

INDEXICAL LANGUAGE AND THE HISTORICAL FILM:
TITUS AND OTHER RECENT SHAKESPEARE FILMS

Article

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ABSTRACT

Gibson's decision to use two dead languages in *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) reminds us of Kracauer's thesis that the historical film has always been an embarrassment in its attempt at realism. The biggest embarrassment is often the dialogue. The Shakespeare film is only film genre that uses the actual language of the past. My argument is that this has the power to free the historic imagination to treat time as a continuum. This article describes recent Shakespeare films breaking through historical literalness.

The argument builds on Bakhtin's description of chronotopes and Philip Rosen's discussions of the indexical sign to conclude that the words of Shakespeare give a strong physical link to the past. This enables the recent Shakespeare filmmakers to innovate visual strategies that get away from overly realistic costume dramas. Taymor's *Titus* is analyzed at length as a particularly bold and successful exploration of past representation.

INTRODUCTION

Mikhail Bakhtin admired Goethe's insistence that everything significant is visible. He became particularly fascinated by Goethe's ability to see time embedded in space.¹ He adopted this stance in his own critical project to construct the chronotope model of genre formation in literature, which posits that every genre is defined by its form of time. The chronotope expresses the inseparability of time and space. "Time takes on flesh; becomes artistically visible."²

Although the visibility of time is always a central feature of film, contemporary moviemaking is distinguishing itself from previous eras by re-discovering time as a strong formal element. Currently, many different types of time representations are being explored. For instance, there is real time, which assures the viewer that there is a direct one-to-one correspondence between narrative time and screen time. This is simulated in the current TV show *24* (2001) and is actually achieved in the movie *Timecode* (2000). In addition, there are depictions of circular and reverse time in *Memento* (2000), and *Run Lola Run* (1998).

There are also various cinematic modes of historical time. Here the contemporary innovations are lacking and current films such as *Gladiator* (2000), and *The Patriot* (2000), are content to stay within classic Hollywood conventions, reproducing the "realism" of the status quo. However, I wish to

argue that there have been tremendous advances in the depiction of the past in one particular category of the historical film genre - the Shakespeare films.

Films presenting the past have always had several related challenges; of presenting a convincing verisimilitude, of getting the past "right," and of representing a relationship between the past and the present. Verisimilitude may seem to be a general challenge for realistic films but films depicting the past have to contend with a unique issue. The past is gone and the past actually did exist. Therefore history films are unlike films that purport to be part of the contemporary scene and unlike films that are more or less fantasies (ranging from myths to science fiction). As we shall see below this changes audience expectations for films of the past. Nonetheless filmmakers represent the past often as a fantasy. All too often, to borrow an image from Star Trek, the past is represented as a holodeck virtual reality rather than as an actual period that was prologue to today's reality. The past becomes a Disneyland spectacle in many movies, a costume pageant alternative to modern dress dramas. This kind of representation may have various cultural functions but contributes little to the Goethe/Bakhtin project of making past time visible in the present.

In order to achieve this project, it is necessary to represent time as a continuum rather than as **the past** something discretely separate from the here and now. Film theorists have taken up this question intermittently, wondering if the medium with its "reality" effect facilitate this.³ The recent Shakespeare films have embraced strategies that illuminate an approach to treating time as a continuous strand in film. Thus, though the Shakespeare films, even of the history plays, are not often thought of as history films, as a genre they are instructive in their construction of the past. I am referring to films that have adopted the long-standing stage option of transposing the Bard's settings to non-traditional time settings. For example, Richard Loncraine's Richard III (1995) is set in the 1930s and Kenneth Branagh's Hamlet

(1996) takes place in the early 19th century. This strategy does not necessarily treat time in a continuous fashion but enables such treatment. In particular, Julie Taymor's Titus (1999), has formulated an approach to "time blending" that is both a revival of Laurence Olivier's strategy in Henry V (1944) and a contribution to present-day films' treatments of continuous time.

Titus and the post 1989 revival of Shakespeare-on-film therefore becomes an occasion on which to reflect on some of the theories of film and history and on the unique opportunities of depicting the past in the Shakespeare film genre.

TIME AND PHOTOGRAPHIC MEDIA

Film is just one of the photographic media. Still-photography originated at the same time as Von Ranke was pioneering scientific historiography, in the 1830s and 1840s. This coincidence became a mutually reinforcing idea when Heinrich Heine and others started to compare their historic investigations to the capturing of reality by daguerrotype.⁴ Both scientific history and photography were premised on physical evidence as the limitation to human expression and interpretation of really "happened."⁵

Photography as a medium inherently possesses a that-which-has already-happened quality. It is always a record of a prior situation placed before the camera. Andre Bazin wrote somewhat disdainfully of photography as "those grey or sepia shadows ... freed from their destiny; not, however, by the prestige of art but by the power of an impassive mechanical process: for photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption."⁶

However, film, by adding motion to the photographic image, brings it into the present. As Sobchack eloquently states "Cinematic technology animates the photographic and reconstitutes its visibility and verisimilitude in a difference not of degree but of kind. The moving picture is a visible

representation not of activity finished or past, but of activity coming-into-being..."⁷ But herein lies the rub of film's relation to history. Movement gives the moving picture a presence that erodes its relation to the past.

