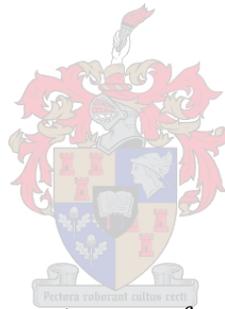


# **The significance of editing techniques in the adaptation of play texts into film**

by

Margaretha Elizabeth Heslinga



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Supervisor: Prof. Edwin Hees

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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

This thesis sets out to provide comparative analyses of selected play texts and their film adaptations in order to demonstrate the significant role that editing techniques play in translating the play text's dramatic elements into the visual language of film. The purpose of a film adaptation is to present a new interpretation of the play text that audiences will find engaging. In order to establish how the film medium is potentially able to enhance or alter the audience's understanding of the original source text, the study turns to the field of semiotics to determine how the play text's themes, plot and characters – embodied in a verbal sign system – are adapted into the audio-visual sign system of film. While cinematography, production design and music are critical elements in film making, editing can be regarded as the distinctive and fundamental signifying practice in the construction of meaning in a film. This will be the point of departure in analysing how meaning is “translated” from one sign system into another in the process of adaptation.

By manipulating the key relations between shots, editing is able to guide the audience's understanding of the film narrative, amplify character development, and generate intellectual and emotional responses. Different editing conventions have therefore been developed to amplify the dramatic effect of the narrative and the filmmaker's vision. The different effects that editing conventions create in the interpretation of a play text are demonstrated by comparing two cinematic versions of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The use of continuity editing techniques in Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* is compared to Baz Luhrmann's use of modern MTV conventions in his *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996). Zeffirelli and Luhrmann both employ different editing conventions to amplify their “readings” of Shakespeare's play text, thereby presenting an adaptation that their target audience will find engaging. The film adaptations of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* therefore demonstrate the significance of different editing techniques in conveying meaning within a specific reception context.

The series of reinterpretations of Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) illustrates how editing techniques are able to transfer Isherwood's themes and political commentary on the rise of Nazism in Weimar Berlin across various texts and mediums, which include the film adaptation *I am a Camera* (1955) directed by Henry Cornelius, the Broadway musical *Cabaret* (1966) directed by Joe Masteroff, and finally Bob Fosse's musical film *Cabaret* (1972).

The comparative analyses of the above-mentioned source texts and their subsequent film adaptations demonstrate how different editing techniques are able to highlight new perspectives on the source material. Editing conventions are therefore highly significant in the creation of cinematic representations of the play text as they lead audiences to “read” the dramatic narrative within new contexts, using the visual language of film to create new insights that will complement the audience’s understanding and appreciation of the play.

## Opsomming

Vergelykende analises tussen gekose speeltekste en hul verwerkings vir film word in hierdie tesis uiteengesit om die betekenisvolle rol wat redigeertegniese in die vertolking van die speeltekste se dramatiese elemente in die visuele styl van die film speel, te demonstreer. Die doel met 'n filmverwerking is om 'n nuwe interpretasie van die speeltekste aan te bied wat gehore vasgevang sal hou. Om te bepaal hoe die filmmedium die gehoor se begrip van die oorspronklike teks potensieel kan versterk of verander, gebruik hierdie studie die veld van semiotiek om vas te stel hoe die speeltekste se temas, intrige en karakters – beliggaam in 'n verbale simboolstelsel – aangepas word in die oudiovisuele simboolstelsel van die film. Terwyl filmfotografie, produksie-ontwerp en musiek kritiese elemente in die vervaardiging van films is, word redigering as die onderskeidende en fundamentele belangrike praktyk in die konstruksie van betekenis in 'n film geag. Hierdie is die vertrekpunt in die analisering van hoe betekenis “vertaal” word van een simboolstelsel na 'n ander tydens die verwerkingsproses.

Redigering kan deur middel van manipulering van die sleutelverwantskappe tussen skote die gehoor lei om die narratief van die film te verstaan, karakterontwikkeling uit te brei en intellektuele en emosionele reaksies te skep. Onderskeie redigeerkonvensies is dus ontwikkel om die dramatiese effek van die narratief en die filmvervaardiger se visie te versterk. Die verskillende resultate wat deur middel van hierdie tegnieke in die interpretasie van 'n speeltekste verkry word, word toegelig deur die twee filmweergawes van William Shakespeare se *Romeo and Juliet* te vergelyk. Die gebruik van kontinuïteit-redigeertegniese in Franco Zeffirelli se 1968 filmverwerking van *Romeo and Juliet* word vergelyk met Baz Luhrmann se gebruik van moderne MTV-konvensies in sy *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996). Beide Zeffirelli en Luhrmann gebruik verskillende redigeerkonvensies om hulle “lees” van Shakespeare se speeltekste toe te lig en daarmee 'n verwerking wat hulle teikengehoor vasgevang sal hou, te bied. Die filmverwerkings van Shakespeare se *Romeo and Juliet* demonstreer dus die belang van verskillende redigeertegniese in die oordra van betekenis binne 'n spesifieke konteks waarin dit ontvang word.

Die reeks herinterpretasies van Christopher Isherwood se *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) illustreer hoe redigeertegniese in staat is om Isherwood se temas en politieke kommentaar aangaande die opkoms van Nazisme in Weimar Berlyn oor verskeie tekste en mediums oor te dra. Insluitend hierby is die filmverwerking *I am a Camera* (1955) onder regie van Henry Cornelius, die

Broadway musiekblyspel *Cabaret* (1966) onder regie van Joe Masteroff, en laastens Bob Fosse se musiekfilm *Cabaret* (1972).

Die vergelykende analise van bogenoemde tekste en hul daaropvolgende filmverwerkings demonstreer hoe verskillende redigeertegnieke nuwe perspektiewe op die oorspronklike materiaal na vore kan bring. Redigeerkonvensies is uiters betekenisvol in die skep van filmiese voorstellings van die speelteks aangesien die gehoor daarmee gelei word om die dramatiese narratief binne nuwe konteks te “lees” deur gebruik te maak van die visuele styl van die film om nuwe insig te skep wat die gehoor se verstaan en waardering van die stuk aanvul.

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Praise the LORD!  
For he has heard my cry for mercy.  
The LORD is my strength and shield.  
I trust him with all my heart.  
He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy.  
I burst out in songs of thanksgiving.  
Psalm 28: 6-7

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Walter Benjamin's theory that "storytelling is always the art of repeating stories" finds special meaning with the concept of adaptation, since through a process of repetition, but repetition without replication, stories have been repeated throughout history by continually adapting them from one medium to another (Hutcheon, 2006: 2). Since the Victorian era, the art of repeating stories has taken the form of novels, plays, poems, songs, paintings and *tableaux vivants* being adapted from one medium to another. In the post-modern era the process of adaptation has expanded to include film, television, radio, electronic media, theme parks and virtual reality experiences to the long list of various media incarnations. A fundamental part of the creation of a successful adaptation is to update the source text within new reception contexts, using different mediums and modes of engagement to highlight a new interpretation of, or perspective on, the source text that the intended target audience will find appealing. The focus of this study is, firstly to explore the process of adaptation that occurs in translating a dramatic play text into film, and secondly, to determine how the film adaptation is able to "retell the story" of the play text by adapting the source text's themes, plot, and characters into the audio-visual language of film. A fundamental part in analysing adaptations is therefore to determine how meaning is created within a medium and then translated from one medium-specific sign system into another. In order to establish the creation, interpretation, and adaptation of verbal signs in the case of a dramatic play text, and audio-visual signs in film, the thesis makes use of the Saussurean tradition of semiotics as its research methodology.

In order to determine how a dramatic play text is able to generate meaning, it is important to note that even though a dramatic play text and a literary text, such as a novel or a short story, are both driven towards telling a story by utilizing a verbal sign system, they cannot be analysed according to the same standards because it is "at the level of actualization [that] a play and novel are quite different" (Chatman, 1990: 110). A literary text can be considered to be an autonomous piece of work as it's generation of meaning resides solely on the printed words on the page and the reader's imagination. The full potential meaning of a dramatic play text is on the other hand only realized when it is performed on stage. While a novel or short story is what it is, the dramatic play text marks the beginning of a much bigger process as it is intended for performance in a three-dimensional space utilizing theatrical codes which includes a visual, aural and kinetic sign system.

A theatrical production is a multitrack medium, and like the cinematic medium it is a complex system composed of multiple signifying systems that simultaneously act upon the viewer's interpretation of the play or film. In both the theatrical and filmic medium the viewer is actively involved in decoding a variety of medium-specific sign systems according to the dramatic and cultural conventions at their disposal. It is, however, difficult to determine which exact signs contribute to the viewer's understanding of the production due to the multiplicity of signs present during any given moment in a play or film. As a result, each viewer's experience will be different depending on which signs they have registered consciously, which signs were only subliminally experienced, and which signs remained unnoticed (Esslin, 1987: 37-38). For instance, some of the various signifying systems present throughout a play production include the dramatic play text, the stage, lighting, set design and props, costumes, actors, and music. Some of these signs, such as the set, will remain constant for long periods in time, while other signs, for example movement, costumes, dialogue, music, and lighting effects, will change throughout the performance (Carlson, 1990: xii). Despite the varying degrees to which different theatrical signs are present in the production, each element acts as a contributing ingredient in the generation of meaning in the production and will ultimately influence the viewer's overall experience of the play.

The dramatic play text is, however, often regarded as the superior element in the generation of meaning in a theatrical production as it precedes the performance and therefore, to a certain extent, dictates how the dialogue, characters, narrative structure, context, stage directions and setting are to be used in the performance (Elam, 1980: 208). Even though the dramatic play text can be read and analysed on its own terms, the potential meaning of the text will only be fully realized and communicated when it is manifested in a theatrical production by using the theatrical sign systems at its disposal. A dramatic play text should therefore not be regarded as a "linguistic text [that is] translatable into stage practice," but rather as "a linguistic transcription of a stage potentiality which is the motive force of the written text" (Paola Gulli Pugliatti in Elam, 1980: 209). As the "meaning" of a play production doesn't reside solely in the dramatic text, but is rather fully developed in the actualization of the text, then it may be considered that "the script on the page is not the drama any more than a clod of earth is a field of corn" (Styan, 1975: vii). The theatrical elements involved in the presentation of the dramatic play text therefore play an important role as the meaning of the text is not something stable and fixed, but rather something that can constantly be reinterpreted by using different sign systems. This characteristic thus allows theatre and film directors amongst many others, the opportunity to represent the dramatic play text within different reception contexts, using different medium-

specific sign systems to highlight new interpretations of the play text and therefore making it appealing to new audiences. The focus of this study is thus on the manifestation of the dramatic play text, the textual element of the theatrical production that is open to reinterpretation, in the cinematic medium and to what extent the play text's themes, dialogue, action, and characters are adapted from a verbal sign system into the audio-visual language of film.

When focusing on the process of adapting a dramatic play text into film, what defines a film adaptation as a "successful" reinterpretation of the source text? The success of a film adaptation may, for example, be measured by takings during its opening weekend at the box office. Although this may be an indicator of whether or not the film was able to engage and attract its intended target audience, many film viewers are often not even aware that they are watching a film adaptation of a play text. Another measure of an adaptation's success is whether it is in some sense a suitable representation of the source text. There are various methods for determining to what extent the dramatic play text has been adapted into the filmic medium. A possible method is comparing the presented narrative which, in any process of translation, acts as the common denominator between the source text and its adaptation. A "faithful" adaptation of a play text, however, becomes difficult to define as the original narrative, including the plot line, characters, and dialogue, is often used to varying degrees in an adaptation. In some adaptations the narrative may be used more or less in its entirety. Other film adaptations are inspired by the play text's plot and characters but will only feature a few select scenes from the play. Yet others may present extracts from the source text, but otherwise do not follow the plot of the original text (Hatchuel, 2004: 15-18). Analysing an adaptation in terms of its narrative therefore often leads to the fallacy of "fidelity criticism", which does not take into consideration what the film adaptation is able to achieve in its own right. An alternative for analysing adaptations is in terms of how far the filmmaker has chosen to transfer the central meaning of the source play text into its filmic representation.

In order to determine how meaning is created within a medium-specific sign system, the Saussurean tradition of semiotics is reviewed. As each medium has its own signifying system, including practices and modes of engagement according to which it signifies meaning, comparable units of analysis must be established in order to analyse how the dramatic elements of the play text have been adapted from one sign system to another. This study, however, reveals that the signifying unit of a "word" situated in the play text's verbal sign system is not directly comparable to a film "shot", as it is through the simultaneous interaction between several

different signifying practices such as cinematography, production design, editing, music and performance that a film “shot” is able to create meaning in the audio-visual sign system. In order to analyse how meaning is thus translated from a dramatic play text into a film, equivalences must be sought for the play text’s themes, events, characters and dialogue in the film’s audio-visual sign system.

In the audio-visual sign system of film, editing and specifically montage can be regarded as a critical and distinctive signifying practice in the construction of meaning in a film as it allows the filmmaker great control in manipulating the audience’s interpretation and experience of the narrative. Since the beginning of cinema filmmakers have been developing editing techniques in particular, as opposed to the production design, costume, lighting, and cinematographic elements that form part of the film’s *mise en scène*, to help guide the audience’s understanding of the film narrative, amplify character development, and generate intellectual and emotional responses. Its power in the creation of meaning is demonstrated when reviewing some of the best-known edited sequences in film history. These film sequences include the ride of the Ku Klux Klan in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) directed by D.W. Griffith, Sergei Eisenstein’s Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), Orson Welles’s use of montage in the “News on the March” reel of *Citizen Kane* (1941), and the famous shower murder scene in *Psycho* (1960) directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 151). Much of the power and effectiveness of these sequences are derived from the filmmaker’s use of editing techniques. After reviewing different editing theories and techniques, specifically continuity and MTV editing, and demonstrating their effectiveness in the creation of meaning, this fundamental feature of filmmaking will become the point of departure in the comparative analyses between the source play texts and their subsequent film adaptations in this thesis.

There have, however, been different perspectives on the use of editing in a film. On the one hand, many filmmakers believed that in order to minimise the disruptive effect of joining two separate shots together, the film’s cinematography and *mise en scène* must be edited according to a specific system with its own set of rules and conventions. This system soon developed into the classic Hollywood continuity editing system, also known as “invisible editing,” and became one of the dominant film editing styles throughout the twentieth century. The purpose of the continuity editing system is to hide the filmic construction involved in the presentation of the narrative, thereby maintaining the audience’s illusion of viewing continuous action and enhancing their engagement with the presented “reality”. On the other side of the spectrum,

filmmakers who focused on experimental filmmaking and avant-garde cinema, and the directors of the French New Wave period, regarded the disruptive effect caused by editing as “the basic creative force” behind a film, leading audiences to create meaning that extends beyond their perception of the individual shots (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 185). One popular alternative to continuity editing conventions is MTV-style editing. Instead of striving to maintain the illusion of continuity in a film, MTV stimulates a different type of engagement by disrupting the graphic, rhythmic, spatial and temporal relations between shots in order to amplify a particular emotion or feeling state that is crucial to the audience’s interpretation of the film. Whether it is to amplify the illusion of “reality” in the film or to generate meaning through the juxtaposition of shots, different editing conventions have therefore been developed to amplify the dramatic effect of the narrative and the filmmaker’s vision.

For the purpose of this study, knowing how editing generates meaning in a film is important in order to determine which specific editing conventions the filmmakers have adopted in presenting their interpretation of the dramatic play text. The ability of the editing style to generate meaning using specific editing techniques is reviewed in Chapter Two and, along with defining important theories and concepts of adaptation and semiotics, this chapter establishes editing as a point for comparison in determining how the play text’s themes, plot and characters are translated into the audio-visual medium of film. The significance of editing techniques in the adaptation of play texts into films is demonstrated with practical comparative analyses in Chapters Three and Four. These practical examples are accompanied by selected frame grabs. Each frame grab will represent a new shot, thus indicating the specific use of the editing technique discussed in the sequence. In some cases, however, frame grabs will be used to demonstrate the gradual progression of framing and camera movement within a shot. The specific use of the different frame grabs will therefore differ from one figure to the next, but will be explained in more detail with each practical example. Along with the aid of visual references, these chapters will firstly, demonstrate how the dramatic play text can be reinterpreted by using editing techniques to provide a new perspective on the source text, and secondly, how filmmakers use these editing techniques to create a film adaptation that the intended target audience will find engaging and help them gain a better understanding of the dramatic play text.

