distinction that normally "finds expression in people's understandings of the distinction between home and the world of work and the economy more generally" (Schneider 1980, quoted in Carrier 1993: 56). As for Frank the sole thing in life is business, he is not able to make a differentiation between home and work, and thus, neither between gift and commodity. To bluntly simplify the distinction between home and work, it might be said that, whereas "home is the world of durable and affectionate relationships, where things are done for love," the notion of work refers to "a world of fleeting relationships and self-interest, where things are done for money" (Carrier 1993: 56).

In Frank's world, home and work amount to the same thing, at least before he makes a volte-face and is miraculously transformed into a person that appreciates and lives the spirit of Christmas. As he is made aware by the ghost of Christmas past, who takes him back to Christmas Eve 1955 to pay witness to an unpleasant incident in his childhood, his attitude towards Christmas and life in general, as well as his inability to distinguish between home and work, both root early in his seemingly miserable childhood:

> Father: You here, Francis? I've got something for ya.
> Mother: Merry Christmas.
> Frank: A choo-choo train?
> Father: No, it's 4lb of veal.
> Frank: But, Daddy, I asked Santa for a choo-choo.
> Father: Then go and get a job and buy a choo-choo!
> Mother: Earl, he's only four years old.
> Father: All day I listen to excuses why people can't work – My back hurts. My legs ache. I'm only four! – He's gotta learn that life doesn't come on a silver platter. (*Scrooged* 1988)

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[93] The VCR mirrors the 'video revolution' that was taking place at the time *Scrooge* was produced. During the eighties, "home video has become a way of life in millions of homes around the world. The convenience and ease of viewing entertainment at any time of day or night has been accepted and celebrated by millions of VCR owners" (Wasko 1991: 477).

This scene, besides reflecting the poor relationship between Frank and his uncaring father, which serves as an explanation for the antisocial and unacceptable behaviour of the grown-up Frank, also points to the expectations associated with the giving of presents in general. James Carrier suggests that "in modern capitalist societies, the fact that the gift should be a possession[94] creates problems" (Carrier 1993: 56), as ,with regard to presents, there are two sides of the coin: "On the one hand it is a commodity purchased for money in an impersonal transaction, and on the other it is a gift to express affection in a personal relationship" (Carrier 1993: 55), which renders the giver into a difficult situation, as gifts are moreover often connected with high expectations that are almost impossible to meet. This, again, creates stress and anxiety, as the objects "commonly available for use as gifts" are considered as inappropriate, since

> these objects are unsuited to what people want them to mean and to be, for they bear no human identity or being. They are manufactured in the world of work and express only the impersonal desire for profit by the company that made them and the impersonal acting out of work roles, lightly adopted and in return for money, by the unknown people who produced them. (Carrier 1993: 59)

However, such objects still have a social meaning, in that a person can be identified by the objects he or she possesses,[95] though "this social meaning is impersonal in that it refers to abstract categories of sorts of people, rather than to specific individuals and their relationships" (Carrier 1993: 59). As a solution to this problem, Carrier suggests to render meaningless commodities into personal gifts that express love and affection, i.e. to shift them towards the 'gift relation' pole on the Maussian continuum: "practices of the presentation and treatment of gifts help to overlay their commodity identity with sentiment and festivity," which can be effected, for instance, "by having gifts be frivolous, luxurious, or otherwise special" (Carrier 1993: 60). In this

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[94] Carrier describes 'possessions' as objects that indicate "the relationship of identity between possessor and object" (1993: 56).

[95] Commodity culture makes use of this self-identification by means of commodities and "works its effects by making its subjects feel incomplete without the objects they may purchase to complete themselves. Through the purchase of commodities, spectators become present to themselves, expressing their identification with representation" (Jaffe 1994: 260).

way, a completely impersonal object purchased in the shopping mall can be stripped of its commodity character and converted into a tangible symbol of the interpersonal relation between the giver and the receiver. Furthermore, the wrapping of gifts plays an important role, since it "overlays the commodity with sentiment and the giver's identity" (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 56, quoted in Carrier 1993: 60). Caplow even introduces the notion of a 'Wrapping Rule': "Christmas gifts must be wrapped before they are presented" (Caplow 1984: 1310, quoted in Carrier 1993: 60). Under the given circumstances, the very process of choosing and wrapping a gift becomes of major importance and greatly contributes to the positioning of the present on the Maussian continuum of relations.