Sobchack is discussing in theoretical language a persistent complaint about films of the past. For instance, Siegfried Kracauer argued that the historical past must be contrived with costumes and settings that undermine the cinema's propensity for actual situations. Of course any fictional film made in the classic style is contrived and manipulated as any historical film. But the argument is that the viewer is much more schooled in and comfortable with the various codes of reality in a contemporary film than in a historical film. "Looking at such a [historical] film, the spectator is likely to suffer from claustrophobia.... True, films dealing with current subjects may also unfold in staged locales...but [with current subjects] the audience is free to imagine that the camera roams reality itself without being hampered in exploring it."⁸ Mel Brooks deliberately plays on this anxiety at the end of Blazing Saddles (1974) by dollying away from the closed set of a 19th century Western to reveal the contemporary routine of the Warner Brothers studio lot. Film of a past time has an inherent uphill struggle to overcome staginess and/or coming-into-being.

This is a problem separate from the fantasy or science fiction film because the audience expects a "past-ness" since the past was once actual. The filmmaker has to convince the audience of a certain "authenticity" rather than invite the audience into the self-contained imaginary of a fantasy. All too often the filmmaker's authenticity becomes the critic's staginess. Both the film community and earlier critics assumed that a "truer" representation would overcome the staginess of representations of the past. I still remember my old Roman history class and Professor Ost's Monday morning tirades against some toga and sandal movie epic he had watched the previous weekend. Now that cultural critics accept that all representations of reality are constructed, debates over whether film can capture "true" history become somewhat naïve.

More recent analyses have reformulated the question to ask whether film engages or ignores the various discourses of history (Rosenstone) or how a film replicates the commonsense of folklore (Landy).⁹ These analyses use the related concepts of discourse and folklore to raise the issue of how a film enters into a living tradition. This reformulation challenges film to overcome the artificiality of representing a separated past by overtly imaging the past as a continuous strand into the present. The question becomes whether this representation of continuity privileges a certain order of signs. Philip Rosen's work has successfully argued for a strong link between continuous time and the indexic sign. He does this by revisiting some of the struggles over historical authenticity in order to illuminate issues of cinema and time.¹⁰

PRESERVATION VERSUS RESTORATION

Rosen reminds us that previous to cinema, there was a 19th century debate over the visual traces of history remaining present in European ruins. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc wanted to restore medieval buildings and actually fabricated gargoyles from the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris. He did this in the name of unifying the style of the building with the historic moment of its origin. John Ruskin and William Morris also were concerned with the fate of medieval buildings but they wanted to preserve these buildings together with all the accretions the building had gathered over the centuries. They were preservationists, not restorers. "Ruskin emphasize[d] respect for time's passage."¹¹

Rosen directly likens Ruskin-Morris' position to Andre Bazin's praising the "reality" effect of the long shot in film.¹² The distinction is also a semiotic one of the difference between iconic and indexic signs that Charles Peirce first formulated in the same period when Ruskin was exerting his influence. The iconic sign is that which resembles its referent while the indexic sign has a more direct existential relationship with the referent.

Peirce uses the footprint's relationship with a person walking, smoke signifying fire, the weathervane signifying wind as examples of the indexical sign. He also treats photographs as indexical signs with direct relations to the referents.

Viollet-le-Duc's argument for restoration favored the iconic over the indexical. He worked to ensure that a building looked as we imagined it would have looked back in the past while Ruskin/Morris preferred the existential, indexical relationship between an existing building and its various modifications through the passage of time. Their debate suggested two notions of time, one as discrete and the other as continuous.

Rosen reviews these alternative approaches to architectural preservation in order to ask us to consider whether an indexical code is the strategy for the film's convincing depiction of the past.¹³ Mary Ann Doane describes the finger pointing quality of the index; the "this-ness." I hesitate to say that the indexical sign has less cultural context because of its directness but Doane and Peirce are quite convincing in arguing that such signs are more denotative than connotative in their directness. It is more convincing in its "reality" effect.

However, Rosen finds many difficulties in film's containment of the indexical sign with the narrative diegesis. He concludes that the classical cinema is defined by the passage from document (the sphere of the indexical sign) to diegesis (the sphere of the iconic and symbolic).¹⁴ Doane also charts the resistance of film theory to the use of indexical signs.¹⁵ She argues for an indexical relation with the past in the cinema but it is a past that is no further distant than the time of shooting the film.¹⁶

It appears that the historic film can only fitfully participate in the preservation of the past. The indexical image can be no further in the past than the 1890s. Words are even more unlikely signs to represent the continuous stream of time. In particular, dialogue typically has less "reality" effect

than even costumes, locations or behavior. One historian has even noted that the introduction of synchronized dialogue in the late 1920s temporarily diminished Hollywood's desire to produce historic films. She implies the reason why in her statement that "[t]he protagonists of American sound films in the later 1920s and early 1930s, whether they were housewives, gangsters, newspaper tycoons, Roman emperors, or Ptolemaic queens, spoke in a dialogue that was grounded in the idioms of contemporary America."¹⁷

Although screenwriters and actors managed to differentiate the languages of the past from the idioms of today, language remains the Achilles heel of the historical film. For example, the title character of Braveheart (1995) uses the key word "freedom" in a way that seems at odds with its medieval setting. "Family" was similarly misappropriated in The Patriot. It is almost an impossible task for writers to capture the social relations of previous epochs that are buried in language.