In Chapter Three reinterpretations of Christopher Isherwood’s short story compilation *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) into various play and film adaptations are used as a case study to demonstrate

how editing techniques are able to transfer the source text's themes across various mediums and reinterpretations, thus demonstrating the process of adaptation that a specific source text undergoes. The analysis specifically focuses on how editing techniques are able to amplify and adapt Isherwood's themes and commentary in Bob Fosse's film musical *Cabaret* (1972). Extracts from the *Goodbye to Berlin* short stories, the film adaptation *I am a Camera* (1955) directed by Henry Cornelius, the *Cabaret* (1966) musical play text written by Joe Masteroff, and film sequences from the *Cabaret* film, demonstrates how Fosse effectively uses editing techniques to amplify Isherwood's themes of the divinely decadent attitudes of Weimar Berlin paving the way for the rise of Nazism during the early 1930s.

In Chapter Four the significance of different editing conventions in generating meaning in film adaptations of the same source text is demonstrated by comparing two cinematic versions of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In order to demonstrate the different effects and interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet*, Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* is compared to Baz Luhrmann's interpretation of *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996). Intended for different reception contexts, Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's films adopt different editing conventions to update Shakespeare's text for new audiences. Zeffirelli primarily employs continuity editing conventions to render a "realist Shakespeare film", transposing audiences back to Renaissance Verona by using continuity editing techniques to amplify the illusion of "realism". Luhrmann's reinterpretation of the *Romeo and Juliet* play text, intended to engage a young, MTV generation, resorts to MTV editing techniques that have been popularised by music videos and television commercials to amplify Shakespeare's themes of youth, love and violence. The different effects of the respective editing techniques either strive to maintain the illusion of continuity across shots, or focus on creating discontinuity to amplify a specific effect. These effects are demonstrated by firstly discussing the different film techniques in terms of graphic, rhythmic, spatial and temporal relations between shots. Furthermore, these techniques are illustrated with visual examples from sequences from the films. This chapter then effectively demonstrates how continuity and MTV editing conventions are utilised to differing effects in adaptations of the same source text, thus demonstrating their importance as a signifying practice in creating meaning in a film.

The conclusion presented in Chapter Five argues that editing as a signifying practice provides a viable mode of analysis in determining to what extent a source play text's themes, plot, and characters has been successfully adapted across different mediums, transferring meaning from

the play text's verbal sign system to the audio-visual sign system of film. It further reveals how the filmmaker has consciously adopted various film techniques, especially editing, to create a cinematic representation of the play text that would complement the audience's understanding and appreciation of the play. This demonstrates the purpose of film adaptations because, according to Christian Metz, cinema "tells us continuous stories; it 'says' things that could be conveyed also in the language of words; yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as the necessity for adaptations" as each reinterpretation allows a play text to find new meaning with different contexts (Hutcheon, 2006: 3).

## Chapter 2: A comparative analysis between different sign systems in the adaptation of a play text into film

### 2.1. The process of adaptation

As the process of adaptation most commonly involves the translation of an original source text situated in one medium into another, adaptation can be defined as “re-mediations, specific translations in the form of inter-semiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images)” (Hutcheon, 2006: 16). In the process of analysing how a dramatic play text is adapted into cinematic form, especially in terms of the translation that occurs between the different sign systems, a good place to start is to:

- i. establish to what extent the filmmaker has chosen to adapt the dramatic elements that are susceptible to transference; and
- ii. distinguish the elements that the filmmaker has sought to preserve from the source text but reinterpreted using the film’s signifying system to create something new (McFarlane, 1996: 196-197).

In other words, a distinction needs to be made between those elements which can be easily *transferred* between different mediums, and those elements which require *adaptation proper*. The elements that can easily be *transferred* between mediums are primarily focused on *narrative* as it is an element that is not tied to a specific medium’s sign system. On the other hand, *adaptation proper* relates to *enunciation* and requires the consideration of the different signifying systems involved as enunciation relates to each medium’s specific set of elements that are responsible for the display of the narrative. At the level of enunciation, the translation of a play text into cinematic form requires intricate processes of adaptation as the elements of display involved in a dramatic text such as narrative structure, dialogue, performance cues, and stage directions, are so closely tied to its respective medium’s sign system that they cannot be directly transferred into the cinematic medium’s sign system which consists of mise en scène, lighting, cinematography, editing and soundtrack, without undergoing some form of reinterpretation (McFarlane, 1996: 195-196).

If a narrative can be described as “a series of events, causally linked, involving a continuing set of characters which influence and are influenced by the course of events” then it is clear that narrative can be regarded as the chief transferable element between a dramatic play text and its film adaptation as such a description suits equally well to a narrative portrayed in both mediums (McFarlane, 1996: 12). The transferable element of narrative therefore seems to offer the best and most obvious starting point for a comparative study between a play text and its film adaptation. Since film established itself as a predominantly narrative medium, it has had to acknowledge a heavy dependence for its material on adaptations of novels, short stories and play texts, as they provided a source of ready-made material, a variety of pre-tested stories and characters. “Filmmakers’ reasons for this continuing phenomenon” which entails the ransacking of an already established repository of literary and dramatic texts, “appear to move between the poles of crass commercialism and high-minded respect for literary works. No doubt there is the lure of a pre-sold title, the expectation that respectability or popularity achieved in one medium might infect the work created in another” but this is done without too much consideration of the extent the source text’s success is intertwined with its mode of representation (McFarlane, 1996: 7).

## **2.2. Fidelity criticism**

Although it has been stated in Chapter 1 that a dramatic play text cannot be analysed according to the same standards as a literary text, such as a novel or short story, there are some criticism in terms of adaptation theory that are applicable to a dramatic and literary text as both are driven towards telling a story by utilizing the verbal sign system. In an attempt to establish a comparative analysis between a dramatic play text and its film adaptation, the central importance of narrative in the process of adapting a literary text or play text into the medium of film, provides a point of comparison in adaptation studies as the story is the common denominator, the core of what is transposed across different mediums, and thus allows a comparative relationship between “this book” and “this film” (Sarah Cardwell in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 52). Unfortunately, this type of comparative analysis frequently leads to “fidelity criticism” as the process of adapting a long and complex literary text into a film is regarded as the most fraught kind of transposition as the film is seen as “tampering” with the source text. As early as 1926, Virginia Woolf called film a “parasite” and literature its “prey” and “victim”, as she condemned the process of simplification a literary text had to undergo in its transposition to film (Hutcheon, 2006: 3). The type of criticism involved when analysing a film adaptation

in terms of its narrative has therefore often been “profoundly moralistic, awash in terms such as infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, and desecration” as it is generally considered that the filmic medium cannot explore the depths of psychology or emotional consciousness as literature can (Robert Stam in Zatlin, 2005: 153).

In the introduction to his book *Film Adaptation* (2000), James Naremore cites a “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’” (James Naremore in Zatlin, 2005: 152). Unfortunately by analysing adaptations in terms of fidelity usually leads to the automatic response that “the book was better” without taking into consideration what the adapted film is able to achieve in its own right. One need only consider the cinematic breakthroughs of Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni, Yasujiro Ozu and Akira Kurosawa, amongst many other filmmakers, to realize that film has at its disposal filmic techniques that are potentially as subtle and complex as those of any literary or dramatic medium (Brian McFarlane in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 4).

Fidelity criticism further depends on a “notion of the text as having and rendering up to the reader a single, correct ‘meaning’ which the filmmaker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with” (McFarlane, 1996: 8). When viewing the film adaptation of a literary or dramatic source text, most audiences only wish to compare their own projection of what the novel or play should “look like” with those created by the filmmaker, without taking into consideration what the filmic medium is capable of. This type of comparison is almost always to the detriment of the film, as after viewing a film adaptation audiences rarely compliment the sophisticated use of *mise en scène*, editing, cinematography or any other cinematic technique. Instead it is quite common to hear comments such as: “Why did they change the ending?” or “She was blonde in the book” or almost inevitably, “I think I liked the book better” (Brian McFarlane in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 6). Audiences are therefore often “not interested in something new being made in the film but only assessing how far their own conception of the novel [or play text] has been transposed from one medium to the other” (Brian McFarlane in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 6). This stigma, of course, makes it much more difficult to compare the source text with its film adaptation as the analysis no longer merely involves a parallelism between the source text and the film, but between audiences’ various readings and interpretations of the dramatic play text. The problem is when watching a film adaptation of a beloved text, the viewer “will not always find *his* film, since what he has before him in the actual film is now somebody

else's fantasy" (Christian Metz in McFarlane, 1996: 7). Filmmakers may therefore often anticipate fidelity criticism that comes as a result from the belief that they ultimately violate the viewer's single correct "meaning" of the source text.

In the argument against fidelity criticism, Robert Stam states that the assumption that there is "an extractable 'essence'... hidden 'underneath' the surface" of the literary source text is very simpleminded, and this is even more true of a dramatic play text. "In fact there is no such transferable core: a single novelistic text [and play text] comprises a series of verbal signs that can generate a plethora of possible readings... The literary text is not a closed, but an open structure to be reworked by a boundless context. The text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation" (David Kranz in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 79). The number of adaptations that may be inspired from a single source text is therefore unlimited as the dramatic play text is constantly reread and reinterpreted by different individuals within ever-changing contexts. The film adaptation is, however, only able to produce the filmmaker's interpretation of the source text. Even though the filmmaker's vision will hopefully coincide with the vision of many other viewers, the critic who disregards a film adaptation based on its fidelity to the source text is really only saying that: "This reading of the original does not tally with mine in these and these ways" (McFarlane, 1996: 9).

Dudley Andrew concludes that this "tiresome" debate on fidelity and its notion that "the task of adaptation is the reproduction in cinema of something essential about an original text," only results in "strident and futile arguments" about the essential differences that exist between the mediums involved in the process of adaptation (David Kranz in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 78). Robert Stam notes that the transition which occurs "from a single-track, uniquely verbal medium such as the novel [or play text]... to a multitrack medium such as film" makes fidelity almost impossible (David Kranz in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 79). Indeed, in *Novels into Film* (1957) George Bluestone states that "changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium" and that in terms of comparison it is as "fruitless to say that film A is better or worse than novel B as it is to pronounce Wright's Johnson's Wax Building better or worse than Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*" (Thomas Leitch in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 17).

This "evaluative straitjacket" of fidelity criticism, which assumes that a film adaptation can never fully represent its literary or dramatic source text nor provide the viewer with a similar emotional and intellectual experience, therefore needs to be shed (David Kranz in Welsh & Lev,

2007: 84). Instead of adaptations being criticised on the basis of their infidelity to the source text, which is an approach that ignores the cinematic techniques available to a filmmaker and their potential to amplify a different artistic interpretation of the text, adaptations should rather be evaluated in terms of the adapter's creativity and skill in making something that is both connected to its precursor text but is still autonomous and new in itself. The process of adaptation therefore shouldn't be regarded as slavish copying in an attempt to maintain fidelity, but rather as a process of making the adapted material your own (Hutcheon, 2006: 20).

### 2.3. Adaptations “as adaptations”

Another option in the comparative analysis of adaptations is to view them *as adaptations*, “not only as autonomous works” but as “deliberate, announced and extended revisitations of prior works” (Hutcheon, 2006: xiv). The collective work of a play text such as William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* or the musical *Cabaret*, can be regarded as a series of adaptations where every copy, print edition, short story, exhibit, stage performance, opera, ballet, or film and so on, is an adaptation in the sense that each work re-frames, re-presents or re-iterates prior versions of the play text into new environments and for new audiences (Joseph Grigely in Cartelli & Rowe, 2007: 27-28). Adaptations can therefore be analysed in terms of intertextuality, as “every text is a rereading of earlier texts and every text, whether it poses as an original or an adaptation, has the same claims to aesthetic or ontological privilege as every other” (Thomas Leith in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 332).

It does seem, however, to be more acceptable to adapt a popular work such as a well-known play text into an opera or a ballet, rather than a film, as film adaptations are often regarded as inferior and secondary in comparison to the “original” source text (Hutcheon, 2006: 3). In his introduction to *Film Adaptation* (2000), James Naremore observes that academic criticism of adaptations are too often “narrow in range, inherently respectful of the ‘precursor text’, and constitutive of a series of binary oppositions that poststructuralist theory has taught us to deconstruct: literature versus cinema, high culture versus mass culture, original versus copy” (Zatlin, 2005: 152). Add to that the nostalgia for originals, and the corresponding sense that any “updating” falls sort of the original, film is often described as appealing to the lower-class sensations of mass culture rather than the higher processes of the elite. As a result of all these stigmas, contemporary film adaptations are often regarded as a “second-order art that

parasitically sucks the life from the text, as it converts it to an ‘image’” (Robert Stam in Cartelli & Rowe, 2007: 33).

According to Michael Alexander, to deal with adaptations *as adaptations* is to regard them as “inherently ‘palimpsestuous’ works”, perpetually followed by the ghosts of their precursor texts (Hutcheon, 2006: 6). For the viewer who is acquainted with the precursor text, part of the pleasure of viewing adaptations *as adaptations* comes from the repetition with variation, the comfort and pleasure of knowing what can be expected to happen combined with the element of surprise, or in other words “warmed-over comfort-food, pre-packaged in Hollywood” (Joel Honig in Hutcheon, 2006: 115). Even though adaptations are intrinsically tied to their precursor texts, allowing the viewer to oscillate it in their memory while experiencing an adaptation *as an adaptation*, it is important to note that the precursor text should only be regarded as a single aspect of the adapted film’s intertextuality (Hutcheon, 2006: 121).

During the process of creating an adaptation *as an adaptation*, filmmakers must take into account that along with the known precursor text, there are many other intertextual references to well-known literary, cinematic, cultural or otherwise valued sources that will help set up audience expectations and guide their interpretation of the adapted film they are experiencing (David Kranz in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 89). Indeed, when moving from the discursive expansion of literature to the time and space limitations of film, adapters rely on intertextual references to popular films, music, paintings, famous literature, newsworthy events, and so on, to help the viewer fill in any gaps in the adaptation, aiding their understanding and appreciation of the adapted film. Viewing an adaptation *as an adaptation* therefore becomes an “ongoing dialogical process”, to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term, involving a constant conceptual flipping back and forth between the precursor text, including other intertextual references the viewer is aware of, and the adapted film they are experiencing (Hutcheon, 2006: 21). Robert Stam therefore correctly states that in the process of creating and viewing film adaptations, they are “caught up in the ongoing whirl of textual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin” (Zatlin, 2005: 150).

The difficulty in establishing a comparative analysis between a dramatic play text and film adaptation in terms of intertextuality studies, however, occurs when the film adaptation reaches a segment of the audience that is unfamiliar with the precursor text or the intertextual references

used. In some cases, the filmmaker relies too heavily on the preconception that the viewer has previous knowledge of the precursor text and as a result, the adaptation makes no sense without definite foreknowledge of the precursor text. The unknowing viewer then experiences the film adaptation as they would any other work, the adaptation becoming no more significant than any other film (Hutcheon, 2006: 120-121).