Christmas shopping, then, can be seen "as an integral part of Christmas, rather than as an unfortunate commercial accretion on a real ritual and familial core" (Carrier 1993: 62), taking into consideration the annual weary process of pushing and shoving through the crowds in the shopping malls at Christmas time in order to discover the perfect item to personalise and appropriate, so it can serve as an expression of sentiment and affection, embodying the interpersonal relation between giver and receiver. In other words, specific commodities that are chosen from "the indifferent mass of objects in the store," then, are transformed "to the special things that the shopper selects, things that thereby reflect the shopper and the social relations in which the shopper is located." Hence, Christmas shopping acquires considerable significance as "an annual ritual through which we convert commodities into gifts" (Carrier 1993: 63).[96]

According to the suggestions of advice columnist Judith Martin, ideal

> presents are never given because they are felt to be obligatory, but because people enjoy expressing their affection and appreciation in tangible form. You choose a present when something catches your eye and suggests itself as a source of delight for a particular person. When you receive a present, your pleasure in it and in the feeling it symbolizes obliterates any awareness of its material worth. (Martin 1982: 521, quoted in Belk 1993: 88)

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[96] See also Carrier 1990 and Miller 1987: 190.

Admittedly, this account hardly ever is the case, since gifts are almost never given without a feeling of obligation, particularly at Christmas time when it is part of the tradition to give presents. Thus, at Christmas, people expect to receive gifts, and therefore more or less obligate each other to give presents.

Nevertheless, the commodity aspect of an object still can be lost to a great extent when the given object constitutes a source of delight for the presentee and is embedded in a personal context. When Frank is giving twelve sharp knives to Claire as a present in the early days of their love relationship, Carol seems to be delighted, although knives might appear to be rather impersonal and considered mere commodities in a different context. However, Frank has transformed them into a personal 'gift' reflecting his then happy relationship with Claire. Thus, while the knives underneath the wrapping paper might be experienced as ordinary and indifferent kitchen tools by outsiders, for Frank and Claire they are symbolising their close affiliation. As Mauss emphasises, gifts "are not indifferent things," as they "have a name, a personality, a past, and even a legend attached to them" (Mauss 1969: 25, quoted in Carrier 1991: 126), in which case the real significance of a gift can only be estimated by the two people involved in the transfer: the giver and the receiver. Hence, Claire is possibly very fond of cooking and Frank, knowing about this passion because they are living together, refers to their relationship and shared household by giving her the knives. Moreover, Frank points out to the ghost of Christmas past that such knives are very special, because they are "super sharp" ginsu knives with which "you can cut a tin can like a tomato" (*Scrooged* 1988). Thus, "even an ordinary object becomes unique when it is given as a gift because it is marked by the tie that links the giver and recipient to each other" (Carrier 1991: 126). However, in these premises, Frank's brother James' gift, that is the home-made picture frame holding a photograph depicting Frank and James when they were children, is arguably the most personal gift with the least touch of materialism, as it has the whole story of their shared past attached to it.

The vast influence of consumerism and capitalism on contemporary Christmas just demonstrated goes hand in hand with the fact that Christmas has turned into a global festival at the end of the last century, and nowadays

is even celebrated in places where it is not an element of the prevailing religious traditions and originally was not celebrated at all. The main generator for the increasing spread of Christmas is doubtlessly popular culture, particularly cinema, for it "has shown people what the festival of Christmas is like, particularly how it is celebrated in America, more than any other medium" (Connelly 2000: 1). Thus, films like *Scrooged* and countless other films depicting the festivities at Christmas time helped to spread the phenomenon of Christmas all over the world. A convincing example of this trend is the introduction of Christmas in Japan, which "in recent years [...] has adapted aspects of the season – Santa, decorations, trees – into its calendar" (Connelly 2000: 1) and presents an image of Christmas that "centres on youth, couples, and exclusivity" (Moeran & Skov 1993: 105-133).

As a side-effect, these latest developments have provoked a frequent dispute among Christians, about what effects the spreading of Christmas, as well as its increasing commercialisation that goes hand in hand with its growing popularity, bears on the festivities, and about whether the religious aspect of Christmas still has its place, or is threatened to fade into obscurity.