Adapters of novels such as the various movies based on Jane Austin's or Charles Dickens have an easier time but still must struggle over scenes whose meanings derived from an interplay of description in the story's prose passages and in what dialogue the original novelist chose to quote rather than paraphrase. How can a screenwriter recapture the early 19th century anxiety over class standing that Austin depicts more in the description of people than in their actual words to each other? It is a task several contemporary writers have accomplished through skillful simulation, a restoration not a preservation, if you will.

There is only one genre in the English speaking film world that can hope to have an existential direct relation with the sound of the past and that is the Shakespeare film.

INDEXICALITY AND SHAKESPEARE

When we strictly define the Shakespeare film as those films that use word for word the language of Shakespeare, the reason for this indexical engagement emerges. This is the only film genre where filmmakers have consistently decided to abide to a pre-written fixed dialogue. Thomas Pendleton has looked at the entire history of Shakespeare films and has found that very few screenwriters have had the audacity to add to Shakespeare's lines. He reminds us that the story that the first sound Shakespeare film, The Taming of the Shrew (1929) had the credit "with additional dialog by Sam Taylor" is apocryphal.¹⁸ His rather thorough search documents only a few added lines, usually short exclamations, in the entire genre. There are some inter-title cards from non-Shakespeare pens such as Olivier's heavy handed "This is the story of a man who could not make up his mind" in the beginning of his Hamlet.¹⁹ Both Welles and Mankiewicz interpolated lines in expository voice-overs from Shakespeare's own sources (Holinshed and Plutarch respectively). Many have added songs, and practically every production has cut lines, reassigned lines, and moved scenes out of their original order. Nonetheless, the original text always remains largely intact since no screenwriter dares to add for fears of diluting the words' prestige.

It is surprising that spoken words which are always experienced as ephemeral can be preserved over four hundred years. Of course, to follow this argument, flexibility to the indexical sign has to be conceded. The actual sound of the 17th century has disappeared. The only traces we have come to us through written text. Nonetheless every new performance of this written text has a "this-ness" about it that few other texts in cinema do because we accept that this text has been preserved over the centuries. The filmmakers' willingness to not go beyond the text re-emphasizes the preserved quality. Indeed a further confirmation of the existential "past-ness" of the text lies in its very resistance to use. It is as if filmmakers have for the sake of

authenticity chosen to work with a language that is particularly resistant to current mediations.

The Shakespeare movie is rather odd in this adherence to the written word. Elizabethan plays were not written in the conversational styles, even of their own time. In addition, English usage has changed over the four hundred years. By now, the metered lines are highly conventionalized to the point of illegibility. The contemporary audience has no other opportunity to learn these conventions except at a Shakespeare presentation since very little in current culture uses these or similar approaches to language. Even our poetry has been "naturalized" into ordinary spoken prose compared to this earlier period. There is some justification for claiming that "rap" is the only current cultural form that conventionalizes language usage to the degree of the Elizabethan stage. However rap does little to prepare the current audience for the combined metric and vocabulary onslaught of Shakespeare. Filmmakers feel that they can overcome some of the illegibility by filming actors in close-up, which gives the audience more access to the spoken words. They can also count on the audience's previous experience with Shakespeare in their prior education.

It was for reasons of resistant language that classic Hollywood was rather shy about producing Shakespeare films. There were only three sound versions that were produced in California before World War Two. American screen actors were timid about the Bard while the English were bolder and were responsible for most of the productions in the sound era until the 1950s. It was a particularly British production of Henry V directed by Laurence Olivier that first exploited the indexical link of the language to a continuous past.

HENRY V

In 1944, Olivier made his first Shakespeare film - Henry V - by systematically moving through three different visualizations of time,

suggesting the continuity of the past. The opening shot establishes its artifice with a beautiful craning shot through a miniature diorama of London in 1600. It brings us to an open-air stage performance in the Globe Theater before a contemporary audience. We are looking over the shoulder of the 17th century. Thus the language of Shakespeare is matched by the image of Shakespeare's time watching representations of two centuries earlier. The action then moves to the launching of Henry's army for France and the camera abandons Shakespeare's stage for the interior studio. This is done so that the camera perspective replicates the conventions of medieval painting, in particular, the multi-point perspective of the famed 15th century illustrated manuscript Les Très Riches Heures du Jean duc de Berri. Therefore, the viewers are asked to look through medieval eyes upon medieval events. Olivier makes another transition in the open air location filming of the battle of Agincourt. Here the audience can relapse into the habitual conventions of Hollywood's realism and watch through 20th century eyes. Olivier telegraphs these transitions by repeating them in reverse through the fifth act, returning to the Globe Theater setting for the final scene.