## 2.4. “Adaptation proper” processes

As we attempt to establish some form of comparative analysis between a dramatic play text and its film adaptation, we have thus far mainly focused on two possibilities: i) the chief transferable element that is narrative; and ii) adaptations in terms of intertextual studies. Even though the narrative provides an obvious point of comparison between the play text and corresponding film adaptation, as it is considered the core of what is transferred across the different mediums, the type of criticism involved when analysing film adaptations in terms of its fidelity to the source text has been profoundly negative. As discussed in section 2.2, this type of criticism is primarily aimed at the adaptation’s “betrayal” and “infidelity” to its source text, and as such it fails to notice the cinematic techniques available to film and the potential it has to create something new. Analysing film adaptations in terms of their intertextual connections to earlier source texts and other literary, cinematic or cultural references can be regarded as an alternative. For the purposes of this study, however, this type of intertextual analysis would then be dependent on the viewer’s prior knowledge of the dramatic play text in order to regard the adaptation *as an adaptation*. Without reference to such intertextualities, the viewer will regard the adaptation as just another film and as a result, the significance of adapting a play text into the filmic medium will be lost to the viewer.

The other possibility for a comparative analysis between a literary source text and its film adaptation is, as Robert B. Ray suggests, through a constructive analysis of “how stories travel from medium to medium” (Zatlin, 2005: 153). If we return to our definition of adaptations as “specific translations in the form of inter-semiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images)” or in other terms, the process of transcoding specific elements of the source text from one set of medium-specific conventions into a different set of medium-specific conventions, then it is therefore at the level of enunciation that a comparative analysis can be made (Hutcheon, 2006: 16). To recap from section 2.1, enunciation relates to each medium’s specific set of elements that are responsible for the display of the

narrative. At the level of enunciation, the translation of a play text into cinematic form requires intricate processes of adaptation as the elements of display involved in a dramatic text such as scenes and acts, dialogue and lyrics, list of characters and physical attributes, performance cues and dramatic pauses, descriptions of sets, props, and costumes, and stage directions along with lighting and music cues, are so closely tied to its respective medium's sign system that they cannot be directly transferred into the cinematic medium's sign system which consists of mise en scène, lighting, cinematography, editing and soundtrack, without undergoing some form of reinterpretation. In the process of adapting a play text into a film adaptation, the filmmaker therefore needs to find equivalences for the various elements of the source text in a different signifying system using *adaptation proper* processes (McFarlane, 1996: 195-196).

In an essay written in 1948, André Bazin suggested a method for examining film adaptations in terms of their equivalence in meaning to the source text: "faithfulness to a form, literary or otherwise, is illusory: what matters is the equivalence in meaning of the forms" (Zatlin, 2005: 153). This method is comparable to the linguist Eugene Nida's concept of "dynamic equivalence" where it prescribes that the effect the translation has on the viewer should be roughly equivalent to the initial effect that the source text had on the reader. In *Concepts of Film Theory* (1984), Dudley Andrew provides a similar option of judging adaptations in terms of their equivalence in meaning as an alternative for analysing film adaptations. Andrew's process of seeking equivalences for "the original's tone, values, imagery and rhythm" in a different sign system therefore relates to the concept of inter-semiotic translation (Zatlin, 2005: 154). In the process of adapting a dramatic play text into a film, which entails the conversion of verbal signs into nonverbal signs, equivalences are thus sought in the cinematic sign system in order to represent the precursor text's characters, themes, events, plot line, mood, environment, point-of-view, symbols, and so on (Hutcheon, 2006: 10).

A comparative analysis between corresponding scenes from the source play text and film adaptation thus proves to be the most helpful in determining how meaning is translated from a verbal sign system to a system of audio-visual images. It allows us to analyse, in Roland Barthes' term, what "cardinal functions" of the narrative the filmmaker has chosen to reproduce cinematically and in what ways the filmmaker has chosen to create his own work, using the film's signifying system to create his own unique interpretation of the source text by providing a different emphasis and experience (McFarlane, 1996: 196-197). This type of comparative analysis further leads to a comparison between the different mediums themselves, as every

medium, whether it is dramatic text or film, has its own affordances and constraints, codes and sign systems according to which they can create meaning which differentiates them from one another but also highlights wherein their artistic potential lies (Sarah Cardwell in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 59).

## 2.5. Semiotics

In order to discover how meaning is firstly, created and interpreted within a specific medium, and then secondly, translated from the signifying system in which the source text is situated into the signifying system of the adaptation, we turn to the study of semiotics, “the study of signs”. As a species, we can surely be regarded as *homo significans*, humans as meaning-makers, as we are constantly driven to create and interpret “signs.” Indeed, anything can be regarded as a sign, “as long as someone interprets it as ‘signifying’ something – referring to or standing for something other than itself” (Chandler, 2007: 13). Whether it is words, symbols, visual images, or physical gestures, anything can therefore be perceived as representing a specific meaning. In order to interpret the correct meaning of a specific sign, however, requires that the sign not be interpreted on its own, but rather as part of a semiotic “sign system,” such as textual or filmic codes and conventions, according to which it signifies meaning.

In the development of semiotics, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) is responsible for the creation of one of the primary theoretical traditions used to define the process according to which a sign generates meaning. Saussure’s theory defines the sign and its signification of meaning according to the interaction that occurs between two elements existing in a dyadic relationship, one part known as the *acoustic image*, and the other part its intended meaning, the *concept*. Throughout the rest of the thesis, the Saussurean tradition of semiotics will form the basis of this study in exploring how meaning is created within a medium-specific sign system such as a dramatic play text and the cinematic medium.

## 2.6. The Saussurean tradition

Ferdinand de Saussure is best known for his contribution to structural linguistics as compiled by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye from the notes of students who attended a series of lectures presented by Saussure between 1907 and 1911 and published posthumously in 1916 in the book *Cours de linguistique générale*, a “Course in general linguistics” (Sanders, 2004: 1).

The influence of Saussure's "Course in general linguistics", however, stretches far beyond the area of linguistics as within his series of lectures he introduces his theory of "sémiologie" or "signologie", commonly referred to as the Saussurean tradition in the field of semiotics (Sanders, 2004: 240).

In the "Course on general linguistics", Saussure defines a language "as a system of signs, and maintains that the signs of language have only one essential thing to them: the union of a concept and an acoustic image" (John Joseph in Sanders, 2004: 60). A visual representation of the Saussurean diagram, illustrating the model of the "sign" being in a dyadic relationship, demonstrates the inseparability of the acoustic image and the concept in the formation of a sign. Their continuous interaction, known as "signification", being represented by the two arrows in Figure 2.1 (Chandler, 2007: 14-15). At a later stage in "Course on general linguistics", Saussure introduced the terms *signifier* and *signified* as an alternative to the terms *acoustic image* and *concept*: "I propose to retain the word *sign* [*signe*] to designate the whole and to replace *concept* and *sound-image* respectively by *signified* [*signifié*] and *signifier* [*signifiant*]; the last two terms have the advantage of indicating the opposition that separated them from each other and from the whole of which they are parts" (Ferdinand de Saussure in Holdcroft, 1991: 51). Hence the terms, *acoustic image* and *concept*, *signifier* and *signified*, are used interchangeably throughout Saussure's work and the research of contemporary semioticians who follow the Saussurean tradition.

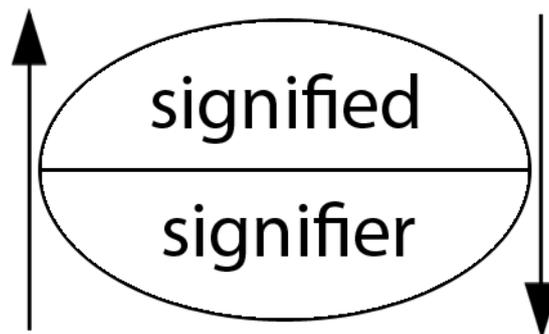


Figure 2.1: Saussure's model of the sign (Chandler, 2007: 14).

Saussure defines the process of signification that occurs when perceiving a linguistic sign as follows: “A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept [signified] and a sound pattern [signifier]. The sound pattern is not actually a sound, for a sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer’s psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called a ‘material’ element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions. The sound pattern may thus be distinguished from the other element associated with it in a linguistic sign. This other element is generally of a more abstract kind: the concept” (Ferdinand de Saussure in Chandler, 2007: 14). In order to demonstrate this process of signification, we take the linguistic sign for “cat”, as an example. It consists of the signifier (the word “cat”) and the signified concept (a feline animal). Saussure does not, however, regard the signifier as a sign for the signified. On the contrary, in the formation of the sign, he regards both the signifier and signified as psychological entities and sees them “as inseparable as the two sides of a piece of paper... wholly interdependent, neither pre-existing the other” as demonstrated in the Saussurean diagram (Chandler, 2007: 17). The signifier of the word “cat” is thus not the sound made when it is pronounced “c-a-t”, but rather it is “the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression it makes on our senses” from where the signified can be defined as the mental image of a cat, their collaboration establishing the meaning of the linguistic sign “cat” as demonstrated in Figure 2.2 (Holdcroft, 1991: 50).

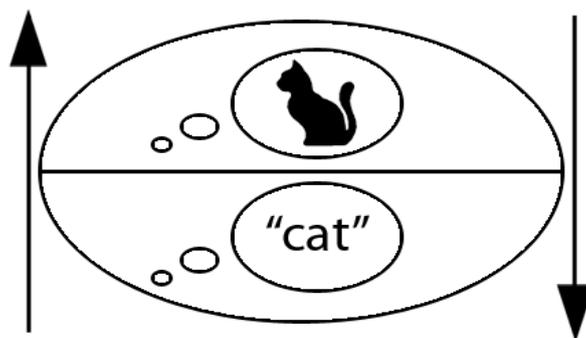


Figure 2.2: Concept and sound pattern (Chandler, 2007: 15).

The meaning of a specific sign thus arises from the “recognizable combination of a signifier with a particular signified” (Chandler, 2007: 16). The first principle to Saussure’s dyadic model is, however, that there exists no defining link between a signifier and its signified, thus establishing the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. While language was often regarded as a

collection of words and their meanings, where the signifier is seen as “standing for” its signified concept, Saussure stressed that “there is no necessary, intrinsic, direct or inevitable relationship between the signifier and the signified” (Chandler, 2007: 22). Jonathan Culler demonstrates the arbitrariness between the signifier and signified as such: “Since I speak English I may use the signifier represented by *dog* to talk about an animal of a particular species, but this sequence of sounds is no better suited to that purpose than another sequence. *Lod*, *tet*, or *bloop* would serve equally well if it were accepted by members of my speech community” (John Joseph in Sanders, 2004: 67). Culler’s statement highlights an important aspect regarding Saussure’s point on there being no logical relationship between the signifier and the signified in the linguistic sign. The arbitrary connection between the signifier and signified is not dependent on the individual’s choice, as their specific use of the linguistic sign is dependent on the established conventions in their community. For example, in the English language, we say *cat* and *dog* because our predecessors said *cat* and *dog*. Rather, the relationship between a particular signifier and signified can be regarded arbitrary in the sense that it has no natural connection towards each other, “there is nothing at all to prevent the association of any idea whatsoever with any sequence of sounds whatsoever” (Ferdinand de Saussure in Chandler, 2007: 23).

This arbitrary connection between the signifier and signified may result in signs having multiple meanings, which can make it difficult to determine the sign’s intended purpose. Saussure, however, states that “no sign makes sense on its own but only in relation to other signs” (Chandler, 2007: 18-19). For example, even though a reader may regard the word “rock” as an independent entity, able to exist on its own and still have meaning, it is only when it is read in relation to the word “music” that its true purpose becomes clear as a genre of music, i.e. “rock music”. If the word “rock” were instead read in relation to the word “mountain”, it would have a completely different meaning. This emphasizes the importance of Saussure’s point that a sign “has no ‘absolute’ value” independent from its sign system (Chandler, 2007: 19). In the “Course on general linguistics”, Saussure compares the value of a sign situated in a linguistic system to the value of a knight in a game of chess. “Take a knight, for instance. By itself is it an element in the game? Certainly not, for by its material make-up - outside its square and the other conditions of the game - it means nothing to the player; it becomes a real, concrete element only when endowed with value and wedded to it” (Ferdinand de Saussure in Holdcroft, 1991: 96). Saussure thus proposes that in order to establish the correct “value” of a sign, it requires to be interpreted in relation to other signs within the same sign system (syntagmatically) and within a certain context (diachronically), just as the value of the knight is determined by its position

on the chessboard in relation to the other chess pieces and its strategic role within the game (Claudine Normand in Sanders, 2004: 100).

In the study of semiotics, contemporary semioticians therefore do not study the individual signs and their creation of meaning in isolation, but rather as part of semiotic “sign systems”. A semiotic sign system, such as a play text’s verbal sign system or the audio-visual medium of film, thus serves as the starting point in determining how meaning is translated across different mediums as each sign system consists of its own signifying practices according to which it generates meaning (Chandler, 2007: 20).

## **2.7. Medium-specific sign systems**

According to Jay David Bolter, “signs are always anchored in a medium. Signs may be more or less dependent upon the characteristics of one medium, they may transfer more or less well to other media, but there is no such thing as a sign without a medium” (Chandler, 2007: 55). The signifier can be regarded as the material dimension, or in other words, the medium within which the sign exists. Whether the specific sign vehicle is the words on a page, a live performance on the stage, or projected images on a cinema screen, “the material expression of the text is always significant; it is a separately variable semiotic feature” that consists of its own principles according to which it creates meaning (Gunther Kress & Theo van Leeuwen in Chandler, 2007: 56).

The comment, “the medium is the message,” made by the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, can be seen as reflecting the notion that “the medium is not neutral” (Chandler, 2007: 85). Each medium has its own capabilities for creating meaning which distinguishes it from other mediums and allows it to achieve a different experience. Émile Benveniste argues that semiotic systems, such as mediums, are not “synonymous”, “we are not able to say the ‘the same thing’” in systems that are based on different signifying units and will therefore act dissimilarly on our consciousness (Chandler, 2007: 224). Understanding the affordances and constraints which underlie each medium’s creation of meaning thus provides valuable insight when considering the adaptation of a dramatic play text into a film, as “telling a story in words, either orally or on paper, is never the same as showing it visually and aurally in any of the performance media” (Hutcheon, 2006: 23). It becomes apparent that changing the signifier from a play text to a cinematic medium, and in the process transcoding the narrative from a verbal

sign system to an audio-visual sign system, may ultimately change the signified, which is regarded as the insight and experience the reader/viewer gain from what is supposedly still the same “content” (Chandler, 2007: 56).

The viewer’s experience of the text is thus determined by the medium in which the narrative is situated as each medium demands its own decoding processes, a different “mental act” from their audience in order to achieve its intended meaning (Hutcheon, 2006: 130). What are then the differences between experiencing a narrative that is situated in a dramatic play text and experiencing the same narrative in a performance medium such as film? In both mediums, the audience can be considered to be actively involved in decoding the signs and creating meaning, whether it is by interpreting words on a page or analysing projected images on the screen. Where their audience participation differs is in their modes of engagement. In the telling mode, a dramatic play text engages the reader through their imagination. The reader’s visualization of the narrative’s world and characters is guided “by taking in words and groups of words sequentially as they appear on the page... The relentless linearity associated with the usual reading of a text favours the gradual accretion of information about action, characters, atmosphere, ideas” (McFarlane, 1996: 27). The telling mode thus requires conceptual work on the part of the reader in order to construct meaning from a series of words on a page. In the move to the showing mode, a performance medium such as a film or stage production must transcode the dramatic text’s narrative, characters, plot and themes into a variety of aural and visual signs. A film, play or musical thus engages the viewer’s “perceptual decoding abilities” as their engagement has shifted from the imaginary to the direct observation of audio-visual stimuli (Hutcheon, 2006: 130).