A more considerable dispute connected with the issue of Christmas is sometimes ironically related to as the "War on Christmas" (Wikipedia: 'Christmas controversy') and is referring to a

> publicized controversy surrounding public acknowledgment or celebration of the Christmas holiday in media, advertising, government, and various secular environments. Modern-day controversy usually occurs due to the holiday's large annual role in Western economy in conjunction with its applied connotations with a specific religion, Christianity. (ibid)

With *The Trouble with Christmas*, Tom Flynn provides a book-length argumentation against the celebration of Christmas. Calling himself the 'Anti-Claus,' he criticises almost every aspect of Christmas and deals with the problems the feast evokes within a multicultural and multifaith America. Hence, what in the Dickens era constituted a time of "happy family gatherings, holiday parties, mistletoe, plum pudding, and abounding joy" (Wrigg 1959: 538), nowadays seems to be increasingly overshadowed by the commercialisation of the feast and the so-called 'War on Christmas'.

Conclusion

As film historicist William Palmer remarks, Hollywood "is usually quite reactive and timely in its handling of social history" (Palmer 1993: xi). As a matter of fact, "the mirroring of society is one of the things that films do best" (Palmer 1993: x), since they are, for all intents and purposes, responses to the prevailing discursive structures that are at stake at a particular time. However, the relationship between such discourses and films is reciprocal, as films are as much influenced by discursive structures as they make them. Within these premises, "Hollywood creates a discourse in clearly defined texts that not only comment perceptively upon contemporary social history but actually participate in it" (Palmer xi) and, for this reason, "movies have always shown and explored either directly or metaphorically what was on the mind of the ticket-buying public" (Palmer 1993: xi).

By adopting a 'cultural studies approach'[97] for the analyses of *Great Expectations* (1998) and *Scrooged* (1988), which is taking the adaptations under consideration as starting points for the analyses, rather than their supposed literary sources, I attempted to reveal some of the discursive structures at work in these film adaptations. In this way, I undeniably attached more significance to the filmic adaptations, rather than to the literary sources they are based on, which is due to the fact that I am generally not so much interested in the processes that are taking place as an adaptation comes into being, i.e. what changes have to be undertaken in order to transfer the 'core' elements of an 'original' to the medium of film, but rather in how prevailing discursive structures are reflected in films and, retrospectively, add meaning to the source texts.

Putting considerable focus on the postmodern concepts of intertextuality and intermediality, as well as taking into account further postmodern discourses such as, for example, the concept of the 'gaze', consumerism and commodity culture, as well as social historicities, such as Reagonism and the yuppie phenomenon, I have demonstrated the ways in which the analysed film adaptations are taking part in what Bakhtin calls the 'intertextual dialogism' of

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[97]   For detailed description of the approach see Seidl 2003, for a brief outline cf. Seidl 2007.

Charles Dickens adaptations, as well as the way in which adaptations, in general, are influenced by and, at the same time, contribute to the shaping of prevailing discursive structures, which, as in the case of *Great Expectations* (1998) and *Scrooged* (1988), are characteristic of the 1990s and the 1980s, respectively.

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Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der wechselseitigen Wirkung, die Filmadaptionen und ihre so genannten ‚Quelltexte' aufeinander ausüben. Unter Berücksichtigung diverser Konzepte des Poststrukturalismus, der Postmoderne und der Kulturwissenschaften wird der Frage auf den Grund gegangen, wie durch Filmadaptionen und ihre Widerspiegelung von gegenwärtigen Gesellschaftsstrukturen, politischen Hintergründen und kulturellen Diskursen die Bedeutung eines Textes nachträglich verändert werden kann.

Im ersten Teil der Abhandlung wird versucht, einen Einblick in den aktuellen wissenschaftlichen Diskurs über Filmadaptionen zu gewährleisten. Einer zusammenfassenden Darstellung der wichtigsten theoretischen Ansätze folgt ein abschließender Blick auf die Entwicklungen der letzten Jahre.

Die anschließenden Analysen zweier in den letzten 20 Jahren erschienen Filmadaptionen der weltbekannten Charles Dickens Erzählungen *Große Erwartungen* (Orig.: *Great Expectations*) und *Eine Weihnachtsgeschichte* (Orig.: *A Christmas Carol*) dienen als konkrete Fallbeispiele. Die beiden Filmproduktionen sind (post-)modernisierte Hollywoodadaptionen und versetzen den Ort der Handlung der jeweiligen Geschichte ins späte zwanzigste Jahrhundert und erzählen somit die jeweilige Geschichte vor einem völlig neuen soziokulturellen Hintergrund. Beide Filmanalysen basieren auf einem kulturwissenschaftlichen Ansatz zu Filmadaptionen und legen den Fokus auf die Filmadaption selbst, d.h. sie gehen vom Filmtext als Ausgangspunkt der Analyse aus, nicht vom vermeintlichen Originaltext.

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