Olivier is overt in his desire to tie together the different time periods of English history from Henry V through Shakespeare to his own period in the waning days of World War Two. Thus the several different treatments of past time form a continuous temporal effect. The film becomes a living English tradition in which the contemporary audience was included. The film is simultaneously about past events and the history of people imagining past events. This is in line with Kracauer's own solution for avoiding the staginess of representing the past on film. "One might think of a film which suggests the infinite chain of causes and effects interlinking the historical events as we know them...establishing a causal continuum...lur[ing] the spectator out of the closed cosmos of poster-like tableau vivants into an open universe..."²⁰

Other films have tried to suggest an infinite chain of cause and effect through time however without the benefit of the language of the past. As far back as 1916, D.W. Griffith pursued the story of intolerance through four different eras in his film Intolerance. However, his and the many other films that borrow this technique remain synthetic in their reference to a causal continuum because their primary and often only relationship with the past is that of staged resemblance. A physical object such as a violin (Red Violin 1998) or an idea (Intolerance) or even a person (Orlando 1992) may keep a thread going from zone to zone, but the audience is not invited to reflect upon the actuality of continuum since the thread is iconic. Neither the violin, the person and certainly not the idea had a physical relationship with the distant past. The relationship with the past remains firmly in the hands of the filmmaker and thus is either purely conventional or a contrived resemblance. Shakespeare's words give a more organic link because these words physically emerge out of the past relatively intact.

Olivier chose Henry V precisely for this linkage because he has overly determined patriotic motives in constructing his film production. Indeed when his Shakespearean interests shifted so did his visual strategies. He did not historicize visual perspectives in his subsequent films; Hamlet (1948) and Richard III (1955). The multi-temporality was, until the 1990s, a singular experiment.

Welles, Mankiewicz, Brooks, Zeffirelli, Polanski and others made Shakespeare films in the post war period. These sporadic efforts resulted in adventurous and acclaimed films. There were parallel efforts in the new medium of television. A high water mark of sorts was reached when the BBC committed itself to televising new productions of all of Shakespeare's plays. This effort started in 1978 and continued through 1985, and perhaps was the strongest attempt to define a mainstream approach to Shakespeare. The executive producer of the effort Cedric Messina, reassured sponsors (including

Mobil and other American corporations) of the effort that the productions would achieve "maximum acceptability to the widest possible audience."²¹ Michèle Willems describes that as the productions continued for the next seven years, three approaches evolved. One was naturalistic, another was pictorial and a third was stylized.²² None were anachronistic (placing the setting in non-traditional time and place). Indeed, the master contract for the series stated that the plays were to be set within Shakespeare's own time or the historical period of the events.

The BBC productions inspire thoughts about the relative strengths of television and film. The BBC cycle was often criticized for being constrained by the television medium.²³ This cycle was the nadir of a literal approach to cinematic time representation and that set the stage for the next cycle of Shakespeare films to revel in the flexibility of the film medium.

In 1989 a veritable Shakespeare film bonanza began when Kenneth Branagh released his Henry V. The film was a success and has since led to continuous releases of Shakespeare films including Branagh's Much Ado About Nothing (1993), Hamlet (1996) and Love Labour's Lost (2000). Other films include Franco Zeffirelli's Hamlet (1990), Peter Greenaway's Prospero's Books (1991), Oliver Parker's Othello (1995), Richard Loncraine's Richard III (1995), Trevor Nunn's Twelfth Night (1996) and Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet (1996). The tremendous success of Shakespeare in Love, which culminated in the Academy Award for best picture of 1998, should also be mentioned, although it is excluded from my argument because it is not based enough on Shakespeare's language to claim an indexical relation. Julie Taymor's Titus (1999) Michael Hoffman's William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream (1999) and Michael Almereyda's Hamlet (2000) are recent additions.

I call this a post-Branagh Shakespeare bonanza. Although the films cover many different styles and approaches, a sensibility unites them as a group. Practically all of these films are determined to shake off public television

stodginess and to popularize Shakespeare for the hip film audience. It is within this sensibility that there is a renewal of the project of using Shakespeare's language to represent a continuous past.

The success of these films have been uneven with Luhrmann receiving the biggest box office from Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet.²⁴ (Shakespeare in Love earned even higher revenues.) Many have made a profit. Henry V was a surprising hit while Zeffirelli's Hamlet performed well to the expectations generated when superstar Mel Gibson took the lead role.²⁵ Much Ado was also a hit, Richard III broke even, Branagh's Hamlet was a disappointment as were Othello, Twelfth Night and Titus.²⁶

HIP HOP AND CARNIVAL ALLEGIANCE

The post-Branagh -- New Hollywood -- actors and directors are no longer intimidated by Shakespeare. At the same time, producers no longer wring their hands over the outmoded divide between high and low art. They want to bring his oeuvre into the mélange of contemporary culture. In his own time, Shakespeare straddled the high/low divide, as Jan Kott emphasized back in the 1960s,²⁷ and now the filmmakers want to explore the possibilities of bricolage and hybridization in Shakespeare's richness of themes, characters and vocabulary. Therefore the current generation has constructed the hip-hop Shakespeare, the mass-mediated Shakespeare, and the retro-lounge lizard Shakespeare.