The process of transcoding a narrative from a dramatic play text into a film is difficult as both mediums are based on separate sign systems. A dramatic text is entirely based on a verbal sign system. When perceiving a verbal sign, such as words on a piece of paper, the verbal sign’s low level of iconicity and high symbolic value, using C.S. Peirce’s terms, leads the reader to interpret the verbal sign conceptually and in the process creates a “mental image” (McFarlane, 1996: 26-27). Robert Stam defines the creation of a “mental image” when reading a novel, but this description is equally applicable to when reading a play text, as follows: “We read a novel through our introjected desires, hopes, and utopias, and as we read we fashion our own imaginary *mise en scène* of the novel on the private stages of our minds” (Robert Stam in Zatlín, 2005: 153). When reading a dramatic play text, the words (signifiers) used in the verbal sign

system to describe the characters, environment or events can be regarded as “arbitrary”, in the sense that they are un-analogous to the elements they are signifying. Signification thus occurs in language due to the ambiguous aspect of the literary sign, the uncertainty that arises from reading a word (signifier) and conceptualizing its intended meaning (signified). For example, when reading the play text for *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, or Christopher Isherwood’s compilation of short stories *Goodbye to Berlin* (1972), the reader gains little information from reading the names “Juliet Capulet” or “Sally Bowles”, aside from the reader’s personal connotations about the characters due to prior knowledge of the texts. Neither can the reader create a clear mental image of the characters’ appearance from interpreting Romeo’s abstract description of Juliet’s beauty “as a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear. Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear ... Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night” (Shakespeare, 1984: I.v.45-46, 51-52). In *Goodbye to Berlin*, Christopher Isherwood describes Sally Bowles as follows, “I noticed that her finger-nails were painted emerald green, a colour unfortunately chosen, for it called attention to her hands, which were much stained by cigarette-smoking and as dirty as a little girl’s... Her face was long and thin, powdered dead white. She had very large brown eyes which should have been darker, to match her hair and the pencil she used for her eyebrows” (Isherwood, 1972: 27). While Isherwood’s description is more detailed than Shakespeare’s abstract depiction of Juliet’s beauty, the reader’s imaginative representations of these characters will never possess as much detail as the characters’ visual representations in their subsequent film adaptations (Chatman, 1990: 112).

In a performance medium, such as a film, the signs that signify the narrative, including the characters, events, and setting, are situated in an audio-visual sign system. These signs can be regarded as highly iconic as there exists a relatively analogous correlation between the signifier and its signified. While meaning in language is created by the conceptual signification that occurs between reading the word “flower” (signifier) and creating a mental image of a flower (signified), in film there is little uncertainty in terms of what is the signifier’s intended meaning as the signifier is exactly what it signifies, an image of a flower is an image of a flower. A filmic image can thus be regarded as a direct, iconic sign, “where the signifier is coextensive with the signified” (Jean Mitry in Scalia, 2012: 49). For instance, continuing with the example of *Romeo and Juliet*, the character of “Juliet Capulet” would be presented by a young, beautiful girl, and depending on which film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* the viewer is watching, the event of Juliet stabbing herself with a dagger is very similar to what a viewer would have imagined the “real” event would look like (Chatman, 1990: 111). There exists, however, a certain element of arbitrariness, as different film adaptations of the same play text will use different actresses

(signifiers) to portray “Juliet Capulet” (signified). In Franco Zeffirelli’s 1968 adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, “Juliet” is portrayed by Olivia Hussey, while in Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 adaptation of the same play, “Juliet” is portrayed by Claire Danes. Each actress will share certain physical characteristics that are associated with the role, but where they differ is in their unique interpretation and embodiment of the character. Changing the actress (the signifier) portraying “Juliet” may therefore ultimately alter the audience’s perception (signified) of “Juliet” within the context of which the film is situated (Chatman, 1990: 112).

The distinction between a dramatic play text and the cinematic medium, between the telling and showing mode of engagement, thus comes down to a distinction between the predominate use of symbolic “arbitrary” signs in a verbal sign system and iconic “analogous” signs in the audio-visual sign system used in films (Chatman, 1990: 114). Therefore, in order to establish a comparative analysis between a play text and its subsequent film adaptation, considering the process of transcoding a sign situated in a verbal sign system into an audio-visual sign system, a comparable unit of analysis needs to be found between the different sign systems and their modes of engagement.

## **2.8. Comparable units of analysis**

In an attempt to define the process of signification according to which film creates meaning, Christian Metz (1931-1994) applied Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of structural linguistics to the study of film. Since his essay “Le Cinéma: langue ou langage” (1964), film theoreticians have been trying to establish a basic unit according to which film is able to signify meaning, for example a film frame, and equate this unit of analysis to the basic unit of meaning used in a verbal sign system, the word (Chandler, 2007: 119). During this period of trying to establish a semiotics of film that is similar to a verbal language, Metz had, however, great difficulties in “the direct application of the concepts and methods of Saussurean structural linguistics to a multimodal cultural object as complex and diverse as cinema” (Sanders, 2004: 252). One of the first difficulties in establishing a directly comparative relationship between a dramatic play text and a film is as a result of their different viewing experiences. A film is normally projected at a rate of 24 frames per second but, depending on the technology involved, the filmmaker’s desired quality and effect for the film, this rate can increase to 48 or even 60 frames per second. This points to one of the fundamental differences between experiencing a dramatic play text and a film as the viewer doesn’t typically view a film frame-by-frame in the same way as a

reader reads a play text word-by-word. The film audience merely perceives the fluidity of the audio-visual images without being conscious of the 24 individual frames being projected per second onto the cinema screen. Furthermore, individual frames may be isolated for purpose of analysis, from where it becomes clear that at any point during the film, the viewer is constantly being exposed to a wide variety of signifiers simultaneously. The various signifiers that are present throughout the film will also occur in varying degrees. Some signifiers such as the cultural or historical context, location, and actors will remain more or less constant throughout longer periods in the film, while signifiers that relate to costume, dialogue, movement, and music will differ between scenes. It is therefore difficult to establish a “basic unit of meaning” that is able to encompass all of the various sign systems that have an effect on the audience’s understanding as due to the multiplicity of signs simultaneously present during any given moment in a film, different viewers will notice different signs and will therefore have a different experience of the film (Esslin, 1987: 19). The individual frame is thus able to provide more information than any given word in a dramatic text due to the spatial quality of the filmic medium. As a result of the multiple signifiers simultaneously present in a single frame and across the duration of the film, Metz realized that the experience of viewing a film cannot be compared to the experience of reading a dramatic play text as the filmic medium has a completely separate semiotic system, with “its own composite conventions and, some would say, even its own grammar and syntax that all operate to structure meaning for the perceiving audience” (Hutcheon, 2006: 35).

Even though film theoreticians have tried to define film’s process of signification according to Saussure’s theory of structural linguistics, the philosopher Susanne Langer argued that “we should not seek to impose linguistic models upon other media since the laws that govern their articulation, ‘are altogether different from the laws of syntax that govern language’” (Chandler, 2007: 7). The Saussurean tradition of semiotics on the other hand, and how it applies to visual images, such as paintings and photographs, gestures, music, sounds, works of art, film and theatre performances, can shed some valuable light on the generation of meaning in these signifying systems (Esslin, 1987: 17). For example, Jan Mukařovský applied the Saussurean tradition of semiotics to a theatrical performance, labelling the entire performance as the *semiotic unit*, the various signs present in a performance such as the actors, sets, props, lighting, and costumes, as *signifiers*, and the effect these theatrical elements have on the viewer’s understanding of the play as the *signified*. Mukařovský’s application of the Saussurean tradition of semiotics to a theatre performance may also be applied to a film as both are regarded as multitrack mediums with similar sign systems that engage the same processes of signification

in order to create meaning. Like the complete theatre performance, a film can thus also be regarded as a macro-sign with its generation of meaning being dependent on the effect various filmic codes and conventions (signifiers) have on the audience's interpretation of the film (signified). In order to establish how a dramatic play text is transcoded into a particular film therefore requires that each element that forms part of the film (the macro-sign) be viewed individually in order to understand its contribution to the generation of meaning in a film (Elam, 1980: 7).

The representations produced in a film are constructed according to a general cinematic code, also known as the cinema's enunciatory system, which should be considered "as a specific set of interrelated elements that depend on and affect one another" in the presentation of a film narrative (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 27). According to Christian Metz, these cinematic codes, which include *mise en scène*, editing, and sound design, can be further divided into sub-codes. Elements of the film's enunciatory system, with its various codes and sub-codes operating in varying combinations, includes the following:

- i. Narrative style: linear or non-linear;
- ii. Film genre: often defined by their subject matter, setting, and narrative form. For example, western, comedy, science-fiction, thriller, amongst many others;
- iii. Performance: actors, dialogue, physical movement, costume design;
- iv. Production design: location, setting, props;
- v. Cinematography: shot size, camera angle, camera movement, frame composition, depth of field, type of lens, aspect ratio;
- vi. Lighting: naturalistic or expressionist lighting;
- vii. Editing: spatial, temporal, rhythmic and graphic relations between shots, different types of fading, cross-cutting between events occurring simultaneously at different locations, juxtaposition, cutting pace, manipulation of time through flashbacks, flashforwards, speeded-up action and slow motion effects;
- viii. Sound design: diegetic and non-diegetic sound, soundtrack and music;
- ix. Graphic design: special effects and animation (Chandler, 2007: 164).

The above-mentioned techniques form part of the film's signification process. "To be ignorant of these [filmic elements] is to be ignorant of how film creates meaning" (Brian McFarlane in Welsh & Lev, 2007: 7). In order to guide the viewer to the film's intended meaning, however,

requires the wide variety of visual, aural, and verbal signifiers simultaneously present within a film, to be situated in recognizable codes and conventions. Viewers learn to recognize and assign the correct meanings to the particular use of codes within the cinematic sign system through frequent exposure to social, cultural and filmic conventions. In the creation of cinematic texts, filmmakers use this knowledge in selecting and combining certain signs that are “organized according to codes and sub-codes which reflect certain values, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and practices” to create a film “language” or also referred to as a specific film “style” (Chandler, 2007: 157). The act of “reading” and interpreting a film thus requires active participation from the viewer in decoding all of the signifiers operating in various combinations within the frame, between different shots, and across scenes. The use of cinematic codes makes it, however, easier for the filmmaker to communicate certain experiences, to limit the text’s possible meanings, and to guide the interpreter towards “a preferred reading” rather than leading the viewer towards, what Umberto Eco refers to as, “aberrant decoding” (Chandler, 2007: 158).

In the audio-visual sign system of film, editing can be regarded an important signifying practice in the construction of meaning in a film as it acts as a “virtual narrator,” leading the audience’s attention through a series of events, emphasising important moments of character development, and amplifying emotional responses that are crucial to the audience’s understanding of the film narrative. This fundamental feature of filmmaking will become the point of departure in the comparative analyses of the source play texts and their subsequent film adaptations.

## **2.9. Editing conventions**

There are different perspectives regarding the significance of editing techniques in the construction of meaning and emotional responses in a film narrative. Filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein, Orson Welles, Sam Peckinpah, and Vsevolod Pudovkin, regards editing “as the basic creative force, by power of which the soulless photographs (the separate shots) are engineered into living cinematographic form” (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 185). The power of editing to generate meaning that extends beyond the individual shots is demonstrated in Sergei Eisenstein’s theory of montage, and Vsevolod Pudovkin’s collaboration with Lev Kuleshov in experimenting with spatial manipulation between shots.

The principle of Sergei Eisenstein’s theory of intellectual montage, or also known as “montage of attractions”, was that by “creating visual ‘jolts’ between each cut, the viewer would be

‘shocked’ into new awareness” (Nelmes, 2003: 403). This type of editing requires active participation from the film viewer in establishing emotional and intellectual connections between the juxtaposition of two, seemingly unrelated shots. The formula according to which Eisenstein’s intellectual montage is able to create new meaning through non-diegetic inserts is as follows: shot A + shot B = NEW MEANING C (Nelmes, 2003: 403). One of the best examples of an intellectual montage is in Eisenstein’s first film *Strike* (1924), where shots of factory workers being attacked by state officials are intercut with shots of a bull being slaughtered, thus forming the intellectual connection that the factory workers are being killed-off like animals. Eisenstein often resorted to the use of montage to amplify political commentary, propaganda, and the concept of revolution in his films. In its modern usage, filmmakers often employ montages to guide audiences in their conceptualization of certain themes, emotions, and concepts that are important to their understanding of the film narrative.

Experiments by Vsevolod Pudovkin and Lev Kuleshov explored the creation of meaning through spatial manipulation between shots. Their theory suggested that “the same shot juxtaposed with different following shots could yield widely different results with an audience” (Dancyger, 2002: 15-16). This theory was successfully demonstrated in one of their most famous experiments by juxtaposing a medium shot of the actor Ivan Mosjukhin looking at the camera with three different shots, a plate of soup, a shot of a dead woman laid in a coffin, and a little girl playing with a toy. By juxtaposing the shot of the actor’s neutral expression with the three different scenarios, the audience’s interpretations varied from seeing a hungry man, a sad husband, and a loving father. Despite the fact that the first shot always remained the same neutral shot of the actor, the eye-line match made it appear as if the actor was looking at the scene in the next shot (Dancyger, 2002: 16). As a result, the spatial manipulation between shots altered the audience’s interpretation of the different sequences as they assumed a spatial co-existence between the two separate shots.

The above-mentioned theories demonstrate the power of editing, as through the juxtaposition of different shots, editing is able to amplify ideas and provoke certain intellectual and emotional responses in the audience. In contrast to the use of editing to create meaning in a film, some filmmakers believe that editing should be kept to a minimum in order to maintain the audience’s attention on the film’s narrative and character development rather than drawing their focus to the filmic construction involved.

According to André Bazin, the aim of a film is “to give us [the audience] the illusion of being present at real events unfolding before us as in everyday reality” (Hatchuel, 2004: 79). Despite many filmmakers’ fear that the disunifying effect caused by joining different shots together would break the audience’s illusion of viewing a continuous film narrative, editing still forms an important part in the construction of a film. A solution to controlling editing’s potentially disruptive force “was to plan the cinematography and mise en scène with a view to editing the shots according to a specific system” (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 163). Instead of drawing the audience’s attention to the film techniques involved, the purpose of this editing system would be to present the film’s narrative in the most dramatically effective way while maintaining the chronological unfolding of the film’s plot line and character development, thereby guiding the audience’s attention and understanding of the narrative. Alain Bergala refers to this process as “diegetisation of enunciation,” which refers to “when a film hides its discourse of construction under the story it tells” (Hatchuel, 2004: 79). Since the early 1900s, filmmakers such as Edwin S. Porter (*Great Train Robbery* (1903)), Cecil Hepworth (*Rescued by Rover* (1905)) and D.W. Griffith (*The Birth of a Nation* (1915)), used relatively sophisticated editing techniques to amplify narrative continuity and the dramatic impact of the film. With the development of cinema and editing styles, this system of techniques have come together under the convention “continuity editing”, or also known as “invisible editing”, which consists of a set of rules for maintaining continuity across shots while amplifying the dramatic intent of the story.

### **2.9.1. Continuity editing**

The statement “film style interacts with film narrative,” refers to how a specific film style is able to amplify the dramatic impact of the film narrative, whether it is by hiding the filmic construction involved or by drawing the audience’s attention to it in order to create an intended effect (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 74). The purpose of the continuity editing system is to present the film’s narrative and character development in a logical, engaging way, while maintaining the illusion of “realism”. This is achieved by editing separate shots together according to a set of rules that will ensure a continuous flow from shot to shot, thereby hiding the filmic construction involved. “Making a smooth cut means joining two shots in such a way that the transition does not create a noticeable jerk and the spectator’s illusion of seeing a continuous piece of action is not interrupted” (Reisz & Millar, 1968: 216). There are a variety of ways according to which shots can be joined together. A gradual transition from one shot to another may slowly introduce new information through a fade, wipe, or dissolve. The most

popular editing transition is, however, through a straight cut, which results in an immediate change to the next shot. The disruption these editing transitions cause in terms of space, time, and graphics between shots is, however, what breaks the audience's perception of a viewing continuous action in a film. In order to maintain the illusion of continuous action in a film, the editor needs to take into account the graphic, rhythmic, spatial, and temporal relations between shots (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 154). The specific editing techniques used for establishing continuity in terms of these relations will be discussed in more detail and with visual examples in the analysis of Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film adaptation *Romeo and Juliet* in Chapter Four.