Branagh and others have devised various strategies to disassociate Shakespeare from a stodgy English classroom setting. Almost all the new directors favor popular, youthful casts and non-traditional settings. Their editing and directing decisions deliver a more visceral relationship between the actors, the audience and the camera, in contrast to a standard presentational mode. Two of the updaters -- Luhrmann and Almereyda -- chose to visually mediate Shakespeare's words as if these were the lyrics of a music video. While they submit (as does every member of the Shakespeare film genre)

to remaining faithful to his words, they are visually counter-pointing the language. Luhrmann captures attention with his clever resignification of Shakespeare's words through imagery. He uses newscasts and intertitles to recontextualize the speeches. Perhaps the most interesting bravura is stopping the narrative flow to cut to a closeup of the brand name "Sword" on the gun Mercutio is holding. This footnotes the verbal reference to "my sword," making it legitimate and comprehensible in the context of pistol duel that the Capulets and Montagues are engaged in at the scene. Almeyreda chooses a related but different strategy of passing Shakespeare's words through new visual technologies. Within the diegetic frame, Hamlet, the ghost of his Father and others speak through video tapes, surveillance cameras and other recording devices. We are no longer receiving the direct address of the actors. We are distracted from our discomfort with Shakespeare because his words are being run through techno-pop.

The post Branagh group has been most playful in their use of setting and representing past time. Branagh, Loncraine, Luhrmann, Almeyreda, Hoffman, Nunn and Taymor have embraced the stage tradition of using a non-traditional or anachronistic time period for the setting of the play. This is achieved in various manners ranging from a full transposition to a new historic period such as in Richard III to a mixture of different period costumes as in Midsummer's Night Dream. The most useful way to organize these various approaches is to ask if the film is using past time as an allegory or using the past as a previous position on a continuous strand that leads up to the present. The allegorical use of the past has less a sense of the continuity of history. For example, the director Loncraine and his star Ian McKellen decide to re-set the 15th century story of Richard III in a fascist tinged 1930s. However, this relocation does not portray a historical dialect moving from the 15th to the 20th century. It is as if Loncraine shares Viollet-le-Duc's purpose by using Shakespeare to restore a fascist past. The allegory between fascist and feudal

power struggles become separate recurrences of the same universal story of corruption.

In contrast, others are more obvious in showing the accretions that accumulate continuously in Shakespeare. Branagh's own revival of Henry V four decades later visually echoes Olivier's tradition. He opens his movie in a setting that reminds us of the theatrical setting of Act one in Olivier. Luhrmann is also attentive to accretions. He characterizes the Montague clan as Latins in a direct reference to Robert Wise's West Side Story 1961 retelling of Romeo and Juliet. These references try to preserve Shakespeare's past in a continuum of pop culture.

Now that we have returned to Viollet-le-Duc vs. Ruskin/Morris in the context of film strategies, we should review the different chronotopes described by Bakhtin. He wrote that some novels organize space and time around the road, others around the castle, the salon and the threshold and staircase. The road chronotope suggests social stagnation and individual freedom, while the castle chronotope features family tradition and individual duty. The castle, over time, accumulates artifacts that change the space of the castle. Road chronotopes often become allegories where time and place "A" is substituted for time and place "B." The transpositions merely equate one place for another rather than reflect the historic relationship one time has with another time that characterizes a castle chronotope. The single space becomes a testimony to the development of those who inhabit it. It is equivalent to the act of preservation that Ruskin and Morris championed.

Rome is the great castle chronotope of human history.²⁸ Ancient Rome changes as all those who come after it, live through their experiences, just as a family castle changes through succeeding generations. Rome is just such a castle for Shakespeare. However, he did not approach Rome in the sense that we are familiar with since the advent of scientific history. Shakespeare did not have our improved knowledge of ancient history nor a strong sense of modern

democracy. Therefore, he often jumbled monarchial, republican and imperial institutions in his Roman plays, with little sense that these institutions followed each other in succession.²⁹ The original source for the Titus Andronicus story places it in the 4th Century A.D. before Theodosius I reunited the eastern and western empires. The story is largely legendary and combines the mythic story of Philomel and others from Ovid and Verginia from Livy's histories of early Rome.³⁰

Thus when Taymor chose to film Titus, she gained access to two indexical sign systems: that of Shakespeare and that of Rome. She calls her use of these systems "time-blending."

TITUS AND TIME-BLENDING

Taymor has the same inspiration as the other Post-Branaghs to position Shakespeare within the popular of today. She alludes to other movies particularly by borrowing many images from Italian cinema and by using the craft people who used to work for Fellini. In the same vein as Luhrmann, Taymor takes advantage of Shakespeare's tribal characters to update them to today's pop domain. Titus' main antagonists are the Queen of the Goths and her sons. Gothic is a category that has reverberated in the Western imagination ever since Tacitus introduced it in his first century treatise Germania. Now, two millennia later, "goth" is a youth sub-cult. The Gothic savagery was appropriated as a cultural symbol throughout the development of Western Europe, most recently as a part of the music fragmentation after the era of "new wave / punk" rock. Therefore, Taymor can directly relate the current goth cultural movement with the position of the Goths in the Imperial period. She casts, dresses and stages the antics of Chiron and Demetrius in a manner as appropriate to today's rock music culture as to the actual Goths. She can also explore current racial politics in her emphasis on the villain in Shakespeare's story: Aaron the Moor. The ultimate in the "other" in today's is the black man

and it is Aaron who will guide the "Goths," Tamora and her sons, in their mayhem.

Going beyond the other post-Branaghs, she expands the domain of references exponentially. She will not just have goth/Goths, she will also have mechanized warfare, renaissance imagery, 20th century decadence, and fascist art and architecture. Such a plethora of references influenced one critic, Charles Taylor, to accuse Taymor of rushing "from garish spectacle to static tableau." He feels the movie amounts to a hodge-podge of appropriations and the "joyless forgeries of Joseph Cornell collages..."³¹ Taylor is misreading the nature of her unity. She locates and blends key images both from the 2000 years of an imagined Rome and from the 400 years of an imagined Shakespeare. In choosing Titus Andronicus, Taymor is creating ample room for her own forte in creating meaning from costume and design. This is evidenced in the opening scene when she introduces us to her chronotope of Shakespeare's Rome.

Taymor suspends the space and time identification of her film by opening with a child (Young Lucius) playing with plastic toy soldiers on a tabletop in a kitchen. The décor is 20th century suburban, a setting that is both shattered and enhanced when an artillery shell comes through the wall. A soldier comes in to rescue the screaming boy. He is wearing a hybrid costume of a contemporary tank top and an ancient legionnaire's helmet. He takes the boy out into a space that is revealed to be the center of a Roman coliseum.

Now we are firmly within the castle chronotope of Rome. Taymor continues the anachronism by mixing Roman infantry with mechanized tanks and personnel carriers. However, she lessens the jarring aspect of this blend by slowing the tanks down to a slow crawl, suggesting a horseless carriage rather than a modern artillery cruiser. The supreme general, Titus (Anthony Hopkins) enters on a horse drawn chariot.

The soldiers perform a drill or a mechanical dance that further links the age of Rome with twentieth century mechanical warfare. The tension builds

between the incongruities of time and space; between a boy alone with a mass army; between danger and safety, until the central character of Titus (Anthony Hopkins) resolves it by gathering the boy in a protective gesture and speaking the opening lines of the movie: "Hail, Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds!"

Titus' speech (delivered on Shakespeare's stage in one space before the tomb's vault) is split in the film between the coliseum and inside the tomb of the Andronici. The words serve to ground the mixed references of the suburban kitchen, the artillery blasting the wall, the mechanized movement, the coliseum and the pagan rites of the Andronici clan. Taymor continues and confirms this strategy in the next scene.

The balance of the first act is devoted to the conflict of succession to the imperial throne and Titus' loyalty to the evil emperor. The overall impression is of a Fascist rally in the 1930s. There is streamlining in the armor and uniforms that can be associated with futurism and Raymond Loewy's work in the 1920s, and high collars and long coats signifying the proto-fascist characters of Gabriele D'Annunzio. This temporal reference is a central part of Taymor's vision of the play. She has not transposed the action of the play to Mussolini's Italy but she has articulated the various images of Italian fascism already accreted in the chronotope of late Rome. Titus, as played by Anthony Hopkins, recalls some of the physical features of Mussolini. Taymor goes further in seeking an indexical link to Roman fascism by staging the rally at the E.U.R. (*Esposizione Universale di Roma*), in front of the notorious "Square Coliseum" constructed by Mussolini in 1939.

Although Fascist and classical Roman imagery dominates, Taymor borrows from the art of intervening periods to suggest a continuing tradition. Lavinia's rape and mutilation refers to Bernini's 17th century sculptural depiction of Daphne since the former's hands are now twigs just as the latter's limbs are metamorphosing into a tree. Taymor places Titus in a bathtub to reproduce Jacques-Louis David's 18th century painting of the French

revolutionary figure, Jean-Paul Marat. The wedding party becomes the orgy scene as depicted by pre-Raphaelites and other 19th century historical narrative art. Thus, century by century, Taymor finds an image to become part of her Titus.

To a degree, Taymor's references recall the visual strategy of Olivier's Henry V. However she does not follow his symmetrical and systematic use of frames. His history was very linear because of his single minded desire to link the British of the 14th, 16th and 20th century into a single pageant. Taymor's causal continuum is not linear. She is interested in the popular culture strand of Shakespeare and she is also interested in how the Western imagination has dealt with the continuing problem of the relation between justice and revenge. The production notes state that Taymor's Titus featured a "time-b[1]ending fusion of costumes, props and settings from many eras, turning the play into a meditation on 2000 years of man's inhumanity to man."³²

REVENGE AND JUSTICE

Titus Andronicus' excessive violence and mutilations has generally spooked producers. However, the play was popular enough with the original audience. Its gory qualities were consistent with Elizabethan revivals of the ancient Roman plays of Seneca and with the excesses of even such major playwrights as Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd. It fulfilled those audiences' desire for the revenge drama. As that taste faded in the 17th century, the play largely dropped from the repertoire after Shakespeare's death until Peter Brooks mounted a famous stage production with Lawrence Olivier in the lead role in 1955. It is indicative of Titus Andronicus' problematic status that it was the last installment of the BBC production cycle. It was this production, directed by Jane Howell that originated the idea of using young Lucius as a privileged observer of the action.