The purpose of the continuity editing system is to create seamless transitions between shots and along with the chronological unfolding of the narrative's cause-and-effect and character development, the viewer's engagement with the film's presentation of the narrative will prevent them from noticing the techniques involved. The editing of shots in the continuity system is therefore primarily determined by the dramatic intent of the story, as each cut and each new shot must advance the narrative, introducing new information that will aid the audience's understanding of the narrative and enhance their engagement. As the film's dramatic goals must dictate the selection of shots, the following criteria needs to be taken into consideration: "1) Which visual information is dramatically interesting, and 2) which visual information is dramatically necessary?" (Dancyger, 2002: 358). Once the relevant shots are selected, it is the editor's responsibility to join the various shots in the most dramatically effective way, while maintaining narrative continuity, thus ensuring that the film's continuity and dramatic goals are respected.

### **2.9.2. MTV editing**

Powerful and popular as it may be, the classic Hollywood continuity editing system that has been used since the late 1910s, remains only one editing style. Alongside the development of continuity editing techniques, filmmakers continued to explore the possibilities of alternative editing conventions. Wanting to break away from the ever-popular narrative continuity system, recent Hollywood filmmakers were inspired by MTV's definite techniques and as result formed a new style of cinematic expression.

MTV refers to the popular music television channel that started in 1981 and gained increasing prominence during 1983. Filmmakers soon began to realize the potential of the MTV-style as

it appealed to young audiences longing for “quick, evocative visual stimuli” (Dancyger, 2002: 184). One of the first films that employed a definite MTV-style was Adrian Lyne’s *Flashdance* (1983) which some critics regarded as “little more than a dance video at greater length” (Steven Stark in Calavita, 2007: 17). The MTV-style of filmmaking expanded during the 1990s and was further popularised by films such as Tony Scott’s *Top Gun* (1986), and especially the films by Oliver Stone. “It is in [Oliver Stone’s] *JKF* (1991) and *Natural Born Killers* (1994) that a shift in Hollywood editing style (and cinematography) can be discerned - toward an often faster and more expressionistic mix of imagery, including varied film stocks, colours, and speeds” (Calavita, 2007: 20). Instead of striving to maintain narrative continuity and character development as in the continuity system, the MTV-style film disrupts the graphic, rhythmic, spatial, and temporal relations between shots by using rapid editing, jump cuts, handheld camera movement, speeded-up action and slow-motion effects, to amplify a particular emotion that is important to the audience’s experience of the narrative.

The disruption of continuity between shots in order to amplify a particular effect, a characteristic that is central to the editing of an MTV-style film, dates back to experimental filmmaking, avant-garde cinema, and the French New Wave period (Calavita, 2007: 18). For instance, some of the techniques that are central to the MTV’s disruption of spatial and temporal discontinuity can be found in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí’s *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) where audiences’ spatial and temporal awareness are disrupted by cutting between timelines that are separated by a few hours or a couple of years, jump cuts to different locations, and surrealistic imagery (Dancyger, 2002: 185). The possibilities of graphic manipulation within a shot were explored by Stan Brakhage. In his films *Anticipation of the Night* (1958), *Scenes from under Childhood* (1967), and *Western History* (1971), Brakhage joined shots purely on their graphic qualities and experimented by scratching and painting on the celluloid, taping moth wings onto the frame, and creating different lighting effects, resulting in aberrant cutting (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 174). The rhythmic quality of shots is demonstrated by Richard Lester’s two Beatles’ films, *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965). In these films Lester used a variety of cinematography and editing techniques to shoot the Beatles’ performances. Along with a fast cutting pace and dynamic camera movement, these techniques, which included handheld shots, multiple camera angles, and jump cuts, were primarily driven to creating an energetic experience rather than maintaining spatial and temporal continuity across shots. It has become commonly accepted that Lester’s film style established some of the “vocabulary” of MTV as his approach provided filmmakers the “freedom to edit for energy and emotion, uninhibited by traditional rules of continuity” (Dancyger, 2002: 151).

From the above-mentioned examples, which are only a select few amongst other filmmakers' work on alternative editing techniques, it becomes clear that these filmmakers concentrated on creating a specific style of filmmaking that draws the audience's attention to the filmic construction involved rather than presenting the film's narrative in a logical manner. The MTV-style therefore marks a shift in focus from the traditional set of narrative goals in mainstream filmmaking, including linear narrative and the primacy of plot and character, to a new approach that is driven by pace, feeling and mood as the defining characteristics of MTV sequences. In terms of editing, this translates into using techniques that undermine the traditional film conventions used in presenting graphic, rhythmic, spatial and temporal continuity and instead establish techniques that tilt the viewer's experience towards a definite feeling state (Dancyger, 2002: 187-189). The disruption of continuity between shots and the use of the MTV-style to amplify a particular theme, plot point, or emotion will be discussed and demonstrated in further detail in Chapter Four, using Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film adaptation *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* as an example.

## 2.10. Conclusion

In the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897), or also titled as *The Children of the Sea*, the well-known English novelist, Joseph Conrad states that: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the powers of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see" (McFarlane, 1996: 3). Conrad's intention of creating a direct relationship between the written word (signifier) and its mental concept (signified) is echoed by one of the most influential filmmakers, D.W. Griffith, who referred to his cinematic goal as: "The task I am trying to achieve is above all to make you see" (McFarlane, 1996: 4). Even though both Conrad and Griffith aimed at a congruence of image and concept within their specific mediums, George Bluestone highlights in *Novels into Film* (1957) the cardinal difference between the way these images are produced and how their intended meanings are received, as "between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image lies the root difference between the two media" (George Bluestone in McFarlane, 1996: 4).

The focus in the comparative analysis in the adaptation of a dramatic play text into a performance medium, such as a film, thus lies "in the discovery of how a verbal text takes a concept and works to create a mental image, and how a cinematic text utilizes technology and visuals to translate those concepts onto the screen" (Patricia Santoro in Zatlín, 2005: 153). "The

performance mode teaches us that language is not the only way to express meaning or to relate stories” as both mediums have their own signifying systems, affordances and constraints, codes and conventions according to which they create meaning and engage a reader/viewer (Hutcheon, 2006: 23). While the cinematic medium’s signifying system includes cinematography, production design, sound design, and so forth, editing can be regarded as the distinctive and fundamental signifying practice in the construction of meaning in a film and thus will be the point of departure in analysing how meaning is “translated” from the play text’s verbal sign system into film’s audio-visual sign system.

## Chapter 3: Significance of editing techniques in adapting *Goodbye to Berlin* into Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*

### 3.1. Adaptations of Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*

In Christopher Isherwood's short story compilation *Goodbye to Berlin*, first published in 1939, he records his observations of the city of Weimar Berlin during the early 1930s. While living in and around Berlin from 1930 until 1933, Isherwood based much of the book's fiction and characters upon his diaries and observations of Berlin's once "divinely decadent" society being set during a transitional period in Germany when fascism became more prominent and Nazism gained increasing power. Written as a connected series of six short stories, the book specifically highlights different groups of people and their own specific ways of dealing with the political turmoil brought on by the rise of Nazism. There is the caring landlady, Fräulein Schroeder, who merely resorts to acclimatizing herself to the current political situation in Berlin, "like an animal which changes its coat for the winter. Thousands of people like Frl. Schroeder are acclimatizing themselves. After all, whatever government is in power, they are doomed to live in this town" (Isherwood, 1972: 204). The chapter on "The Landauers," relates the story of a Jewish family plagued by anti-Semitic attacks, but despite the seriousness of such brutality, they continue to disregard these threats sent by "hot-headed Nazi schoolboys" as "tragi-comic diversions" (Isherwood, 1972: 176). "I [Christopher Isherwood] read the typed words: 'Bernhard Landauer, beware. We are going to settle the score with you and your uncle and all other filthy Jews. We give you twenty-four hours to leave Germany. If not, you are dead men.' Bernhard laughed: 'Bloodthirsty, isn't it?'" (Isherwood, 1972: 176). Then there is Sally Bowles, a young English girl who performs at the Lady Windermere and aspires to become a world famous actress. Even though Sally Bowles is the main character of only one short story in *Goodbye to Berlin*, future playwrights and filmmakers will eventually turn her and her constant pursuit of "divine decadence," wealth, and pleasure, into the star of all the various play and film adaptations of *The Berlin Stories* (1945), a collection brought together by Isherwood, consisting of *Goodbye to Berlin* and other thematically related stories from the novella *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935). Isherwood's theme in *The Berlin Stories*, more specifically in *Goodbye to Berlin*, focuses on the "divinely decadent" characteristics of Weimar Berlin paving the way for the rise of fascism in Germany during the 1930s, and becomes the chief transferable element of the various play and film adaptations to follow.

### 3.1.1. Film adaptation *I am a Camera* by Henry Cornelius

First in a series of adaptations of Isherwood's short stories, *Goodbye to Berlin* became the starting point for the 1951 stage play production *I am a Camera* by John van Druten, which in turn went on to inspire the film *I am a Camera* (1955), screenplay by John Collier and directed by Henry Cornelius. The stage and film adaptations were, however, not considered to be accurate representations of Isherwood's themes as presented in *Goodbye to Berlin*. In a review of *I am a Camera* published in 1955, Bosley Crowther wrote that although the play by van Druten "did make some passing pretence of drawing from *The Berlin Stories* of Christopher Isherwood [and its] haunting sense of degeneration and impending doom in the German Capital," the film by Cornelius "barely recognizes that the Nazi hoodlums were then abroad" (Rodda, 1994: 37). Briefly evaluating *I am a Camera* in terms of how far the film has chosen to adapt the key elements of Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, it becomes clear that the adaptation is more of a light-hearted film focusing on the fictional Christopher Isherwood's relationship with Sally Bowles and their escapades with Clive rather than a serious adaptation focusing on the characters' reactions on the rise of Nazism in Berlin. Crowther's opinion that the film barely makes any reference to this important theme is validated due to the lack of emphasis placed on it throughout the film. After Berlin is described as a "dreary, hopeless place" (*I am a Camera*, 1955: 00:03:31) in the beginning of the film, the growing presence of Nazism is only briefly highlighted in scenes where Chris gets into a fight during a Nazi rally, Jews protesting during a funeral in the street, Natalia Landauer's family is threatened, and the film's conclusion with most of the characters leaving Berlin as "now would be a good time to get out" (*I am a Camera*, 1955: 01:05:01). Although the film certainly makes some reference to the character of Christopher Isherwood documenting the events, people, and the changing political situation in Berlin, it does not place enough emphasis on the various characters' thoughts and feelings regarding the change in society, a theme that is greatly emphasized in the short stories.

### 3.1.2. Broadway musical adaptation *Cabaret* by Hal Prince

One of the best known adaptations of Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, is the Broadway musical production of *Cabaret* (1966), music by John Kander and lyrics by Fred Ebb. According to director Hal Prince, the concept of "calling it *Cabaret* was [playwright] Joe Masteroff's idea [as] the life of the cabaret [could serve] as a metaphor for Germany" and the way it is depicted in Isherwood's short stories (Brengele, 2000: 149). Using a cabaret club as a metaphor for

Germany and its changing political situation thus presented the creators of the stage adaptation with an opportunity to translate certain events, dialogue and themes from Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* short stories into the musical genre. In the Broadway adaptation of *Cabaret*, the production specifically focused on creating a narrative that is amplified by the musical numbers, thereby foregrounding an important convention of the musical genre. John Mueller describes this integrated musical approach taken by the *Cabaret* production as "one that advances the plot by its [musical] content" (Clark, 1991: 51). In the first draft of the production, Hal Prince recalls that "he, Kander and Ebb experimented with two scores: one within the book for the personae, the other pastiche for the entertainers" (Brengele, 2000: 149). The naturalistic setting provided by the cabaret club thus allowed the creators to situate many of the musical numbers meant for "pastiche" on the Kit Kat Klub stage itself, while "backstage" musical numbers were performed in locations such as Fräulein Schneider's boarding house, Herr Schultz's fruit store, and Cliff and Sally's room.

The intended purpose of all the various musical numbers performed throughout *Cabaret* is to deliver commentary upon the events of the musical, amplify the narrative's primary themes, and to provide the audience with valuable insight to the characters' thoughts and emotions as recorded by Isherwood during the 1930s in Berlin. One of the primary themes in Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* is the characters' ignorance regarding the deterioration of the Weimar Republic. This type of attitude is effectively adapted into a variety of musical numbers presented throughout *Cabaret*, including the opening musical number "Wilkommen," and Sally Bowles' popular musical number "Cabaret." The Emcee's invitation to the Kit Kat Klub audience to "Leave your troubles outside. So, life is disappointing? Forget it! In here life is beautiful" (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: I.i.), together with Sally's motto of "No use permitting some prophet of doom. To wipe every smile away. Life is a cabaret, old chum. Come to the Cabaret!" (II.v.) effectively amplifies Isherwood's theme of a "divinely decadent" society that wish to continue immersing themselves in endless parties and pleasure, while ignoring the troubles of tomorrow.

In order to further amplify this important theme of Weimar Berlin being in a constant state of denial regarding their changing political situation, the *Cabaret* musical also focuses on a range of characters, and their way of dealing with their circumstances. One such character is the boarding house landlady Fräulein Schneider, her name having changed from Fräulein Schroeder in the short stories. Fräulein Schneider's nonchalant perspective on the current state of affairs

is made apparent in her musical number “So what?” where you “learn how to settle for what you get. It will all go on if we’re here or not. So who cares? So what?” (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: I.iii.), the musical number being an adaptation of her conversation with the fictional Christopher Isherwood: “Twenty years ago, if anybody had told me to scrub my own floors, I’d have slapped his face for him. But you get used to it. You can get used to anything. Why, I remember the time when I’d have sooner cut off my right hand than empty this chamber... And now my goodness! It’s no more to me than pouring out a cup of tea!” (Isherwood, 1972: 9). The musical number “So what?” emphasizes her and other characters’ denial, which can easily be mistaken as a carefree attitude, of the harsh circumstances in which they need to live in. One such character is Herr Schultz, who is a Jew, and his denial regarding the issue of Jewish intimidation by the Nazis. Despite Herr Schultz’s fruit shop window being smashed by bricks, comparable to the following paragraph in *Goodbye to Berlin*: “Gangs of Nazi roughs turned out to demonstrate against the Jews... They man-handled some dark-haired, large-nosed pedestrians, and smashed the windows of all the Jewish shops” (Isherwood, 1972: 139), Herr Schultz still wishes to ignore the seriousness of the situation by brushing it off as “children on their way to school” (II.ii.). Isherwood’s theme of anti-Semitism and how it is conveniently turned into a laughing matter is also effectively amplified in the musical number “If you could see her” where the Emcee’s seemingly absurd relationship with a gorilla dressed in a pink tutu and hat serves as a metaphor for how Jews were perceived in Germany.

The musical numbers that focus on the characters’ ignorance and denial regarding Berlin’s changing political situation is, however, set in contrast to the propagandistic musical number “Tomorrow belongs to me,” demonstrating Ernst Ludwig, Fräulein Kost, and others growing support for Hitler’s Nazi Party. The dramatic conflict between the different musical numbers, the characteristics they amplify, and events they relate to, provides the ironic commentary throughout the Broadway production and amplifies what Isherwood regarded as partly the reason why Nazism was able to gain increasing power in Berlin.

### **3.1.3. Film adaptation *Cabaret* by Bob Fosse**

Throughout the *Cabaret* Broadway production, it is clear that the musical numbers “do not simply grow out of the narrative, they define and discuss the world in which the narrative takes place” (Clark, 1991: 58), but perhaps this connection between the musical numbers and

narrative, the contrast between “divine decadence” and Weimar decay, is made even more apparent in the film adaptation of *Cabaret* through the use of cinematic techniques.

In the process of creating a film adaptation of Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* short stories, its subsequent *I am a Camera* productions (1951 and 1955), and the *Cabaret* Broadway production (1966), director-choreographer Bob Fosse, screenwriters Jay Allen and Hugh Wheeler, and all those involved in making the *Cabaret* film adaptation in 1972, were driven by the desire to be “faithful to the thematic content of Isherwood’s writing, while at the same time creating something new” (Rodda, 1994: 37). Fosse’s first step in recreating *Cabaret* for the film screen was to reject playwright Joe Masteroff’s narrative, which included plotlines that were not part of the *Goodbye to Berlin* stories, and instead returned to the original Isherwood stories and the play *I am a Camera* as its primary source texts. The second most significant change in the adaptation of *Cabaret* was that the performance of musical numbers were to take place on the Kit Kat Klub stage only. By establishing the Kit Kat Klub as a diegetic reality, the musical numbers become logical pieces that form part of the cabaret environment set in Berlin during the 1930s. This change did, however, require some of the Broadway production’s musical numbers to be either excluded from the film, or be rewritten in order to be performed on the Kit Kat Klub stage.

The purpose of the Kit Kat Klub is to establish a “divinely decadent” atmosphere that is separated and contrasted to the reality of the Nazi’s ever-increasing presence in Berlin. The musical numbers performed in the Kit Kat Klub invite audiences to escape from their hardships, to “leave [their] troubles outside” (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: l.i.), by offering them sexual entertainment in “Mein lieber Herr,” the hope for love (“Maybe this time”), the seduction of wealth (“Money, money,”) and entertainment itself in the musical’s most well-known number, “Cabaret”. The luxuries promoted by the musical numbers in the Kit Kat Klub allows the audience to ignore issues such as anti-Semitism as presented in the number “If you could see her,” and the reality of the growing support for fascism, demonstrated in the propagandistic song “Tomorrow belongs to me” (Clark, 1991: 56). Alongside the content of the musical numbers, Fosse uses various cinematic techniques, specifically editing, cinematography by Geoffrey Unsworth, lighting, and sound, to contrast the glamour of the Kit Kat Klub, the characters’ pursuit of pleasure, wealth, and entertainment, with the hopelessness of Berlin’s political reality in 1931. It is especially through editing techniques, intercutting and juxtaposing musical numbers with reaction shots of the audience or instances of fascist brutality in Berlin,

that Fosse is able to foreground the dramatic irony between these two different environments as he “has a fondness for intercutting the violent reality of the outside... with the smoky unreality of the café” (Hollis Alpert in Rodda, 1994: 37). By presenting the musical numbers and the distorted values they represent in dialectic conflict to the storyline, each musical number can be regarded as an associative montage, amplifying the theme of the *Cabaret* film as “a historical cause-and-effect argument [about how] the moral looseness of Weimar Berlin, in particular the sexual and bisexual play in Berlin nightlife, has made possible the tolerance of Nazism” (Mizejewski, 1992: 3-4).

In analysing the use of various film techniques in *Cabaret*, specifically focusing on editing techniques such as intercutting and juxtaposition, the following sequences demonstrate how musical numbers are successfully integrated into the plot of *Cabaret*, commenting upon the rise of fascism during the last years of the “divinely decadent” Weimar Republic, and effectively translating Isherwood’s themes onto the film screen, thus demonstrating the process of adaptation that the source text undergoes across the various mediums.

## **3.2. Themes of Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* as adapted into Bob Fosse’s *Cabaret* film sequences**

### **3.2.1. “Wilkommen”, introducing the “divinely decadent” Weimar Berlin**

The beginning to “A Berlin Diary”, the first short story in Christopher Isherwood’s book *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), describes Isherwood standing at a window and looking out onto the street. This description is adapted into one of the opening shots in the film *I am a Camera* (1955). In the film, the audience is introduced to the young Christopher Isherwood standing at his window, looking out onto the street as a few people celebrate New Year’s Eve. While intercutting shots displaying some festivities with shots of Nazis being a nuisance to an old man walking in the snow, Isherwood’s voice-over describes what he sees and Berlin’s current political situation as follows: “Signs of celebration were few and far from glamorous. Berlin in those days was a dreary, hopeless place. The Nazis, not yet in power, were hanging about on street corners making themselves unpleasant. I was a foreigner. What could I do? I knew in my heart of hearts I was ducking the issue, but I took refuge in a very convenient phrase. ‘I,’ said I to myself, ‘I am a camera’” (*I am a Camera*, 1955: 00:03:26 – 00:04:05). Indeed, Isherwood’s passivity towards the rise of Nazism (“what could I do?”) is highly reminiscent of his

description of himself in *Goodbye to Berlin* as: “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive recording, not thinking” (Isherwood, 1972: 7).

The presentation of Berlin as a “dreary, hopeless place” is in direct contrast to the opening of the Broadway musical *Cabaret* (1966), and its subsequent film adaptation *Cabaret* (1972), where the audience is welcomed to the Kit Kat Klub, a vibrant cabaret club where you can “leave your troubles outside!” (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: l.i.). In the opening shot to the film adaptation, the audience is presented with a distorted, black and white image of the Kit Kat Klub’s customers reflected in a mirror. During the opening titles, the image gradually turns from black and white to colour as the sound of a drum roll builds up volume, finally ending with a loud cymbal crash and the title “Berlin 1931”. The film audience is first introduced to the Emcee (Joel Grey) through his reflection in the irregular mirror, his face being distorted by this effect (Figure 3.1). This mirror effect is a device that has been borrowed from the original 1966 Broadway production. In the theatre production, set designer Boris Aronson used a large mirror to reflect the theatre audience watching the *Cabaret* production and thus made them appear as if they were the audience sitting in the Kit Kat Klub in 1931. Bob Fosse tries to establish a similar connection between the audience watching the film and the diegetic audience present in the Kit Kat Klub by including a shot of the cabaret audience’s distorted reflection in the mirror, and by directing the Emcee’s eye line and “Wilkommen” speech towards the camera, thus in effect also welcoming the film audience to the cabaret (Clark, 1991: 57).



Figure 3.1: Emcee’s introduction in the opening number “Wilkommen”.

As the camera pans across the distorted mirror, these images explicitly reference German expressionism, a creative movement that reached its peak in Berlin during the 1920s. One of the first introductory shots of the audience sitting in the Kit Kat Klub is of a woman representing the journalist Sylvia von Harden and serves as a direct copy of the “Portrait of the journalist Sylvia von Harden” (1926), a painting by the famous German expressionist painter, Otto Dix.

The particular relevance of including this intertextuality is that Sylvia von Harden was a journalist who wrote for newspapers in Germany and England during the 1920s. In 1933, von Harden left for England but continued to write for *Die Zeitung*, an independent German newspaper that documented news during World War II. Von Harden's role as a journalist can be compared to the character Brian Roberts, a struggling writer, who serves as a fictional equivalent to Christopher Isherwood, and has come to write about the events taking place in Weimar Berlin in 1931.

As the Emcee bids the audience welcome with the opening lines from "Wilkommen", the opening sequence cuts to a shot of Brian Roberts (Michael York) arriving at the Berlin station. Throughout the opening sequence, editing alternates between shots of the Emcee performing his opening number and shots of Brian making his way through Berlin (Figure 3.2). By intercutting these two different timelines, and overlapping the music and dialogue from the cabaret club with the visuals of Brian's arrival, a thematic connection is established between the cabaret club and Brian, linking the Emcee's welcoming of the "Damen und Herren", Brian's arrival in Berlin, and in essence the film audience to the *Cabaret* film.



Figure 3.2: The arrival of Brian Roberts in Berlin.

The opening sequence further introduces the Kit Kat Girls, covered in extravagant, thick make-up, looking like a creation by the German expressionist artist Georg Grosz. The Kit Kat girls then start performing a series of dance routines that Bob Fosse made to look like it was

choreographed “by some guy who is down and out... the kind of guy who only works with cheap cabarets and clubs” (Kevin Grubb in Brengle, 2000: 150). During the musical numbers “Wilkommen” and “Mein lieber Herr”, the camera frequently frames the unattractive, unsmiling Kit Kat Girls through each other’s arms, legs and bent-over torsos as they turn “sexual signals into robot-like, military manoeuvres of submission” (Mizejewski, 1987: 11) (Figure 3.3). At other times, the camera positions the film viewer as an audience member at the Kit Kat Klub by framing the showgirls behind a row of spectators in silhouette (Figure 3.4). The camera positions, distorted mirror effect and the Emcee’s interactions thus blur the distinction between the diegetic Kit Kat Klub and the film audience, implicating them both in the passivity of spectacle-watching, as guilty spectators “being drawn into a world that is highly erotic and visually pleasurable, but also morally reprehensible” (Mizejewski, 1987: 7). This does not, however, mean that we ought to conflate the cabaret and film audience with each other, as the rest of the film will reveal important information to which only the film audience is privy. The use of odd camera angles taken from various positions within the cabaret club thus prevents the viewer from associating with a particular perspective for too long and amplifies a certain detachment from the events presented in the film. The film viewer’s historical and emotional distance thus allows them the privileged position of viewing Weimar Berlin’s changing political situation and the characters’ actions, or rather lack thereof, from an objective point-of-view.



*Figure 3.3: The presentation of the Kit Kat Girls in “Mein lieber Herr”.*



Figure 3.4: Positioning the film viewer as an audience member at the Kit Kat Klub.

A particular character that the film, however, tries to establish an emotional connection with is the lead character, Sally Bowles (Liza Minnelli). In contrast to Brian's introduction to the film audience, which includes several shots of him as the primary focus, Sally is only briefly introduced by the Emcee while standing amongst other cabaret performers (Figure 3.5). While the Emcee refers to the girls as "beautiful", "even the orchestra is beautiful" (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: I.i.), everything that is included in the opening number is in fact hideous. Instead of being distinguished from the other performers with a close-up, or even a central framing position, Sally is simply glossed over by the camera, including her as part of the cabaret's hideousness. Christopher Isherwood describes the atmosphere of the Kit Kat Klub, including its performers and cabaret audience, as "very expensive and even more depressing than I had imagined. A few stage lesbians and some young men with plucked eyebrows lounged at the bar, uttering occasional raucous guffaws or treble hoots – supposed, apparently, to represent the laughter of the damned. The whole premises are painted gold and inferno-red – crimson plush inches thick, and vast gilded mirrors. It was pretty full. The audience consisted chiefly of respectable middle-aged tradesmen and their families, exclaiming in good-humoured amazement: 'Do they really?' and 'Well, I never!' We went out half-way through the cabaret performance, after a young man in a spangled crinoline and jewelled breast-caps had painfully but successfully executed three splits" (Isherwood, 1972: 190).



Figure 3.5: The introduction of Sally Bowles in “Wilkommen”.

Within the context of Weimar Berlin in 1931, the period in which Isherwood wrote *Goodbye to Berlin*, the purpose of the Kit Kat Klub is to offer the cabaret audience, the so-called “laughter of the damned,” “an alternative to despair” (Clark, 1991: 54). As the Emcee bids his audience to “Leave your troubles outside. So, life is disappointing? Forget it! In here life is beautiful...” (I.i.), the opening “Wilkommen” number concludes with a grand ending on stage, welcoming everybody to the *Cabaret*.

In contrast to the film’s opening sequence, Clifford Bradshaw’s welcoming, the leading male character that is comparable to Brian Roberts and Christopher Isherwood, is spread across three scenes in the *Cabaret* play text. In the Broadway production, Act I, scene i comprises of the opening musical number, “Wilkommen,” after which Cliff Bradshaw and Ernst Ludwig arrives at the Berlin station by train in scene ii. Instead of including scene ii of the play text in the opening film sequence, the film audience merely sees Brian Roberts arriving at the Berlin station being intercut with the musical number at the Kit Kat Klub. Ernst’s welcome at the end of scene ii flows into a quick reprise of the Emcee’s “Wilkommen”, which in editing terms can be regarded as an insert or a quick cutaway. A similar technique is used at the end of scene iii, where the Kit Kat Girls’ whisper “Welcome to Berlin,” after Herr Schultz’s welcoming, finally marks the end of the play’s opening sequence. The *Cabaret* film further combines Cliff renting a room from Fräulein Schneider in Act I, scene iii and Cliff meeting Sally at the Kit Kat Klub in scene v, into a direct cut from the Kit Kat Klub to the boarding house where Sally opens the door for Brian, thus eliminating the need for Fräulein Schneider’s introduction and the two musical numbers “So what?” and “Don’t tell Mama.” Aside from merging the two separate timelines, the “Wilkommen” number and Brian’s arrival in Berlin, these series of cuts are significant as they are able to capture Sally’s character within one shot as she opens the door and Brian notices her green fingernails and her love of “divine decadence” (Figure 3.6). Christopher Isherwood describes his first impression of Sally in *Goodbye to Berlin* as: “I

noticed that her finger-nails were painted emerald green, a colour unfortunately chosen, for it called attention to her hands, which were much stained by cigarette-smoking and as dirty as a little girl's... Her face was long and thin, powdered dead white. She had very large brown eyes which should have been darker, to match her hair and the pencil she used for her eyebrows... her performance was in its own way effective because of her startling appearance and her air of not caring a curse what people thought of her ” (Isherwood, 1972: 27 & 30).



Figure 3.6: “Wilkommen” concludes and Brian meets Sally Bowles.

Walter Kerr’s review of the Broadway musical states that “the garish images of Kit Kat Klub kittens and a pushy, lipsticked sinuous Emcee become the distorting mirror through which we peer at an actual world” (Rodda, 1994: 39). Indeed, the “divine decadence” as portrayed by the opening of both the Broadway and film production of *Cabaret* acts as “the distorting mirror” through which the Kit Kat Klub audience sees the reality of the rise of fascism in Berlin as it is presented in the opening sequence of the film adaptation *I am a Camera*. The dramatic irony between the reality of Weimar Berlin and the distorted reality which the cabaret audience wishes to see is amplified through editing in the *Cabaret* film, specifically by intercutting musical numbers with instances of reality as demonstrated in the opening sequence. For example, intercutting cheerful musical numbers from the Kit Kat Klub, such as the “Slaphappy” and “Tiller girls” sequences, with violent scenes of the club manager being beaten up by Nazi supporters or Natalia Landauer being a victim of an anti-Semitic attack, provides ironic commentary that is important to the film viewer’s interpretation of the Kit Kat Klub’s outlook, which is one of denial and indifference, regarding their current political situation.

### **3.2.2. Instances of fascist and anti-Semitic brutality in mud-wrestling, “Slaphappy”, and “Tiller girls”**

The “Wilkommen” opening sequence in the *Cabaret* film establishes the Kit Kat Klub’s love of entertainment and their carefree attitude towards leaving “their troubles outside” (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: I.i.). The mud-wrestling and “Slaphappy” sequences, however, becomes the film’s first pointer towards the issues of fascist brutality and political dissent as addressed in the *Cabaret* play text and in Isherwood’s short stories.

The first example of fascist brutality is when a seemingly innocent looking Brownshirt, also known as a member of Hitler’s Sturmabteilung (S.A.), enters the Kit Kat Klub to collect donations during the mud-wrestling match between the Huber Sisters. “Almost every evening, the S.A. men come into the café. Sometimes they are only collecting money; everybody is compelled to give something. Sometimes they have come to make an arrest” (Isherwood, 1972: 201). When introducing the Brownshirt, the camera maintains its focus on the trooper’s armband displaying the swastika, particularly to highlight the Kit Kat Klub audience’s misperception as to what they still regarded as a “harmless armband” in 1931 but was soon to be contextualized as a symbol of fascism (Figure 3.7). The cabaret audience’s lack of reaction is thus contrasted to the film viewer’s automatic reaction when presented with an emphatic and dismaying symbol such as the swastika.