Julie Taymor brought the play to the New York stage in 1994. She wrote that "the play speaks directly to our times, when audiences feed daily on

tabloid sex scandals, teenage gang rape, and the private details of a celebrity murder trial... Our entertainment industry thrives on the graphic details of murders, rapes and villainy,..."³³ Since she used the play to reflect on violence and on filmed entertainment uses of violence, it was natural that she sought the opportunity to make a film version. Her film treatment borrowed from her own stage treatment, from the BBC and from many other elements.

The power of indexical elements emerges in the telling of the story. The language has the inherent quality of Shakespeare's genius meditating on any problem. In addition the age of his words has the property of demonstrating the enduring problem of revenge subverting justice and of making the problem "strange" again for us since it is refracted through the social relations of Shakespeare's world. Taymor adds visually to the authority of his words by using the images of the castle chronotope of Rome. She seeks as far as possible indexical settings such as the Appian Way, E.U.R., the Roman Coliseum in Pula, Croatia. These also anchor a visual mediation on violence, a particularly powerful index was formed when Taymor filled the seats in the Roman coliseums with Croatian extras who had their own memories of the bloody break up of Yugoslavia.

The use of indexical signs serves to contrast this movie with Oliver Stone's Natural Born Killers (1994). Both films wish to address the theme of entertainment and violence. Both use a variety of sources for their images. However, Stone's work is purely one of resemblance to the non-diegetic world. There are few physical links to spaces and times outside the fiction of the movie. This ultimately undermines his critique of media violence since the fictional nature of Natural Born Killers makes it just one more performance of extreme violence in the media.

In contrast, Taymor is inviting the audience to meditate on a cycle of revenge and violence but constantly placing this cycle within a known tradition. It is important to this invitation that she uses a unified Western

tradition and not refer willy-nilly to various ad hoc instances of violence. Her previous work with other cultural traditions such as in earlier stage work in Bali and in the adaptation of The Lion King for Broadway in 1998 has led to her sensitivity about cultural integrity. Because she confronted multi-culturalism in Indonesia at the beginning of her career, she has learned to not to indulge herself by appropriating another culture.³⁴ "I've been inspired by a lot of Asian ... theater techniques: But I'm not Asian, so why should I do them exactly? It's not my tradition."³⁵ Titus' theme and problem is a tradition of which she is part. She, therefore, finds the double purpose of continuing the post-Branagh celebration of Shakespeare as a wannabe carnivalesque filmmaker and Shakespeare as the intermediary between her own society's problem with media inspired violence and the Roman problem of violence driven by clan loyalties.

Young Lucius is our initial guide into the world of Titus. Taymor uses him in a way that is not in Shakespeare's text to close the film. Aaron has been the most potent destructive character in the story. His hatred of all that is good points the way to more developed Shakespeare villains such as Iago and Richard III. In one way he is more interesting to us than the more famous malefactors. He compels our modern attention because he is black. His hatred of humanity has a strong element of the desire for racial revenge against the dominant race. It is prescient because racial hatred in either direction is one of the central problems of our era. While many of the main characters - Titus, the Queen of the Goths, Saturnius - have died in the penultimate bloody banquet, Aaron still survives to be punished in the scene of the movie.

He is condemned to death and is buried alive in the middle of the coliseum. What is ambiguous about his sentence is whether it is an act of justice or an act of revenge that will lead to a further cycle. Aaron has a child, an infant. While Shakespeare's text is silent about the fate of the young Aaron, Taymor makes it explicit that modern society cannot tolerate any

other ending than one that points toward justice. Young Lucius takes the infant out of the box in which the child had been placed while the father was buried. In front of the coliseum's assembled crowds (the Croatian extras referred to above) he takes the child and walks out of the darkness of the final condemnation through the gate to the horizon of the dawning sun. It is this visual image brings the audience into the present state of civilizations' attempts to redeem inhumanity. The opposition between vengeance and justice has not just statically vacillated but has evolved over the two thousand years of Rome's legacy or even the four hundred years of Shakespeare performances. Because her visual strategy depicts both the story and its legacy, she earns the authorial right to impose a contemporary note at the end, to give a latter-day answer to Shakespeare's silence.

CONCLUSION

My argument is motivated by a shared desire with Kracauer to recognize a film that can "suggest the infinite chain of causes and effects interlinking the historical events as we know them...establishing a causal continuum..." (my emphasis). This kind of film will certainly share many features with the castle chronotope as described by Bakhtin. It is the architectural metaphor of this chronotope that leads one to Rosen's argument that the indexical sign system does stress the continuum of time. At this point, the problem becomes one of finding indexical sign systems in fictional films.

Taymor deploys both architecture and language as indexical systems. However the weight of meaning of the past must be with the words of Shakespeare. It is from this perspective that Taymor's Titus is not just an isolated experiment in a new treatment of the past. It is part of the movement of the recent Shakespeare films to escape the heavy-handed literal depictions of most historical films. Of course, a Shakespeare film does not assume the burden of forming a relationship with "what really happened." But these films

do represent the past, the past of Shakespeare's imagination. The fidelity of the words therefore form an indexical link with this past imagination. The link may not reflect a one to one correspondence between the referent and the signified since words and even sentences change meanings but total correspondence is too strong a test for an indexical sign. The sufficient test is that the words and sentences resist the conflation of past and present meanings and the very difficulty of Shakespeare for contemporary audiences demonstrates this resistance.