A sense of disorder and chaos is created in the scene when the Huber Sisters wrestle in the mud which is amplified through violent camera motion and rapid intercutting between the fight and extreme close-ups highlighting particular audience members laughing at the spectacle. This form of entertainment was very popular and was regarded by Isherwood as one of the chief attractions in Berlin. He described it as “a tent where boxing and wrestling matches are held. You pay your money and go in, the wrestlers fight three or four rounds, and the referee then announces that, if you want to see any more, you must pay an extra ten pfennigs... The audience took the fights dead seriously, shouting encouragement to the fighters, and even quarrelling and betting amongst themselves on the results. Yet nearly all of them had been in the tent as long as I had, and stayed on after I had left” (Isherwood, 1972: 187-188). Aside from the mud-wrestling match’s entertainment value for the cabaret’s audience, the sequence projects a sinister subtext when the Emcee creates a mocking imitation of Hitler by dragging his finger through the mud and touching his upper lip to create a Hitler moustache (Figure 3.7). After throwing a final

Chaplinesque Nazi salute, referring to Charlie Chaplin’s parody of Adolf Hitler in the film *The Great Dictator* (1940), the scene comes to an end. “With this salute, the film audience is encouraged to reread the scene as a parody of fascist aesthetics: the mud-wrestling match can appear to be harmless fun, but the critique is that in the context of the ever-present Nazi politics – as represented by the Brownshirt – such fun can also be made to carry ideological weight” (Belletto, 2008: 621).



Figure 3.7: Swastika symbol and Emcee’s parody of Hitler introduce theme of Nazism.

In the “Slaphappy” scene, the club owner’s throwing out of the Brownshirt is repaid with a vengeance, when other members of the S.A. are shown attacking the owner in a dark alleyway. Isherwood’s description of a similar attack can be applied to the club owner’s beating: “Walking along the pavement ahead of me were three S.A. men. They all carried Nazi banners on their shoulders, like rifles, rolled tight round the staves – the banner staves had sharp metal points, shaped into arrow-heads... I heard one of the Nazis shout: ‘That’s him!’ and immediately all three of them flung themselves upon the young man. He uttered a scream, and tried to dodge, but they were too quick for him. In a moment they had jostled him into the shadow of a house entrance, and were standing over him, kicking him and stabbing at him with the sharp metal points of their banners” (Isherwood, 1972: 197-198). In *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood further describes the onlookers’ disregard to the situation: “They seemed surprised, but not particularly shocked... Twenty yards away, stood a group of heavily armed policemen. With their chests out, and their hands on their revolver belts, they magnificently disregarded the whole affair” (Isherwood, 1972: 198). In order to amplify the horror of the club owner’s beating in the film adaptation, but also the Kit Kat Klub’s ignorance regarding the attack, editing creates a sound edit transition from the scene in which Sally convinces Brian into screaming with her under the railroad trestle as the train goes over it. While the film audience would expect Sally and Brian’s scream to be directed towards the violence presented in the next shot, their scream is rather one of experiencing excitement. Editing is thus able to amplify the Kit Kat Klub’s members’ lack

of awareness regarding Berlin's increasing political violence as Sally and Brian are literally participating in a scream of delight while someone else is suffering an attack of fascist brutality (Mizejewski, 1987: 9-10).

This takes the film into the "Slaphappy" number, where the Emcee, dressed in traditional lederhosen, beats a fast-paced rhythm on the thighs and buttocks of the Kit Kat Girls, also dressed in similar traditional German outfits. While there is no singing in this number, the Emcee's choreographed slapping of the women on the Kit Kat Klub stage during this light-hearted dance sequence is intercut with shots of the Brownshirts beating the club owner in the alleyway (Figure 3.8). The "Slaphappy" sequence thus serves as an example of "stylized violence being cross-cut with actual violence" (Belletto, 2008: 622). The effective cross-cutting between the "stylized violence" and the "actual violence" is primarily achieved by cutting on matching movement, action, similar shot size, and frame composition. For example, when the Emcee playfully slaps one of the performers on stage, the slapping action is carried through into the next shot of the manager being punched by one of the Brownshirts. A similar transition is achieved by focusing on the dancers' feet and the Emcee lying on the floor of the stage, and then cutting to the club owner falling to the ground and being left bleeding in the alleyway. Maintaining similar shot size and frame composition between the cabaret club and alleyway, and cutting on the movement of the slap/punch, or falling to the ground, thus allows for a smooth transition between the two different locations. In addition to these editing transitions, a sense of disorder and chaos is amplified by using dizzying and violent camera motion, and increasing the cutting pace between extreme close-ups of the club manager, Emcee, and the audience laughing grotesquely. The Kit Kat Klub's ignorance of what is happening outside of their world of "divine decadence" is further amplified by overlapping the diegetic laughter of the cabaret audience with the visuals of the club owner being beaten up. On the one hand, the film audience is presented with the light-hearted music and laughter of the "Slaphappy" sequence in the cabaret, while in direct contrast, the film audience also bears witness to the brutality outside in the alley.



Figure 3.8: Intercutting the “Slaphappy” sequence with fascist brutality.

A similar type of contrast between visual and audio, the entertainment inside the Kit Kat Klub versus the violence outside in Berlin, is created in the “Tiller girls” sequence. While the Emcee and the Kit Kat Girls entertain the audience, the musical number is intercut with the anti-Semitic attack on the Landauer household, a wealthy Jewish family that owns a department store, and who are part of the film’s subplot. During the sequence, two young men are shown breaking into the Landauer property and throwing the body of Natalia Landauer’s murdered dog onto their doorstep. Using the same audio-visual editing technique from the above-mentioned “Slaphappy” sequence, the film audience is confronted with the horrific visuals of Natalia’s murdered dog, a close-up focusing on the word “JUDEN” painted in big yellow letters in front of their gate, and the “Nazi schoolboys” chanting “Juden, Juden!”, while at the same time, the film viewer can still hear the festive sounds of the cabaret and the audience cheering in the background (Figure 3.9). As the sequence continues to become more and more frenzied during the constant cross-cutting between the anti-Semitic attack and the Kit Kat Klub dance number, the Emcee, also dressed in a blonde wig, tutu, black garters and stockings, leads the girls into

turning their costumes and props into a soldier's uniform and artillery. By using their bowler hats and dancing canes to signify helmets and rifles, the Emcee and Kit Kat Girls are mimicking soldiers, parodying the Nazi presence in Berlin, and with that the Emcee organizes the girls into a row of goose-stepping performers acting "Heil Hitlers" and marches off the stage (Belletto, 2008: 619) (Figure 3.9).

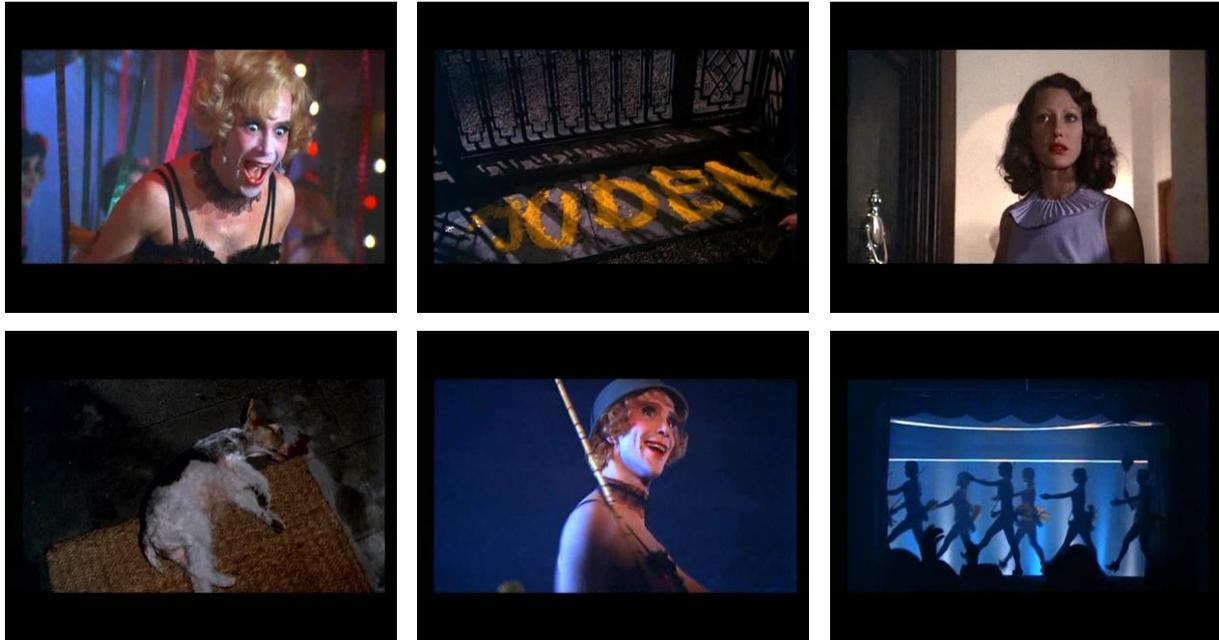


Figure 3.9: Intercutting the "Tiller girls" sequence with anti-Semitic brutality.

The dramatic irony between the visual and audio in the three sequences discussed above creates the impression that the diegetic cabaret audience is laughing and cheering, in a similar way to Sally and Brian's scream of delight, at the violence displayed outside of the club, and in effect challenges the film viewer's "assumptions and expectations about a number that seemed only conventional entertainment" (Belletto, 2008: 619). Juxtaposing moments of delight and entertainment with instances of fascist and anti-Semitic brutality thus visually and aurally amplifies what Isherwood regarded as the type of attitudes responsible for the Nazis' rise to power. One commentator notes critically about the use of editing in these sequences: "Though a very effective but very specious use of cross-cutting... the film makes it seem as if the decadent atmosphere of Berlin is not merely a symptom of social disorder and disillusionment but somehow directly responsible for the rise of Nazism" (Steven Farber in Rodda, 1994: 38). Another critic, Brook Atkinson regards this theme as a common thread in adaptations of Isherwood's short stories, that "at a monstrously critical moment in the world's history, people were thoroughly immersed in their own pleasures, problems, and affairs and unaware of the big

forces all around them” (Rodda, 1994: 38). For example, while making their holiday plans for Honolulu, *I am a Camera* illustrates Sally, Christopher, and their friend Clive’s convenient disregard of the Jews protesting during a funeral, a scene that is adapted from *Goodbye to Berlin*. ““What funeral, darling?” Sally asked, patiently. ‘Why, say, haven’t you noticed it!’ Clive laughed. ‘It’s a most elegant funeral. It’s been going past for the last hour.’... ‘Say, who was this guy, anyway?’ asked Clive, looking down. ‘I guess he must have been a big swell?’ ‘Who knows,’ Sally answered, yawning. ‘Look, Clive darling, isn’t it a marvellous sunset?’ She was quite right. We had nothing to do with those Germans down there, marching, or with the dead man in the coffin, or with the words on the banners” (Isherwood, 1972: 52).

In the *Cabaret* play text, the characters’ ignorance is demonstrated in the quick reference to Sally thinking that *Mein Kampf* is the novel that Cliff has been working on in Act I, scene vi.

SALLY: Oh! This is your novel!

(*Squinting at it*)

It’s in German? “Mein Kampf”?

CLIFF: It’s not my novel. I thought I should know something about German politics.

SALLY: Why? You’re an American (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: I.vi.).

Sally Bowles’s view of “Why?”, why should anybody care if it doesn’t directly affect them, represents the perspective of Berlin’s decadent society as portrayed in the various play and film adaptations of *Goodbye to Berlin*, and amplifies the type of attitudes that Isherwood regarded as partly responsible for the rise of fascism.

### **3.2.3. Growing support for Nazi ideology in “Tomorrow belongs to me”**

The sequence that best portrays the fascist ideology of Nazism is when a group of typical-looking German folk joins together and sings the song “Tomorrow belongs to me.” The scene is set at the beer garden of the guesthouse “Gasthaus Waldesruh,” where Brian and the wealthy Baron Max von Heune have stopped for a drink while travelling through the German countryside. A peaceful and festive atmosphere is created by including various close-up shots of the beautiful pastoral setting, stags running free, people eating, drinking, and laughing while making music and playing games. Amidst this pleasant atmosphere, a young Aryan boy starts to sing “Tomorrow belongs to me”, which at first appears to be a sweet song about their current surroundings (Belletto, 2008: 612).

The sun on the meadow is summery warm  
The stag in the forest runs free.  
But gather together to greet the storm  
Tomorrow belongs to me.

The branch of the linden is leafy and green,  
The Rhine gives its gold to the sea.  
But somewhere a glory awaits unseen  
Tomorrow belongs to me (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: I.xii.).

As the boy continues to sing, and the crowd at the beer garden becomes more intrigued with his performance, the close-up on the boy's face is intercut with various shots revealing the pleasant expressions of those listening to his song. Everyone seems to be engaged by the young boy's performance, except for an old man, presumably a World War I veteran, who merely shakes his head and disregards the boy's enthusiasm as he has probably seen this kind of euphoria before and knows of the hardship and turmoil that awaits. In addition to the old man's reaction, the film viewer's contextualisation of the setting and the song soon changes as the camera starts to pan down from the close-up on the boy's face, revealing the rest of his uniform as being part of the German Youth group, or also known as the Hitler Youth (Figure 3.10). Although "there is nothing overtly political in the lyrics" it is through the subtle use of camera movement and editing that the song's sweet lyrics and melody gradually becomes more militant by focusing the audience's attention on the young boy's uniform, which is what "infuses the otherwise hopeful song with its menacing dimension" (Stephen E. Bowles in Rodda, 1994: 40).



Figure 3.10: "Tomorrow belongs to me" becomes a symbol of Nazi support.

As the song moves into its final verses, other members of the crowd are shown joining the Hitler Youth in his rendition of a patriotic song about their Homeland. This type of public expression of patriotism was quite typical during the early 1930s, leading up to Hitler's rise to Chancellor of Germany. Isherwood describes two instances of such behaviour in the chapter "On Reugen Island" in *Goodbye to Berlin*. "The other morning I saw a child of about five years old, stark

naked, marching along all by himself with a swastika flag over his shoulder and singing ‘*Deutschland über alles*’” (Isherwood, 1972: 88), and “The children sing as they march – patriotic songs about the Homeland – in voices as shrill as birds” (Isherwood, 1972: 93). Even though this song is not performed within the Kit Kat Klub, an environment where the performance of a song is to be expected, it can still be regarded as diegetic as the context within which it is sung in the countryside can be viewed as part of a spontaneous political rally with the crowds’ forceful facial expressions and singing amplifying the song’s political undertone. As a critic observed, “the refrain becomes fervent, more and more people join with Nazi fervour, and what started out as schmaltz ends as scare” (Kauffman in Rodda, 1994: 40).

The babe in his cradle is closing his eyes  
 The blossom embraces the bee.  
 “But soon,” says a whisper,  
 “Arise, arise,  
 Tomorrow belongs to me.”

Oh Fatherland, Fatherland, show us the sign  
 Your children have waited to see.  
 The morning will come when the world is mine  
 Tomorrow belongs to me! (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: I.xii.).

Throughout this sequence, the Hitler Youth and members of the crowd singing “Tomorrow belongs to me” are predominantly framed in close-up, low angle shots in order to amplify their growing and threatening support for the Nazis. The intended effect of this type of framing and use of camera angles are highly reminiscent to Leni Riefenstahl’s political propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* (1935) in which low angles and close-up shots are primarily used to amplify Hitler, his army, the Hitler Youth, and German supporters, as a force to be reckoned with (Belletto, 2008: 613) (Figure 3.11).



Figure 3.11: Framing in “Tomorrow belongs to me” compared to “Triumph of the Will”.

Even in Isherwood’s writings, references can be found to the specific use of low angle shots in the depiction of Hitler Youth boys as epic giants: “They showed me dozens of photographs of boys, all taken with the camera tilted upwards, from beneath, so that they look like epic giants, in profile against enormous clouds” (Isherwood, 1972: 195).