Although the indexical status of spoken words in a filmed text is surprising, its power has been utilized in non-Shakespeare shows. I recall Ken Burn's multi-part TV show on the Civil War (first broadcast in 1990) and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's Our Hitler (1977) among other examples. In both letters were read from the more unknown participants in the great events described. In the former the words served to give excitement to another otherwise static visual presentation although many of the images had their own indexical status as photographs and known contemporary images of the period. In the latter the words served to anchor an avant garde and eclectic pictorial strategy.

Ultimately this semiotic link to the past is not a guarantee but an enabler of the filmmaker's expression of time visible. Representations of the past are a particular problem for moving pictures and there are unique rewards for those who are willing to work with less malleable codes, the "this-ness" of signs that have physical links to the past. Certainly one reward is a confidence the filmmaker can have that these signs will give a certain credibility to a view of history as an actual prelude to the present rather than as a just another inauthentic tourist site. It is thus that Taymor gains our attention in her use of *Titus* to work out her thoughts through Shakespeare, through history, on revenge and justice.

¹ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp.24-28.

² Mikhail M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.84.

³ There are many discussions of the historical film's relation to theory. See, for example, Pierre Sorlin, The Film in History: Restaging the Past (Totowa NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980) and Robert A. Rosenstone, Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) for a synthetic overview.

⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, History: The Last Things Before the Last (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁶ Andre Bazin, What is Cinema? (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1967), p.14.

⁷ Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic 'Presence'," in Robert Stam and Toby Miller, eds., Film and Theory: An Anthology (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p.74.

⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p.78.

⁹ See Robert Rosenstone, Visions of the past: the challenge of film to our idea of history; Marcia Landy, Cinematic Uses of the Past, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Philip Rosen, Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory. (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.50.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.53.

¹³ His discussion is located in a chapter entitled "Detail, Document, and Diegesis" pp.147-201 in Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory. (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.183.

¹⁵ Mary Ann Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) p. 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.104-107.

¹⁷ Marie Wyke, "Projecting Ancient Rome," in Marcia Landy, ed., The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001) p. 134.

¹⁸ Thomas A. Pendleton, "Shakespeare...with additional dialog." Cineaste 24 no.1 (1998):62.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.64.

²⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, Theory of Film: The redemption of physical reality p.80.

²¹ Susan Willis, The BBC Shakespeare Plays: Making the Televised Canon. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) p. 11.

²² Michele Willems, "Verbal-Visual, Verbal-Pictorial or Textual-Televisual? Reflections on the BBC Shakespeare Series" Shakespeare Survey: an Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies & Production. 39 (1987):96.

²³ Willis, The BBC Shakespeare Plays, p.79.

²⁴ William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet cost \$15.5 million and earned \$22.9 million in North American rentals with additional sums from overseas and ancillary markets. (www.imdb.com and Variety)

²⁵ Henry V had a US gross of \$ 10.2 million ((using an industry rule of thumb this translates to approximately \$6 million in rentals). Zeffirelli's Hamlet grossed \$20.7 million in US (rentals \$13 million) (www.imdb.com, June 2nd 2000).

²⁶ Much Ado grossed \$22.6 million (rentals \$14 million) in North American with a reported budget of \$8 million. Branagh's Hamlet was budgeted at \$18 million and only grossed \$4.4 million in North American. Richard III grossed \$2.6 million (rental \$1.6 million) with approximately another half a million dollars in United Kingdom rentals reported. However Loncraine reports that the

film is earning back its negative costs of \$8.5 million ("Shakespeare in the Cinema..." p.55; Rothwell, p.230). He must have access to ancillary market earnings to justify this claim. Othello must be losing money since it was budgeted at \$11 million and only grossed \$2.2 million in N.America. Titus' domestic gross is apparently only \$2 million. Twelfth Night was budgeted at \$5 million (Rothwell, p.238) and grossed a disappointing \$.55 million in North America. (all figures www.imdb.com June 2nd 2000).

²⁷ Jan Kott, Shakespeare, Our Contemporary, (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1964).

²⁸ Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, p.40.

²⁹ Vivian Thomas, Shakespeare's Roman Worlds (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.23.

³⁰ Coppélia Kahn, Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, wounds and women (New York: Routledge, 1997), p.57.

³¹ Charles Taylor, "Titus." Salon Arts and Entertainment (January 7, 2000), <http://www.salon.com/ent>.

³² Troy Snider and Matthew Greene, Titus Production Notes (Bellevue WA: Vulcan Northwest Inc., 1998).

³³ Eileen Blumenthal and Julie Taymor, Playing with Fire: Theater, opera, film (New York: Harry Abrams Publisher, 1995), p.183.

³⁴ Blumenthal and Taymor, Playing with Fire, p.17.

³⁵ S.L. Wallach, "Julie Taymor, Puppets, Masks, Sculptures." Theatre Crafts. 16 n.8 (1982): 24.