The editing used in *Triumph of the Will* also conveys Hitler’s fascist ideology of “One people,” “One leader,” “One state,” “Germany!” by intercutting various shots using similar framing conventions of different groups of people and individuals shouting “Heil Hitler!” and thus in effect establishing a unity amongst, what Hitler regarded as, the superior Aryan master race. This specific use of editing can also be applied to “Tomorrow belongs to me,” as by alternating close-up, low angle shots of all the various individuals participating in the patriotic song, the sequence forms them into a united voice for Nazi Germany. “The beer garden scene in *Cabaret* illustrates how fascist aesthetics seek to ‘quilt’ ‘heterogeneous material’ (the varied faces of everyday Germans) into a ‘unified ideological field’ (the fascist notion that, if the constituent parts of a collective become one, tomorrow will belong to the one)” (Belletto, 2008: 614). That is everyone, except for Brian, Max, and a close-up of the old man, who remains seated throughout the entire scene (Figure 3.12).

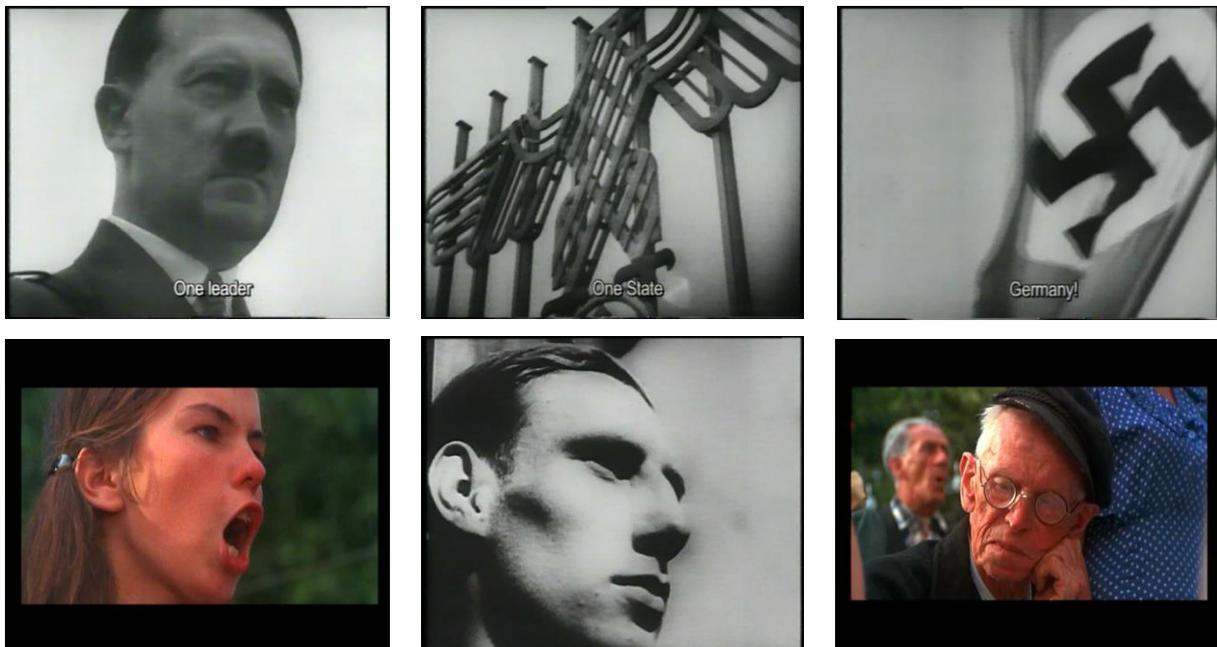


Figure 3.12: “Tomorrow belongs to me” displays growing support for Nazi ideology.

The intended effect of this montage of images is to foreshadow the rise of Nazism in Germany and it is upon this that the Emcee comments at the end of the sequence as Max’s car speeds

away. As the crowds' singing of "Tomorrow belongs to me" continues to grow in non-diegetic proportions, it finally overlaps with an inserted shot of the Emcee looking up into the camera with a leering, triumphant nod and evil grin at the film audience (Figure 3.13). The Emcee's inserted commentary is comparable to Act I, scene ix of the *Cabaret* play text, where for a brief moment he enters on stage with a wind-up gramophone playing a young boy's singing of "Tomorrow belongs to me". The full song is only performed in Act I, scene xii after Ernst Ludwig takes off his coat, exposing his Nazi armband. This is the first symbol of Nazism presented in the play text and is quickly followed by Fräulein Kost and Ernst Ludwig singing "Tomorrow belongs to me," a song in which eventually everybody joins in except for Sally, Cliff, Fräulein Schneider and Herr Schultz. In a similar way to the beer garden scene in the *Cabaret* film, the purpose of scene xii in the play text is to amplify the growing support for the Nazis' fascist ideology by acting as a unity in both the play text and the film. In *I am a Camera*, the only example of the Nazi Party promoting Hitler and fascist ideology is during a public demonstration involving swastika signs being painted on shop windows, posters of Hitler on the wall, S.A. members shouting Nazi propaganda, and forcing people, including Christopher, to take fliers with a picture of "HITLER" imprinted on it.



Figure 3.13: Emcee delivers silent commentary upon the rise of Nazism.

Despite the differing degrees to which the theme of Nazi ideology is present in the various play and film adaptations, the audiences' response regarding the political moral of the crowd present at the public demonstration, in the *Cabaret* play text, or at the beer garden, is disheartening, as from the viewer's privileged historical perspective it is clear that "these people could be made to believe in anybody or anything" (Isherwood, 1972: 188). In the context of *Cabaret*, it seems as if the Emcee is the only one who realizes this as well.

### 3.2.4. Emcee's commentary on Weimar Berlin's values in "Money, money" and "If you could see her"

The purpose of the Emcee's continual presence throughout the *Cabaret* play text and film adaptation is to comment upon "the decadence and decay [of Weimar Berlin] which helped the Nazi menace gain momentum while no one bothered to be concerned" (Robert Osborne in Belletto, 2008: 611). While each adaptation and performance of the play text may choose to present the role of the Emcee differently, he is often portrayed as having direct access to the film/theatre audience, as if they were sitting in the actual cabaret club in 1931. In the play text, the Emcee delivers most of his commentary through his performance of the musical numbers on the Kit Kat Klub stage. In the film adaptation, however, the Emcee's ironic commentary is made particularly apparent through the use of editing. This is primarily achieved by intercutting his performances on the Kit Kat Klub stage with an event happening outside of the cabaret club, as demonstrated in the above "Slaphappy" and "Tiller girls" sequences, or through inserted cutaways, one being the insert following the fascist number "Tomorrow belongs to me". Throughout the film, it is as if amongst all of the characters in *Cabaret*, the Emcee seems to be the only one who understands what is going on. Inserted cutaways of the Emcee commenting upon Weimar Berlin's constant pursuit of wealth and "divine decadence," as embodied by Sally Bowles and the musical number "Money, money", and his performance of the musical number "If you could see her," focusing on how society regards the issue of anti-Semitism as a laughing matter, further amplifies his role as the film's omniscient consciousness, focusing on the types of attitudes that helped pave the way for the Nazi's rise to power.

In *Goodbye to Berlin*, Sally dreams: "...if only I could get a really rich man as my lover. Let's see... I shouldn't want more than three thousand a year, and a flat, and a decent car. I'd do anything, just now, to get rich." (Isherwood, 1972: 48). In the *Cabaret* film, Sally's desire for wealth motivates the immediate jump-cut from seeing Baron Max von Heune's luxurious car parked in the street to the musical number "Money, money" in the Kit Kat Klub (Figure 3.14).

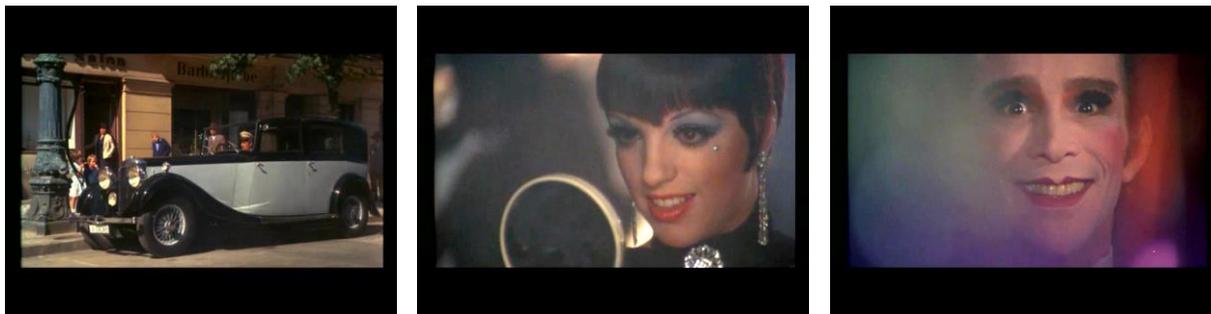


Figure 3.14: “Money, money” illustrates the seductive quality of wealth in Weimar Berlin.

Sally and the Emcee’s performance of the musical number takes on a very sexual quality, equating money as a type of aphrodisiac to the decadent society of Weimar Berlin. Especially in terms of the hardships described in the lyrics, with hunger knocking at the window, money seems to be the characters’ only solace during a time of great uncertainty in Berlin.

But when hunger comes a rap  
 Rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat at the window  
 Who’s there?  
 Hunger!  
 Ooh, hunger!  
 See how love flies out the door...  
 For money makes the world go round (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: I.x.).

After their performance, Sally is already shown being lured in by Max’s display of wealth and, in particular, his promise to make her a film star. The seductive quality of money is further amplified by inserted shots of the Emcee sticking out his tongue at Sally, commenting on her superficial sense of romance, and an inserted close-up of the ventriloquist’s puppet, signifying that Sally is the puppet and money is the one pulling the strings (Figure 3.15). In *I am a Camera*, the character Christopher Isherwood heeds the mesmerizing effect of money: “Penniless people should avoid contact with the rich... as for Sally, it might have been the chauffeur, it might have been the car, but something transformed her... it all went to her head like wine” (*I am a Camera*, 1955: 00:39:35 – 00:40:09). In both *I am a Camera* and the *Cabaret* film, montages of Sally and Christopher/Brian being spoiled by Clive/Max to endless parties, shopping sprees, gambling, and making holiday plans to Honolulu or wild Africa, visually amplifies the characters’ complete escape from Berlin, a “dreary, hopeless place.” Such displays of luxury is, however, not present in the play text of *Cabaret*. With only a few references to Sally hopefully begging Cliff for “dinner at the Adlon? With a bottle of champagne?” (I.x.), and praising

seventy-five marks as “a gift from heaven” (I.xii.), Sally and Cliff’s pursuit of saving money in the play text is driven towards preparing for their unborn baby.



Figure 3.15: Ventriloquist's puppet signifies that money is controlling Sally Bowles.

In contrast to the *Cabaret* play text, Sally Bowles’ constant pursuit of “divine decadence,” as described by Isherwood and presented to a certain degree in *I am a Camera*, is even more visually amplified in the *Cabaret* film through inserted cutaways of the Emcee commenting on her materialistic desires. For example, during a lavish dinner with other aristocrats at Max’s mansion in the German countryside, a close-up shot of Sally, completely entranced by all of the riches around her, is interrupted by a cutaway of the Emcee, slowly reiterating the word “money,” thus visually amplifying Sally’s thoughts and desires (Rodda, 1994: 38). Inserted cutaways of the Emcee throughout the *Cabaret* film thus allows the Emcee to continually comment upon the events that are happening outside of the cabaret club, amplifying his role as Weimar Berlin’s guilty conscience.

The Emcee delivers his most thought provoking commentary in the performance of “If you could see her,” in which the relationship between Fritz Wendel and Natalia Landauer, who forms part of the *I am a Camera* and *Cabaret* film’s subplot, is compared to the Emcee’s seemingly absurd relationship with a gorilla dressed in a pink tutu and hat. In the beginning of both films, Fritz is a poor Jew who presents himself as a Gentile, hoping to make a rich marriage, but soon falls in love with Natalia, a wealthy Jewish department store heiress. In order for them to get married, however, Fritz needs to admit of being Jewish himself which, within the political context of Nazi Berlin, is a guarantee of hardships to come. As the Kit Kat Klub audience suspiciously views this unusual relationship with a gorilla, the Emcee pleads towards the audience’s humanity: “Meine Damen und Herren, Mesdames et Messieurs, Ladies and Gentleman. Is it a crime to fall in love? Can we ever choose where the heart leads us? All we are asking is ein bisschen Verständnis, a little understanding. Why can’t the world ‘leben and

leben lassen.’ ‘Live and let live?’” (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: II.iii.). While the Kit Kat Klub audience interprets the Emcee’s plea for a little understanding in terms of sympathy towards his choice of loving a gorilla, someone who is different, and non-human, the film viewer’s conceptualization of the Emcee’s plea is guided by editing the musical number amidst Fritz’s dilemma of realizing that in order to marry Natalia, he must admit of being Jewish himself. The film audience is thus encouraged to read the musical number and lines such as “when we’re in public together, I hear society moan” and “live and let live” (II.iii.) within the context of the anti-Semitic brutality displayed earlier in the film. To further amplify the particular kind of oppression being parodied in the number, the Emcee concludes the song with “If you could see her through my eyes... she wouldn’t look Jewish at all” (II.iii.). With this final line from the Emcee, “the whole song is recontextualized and the gorilla becomes a visual metaphor for the ways in which Jewish people were being perceived in Berlin in 1931,” but instead of responding with shock at the Emcee’s comparison of a Jewish girl with a gorilla, as something non-human, the Kit Kat Klub audience merely bursts out laughing as what they regard as absurd “is not the human-gorilla affair, but the fascist logic that figures Jews as radically inassimilable and therefore disposable” (Belletto, 2008: 611).

In both the play text and film adaptation of *Cabaret*, the Emcee’s commentary in the musical number focuses on Berlin society’s disregard of the seriousness of anti-Semitism. Where they differ is in terms of whether these hardships will be faced alone or together by the characters who are affected by this discrimination. In the *Cabaret* play text, the issue of anti-Semitism is presented by the Emcee throwing a brick at Fräulein Schneider and Herr Schultz, who is a Jew, and shattering his shop’s window in Act II scene ii. Although Herr Schultz and Fräulein Schneider’s relationship is comparable to Fritz and Natalia’s in the film adaptation, they differ in terms of plot resolution. In the play text Fräulein Schneider breaks off her engagement to Herr Schultz because he is Jewish, and “not a German” (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: I.xii.), as Ernst Ludwig would say. In the *Cabaret* film, however, the film audience is assured of Fritz and Natalia’s union by overlapping the music of “If you could see her” with a shot of Fritz telling Natalia that he is Jewish, allowing them to get married during a traditional Jewish ceremony (Figure 3.16).



Figure 3.16: Gorilla is used as a metaphor for anti-Semitism in “If you could see her”.

In the *Cabaret* play text and film adaptation, the Emcee “personifies the indifference of any nation that can close its eyes and ears to persistent horrors and agonies” (Joe Blades in Rodda, 1994: 38). His performance at the Kit Kat Klub, amplifying desires for wealth, lust and entertainment, and often intercut with displays of fascist and anti-Semitic violence in the film, can be likened to what Isherwood regarded as “a dress-rehearsal of a disaster. It is like the last night of an epoch” (Isherwood, 1972: 174). The end of a “divinely decadent” era in Weimar Berlin, as described by Isherwood, is personified by the Emcee’s demise as presented in the film and play text’s closing sequences.

### 3.2.5. Choosing to believe “life is a cabaret” leads to characters’ own demise

At the end of *Cabaret*, the characters are presented with a choice of either continuing to believe that “life is a cabaret,” consisting of a series of parties, or to face the reality of the Nazi’s presence and growing power in Weimar Berlin. In the *Cabaret* film, a fantasy montage signifies the decision Sally has to make between a world of “divine decadence” at the Kit Kat Klub, where she is regarded as an “international sensation”, and the reality of being pregnant during a time of great uncertainty in Germany. The fantasy montage, amplifying Sally’s thought process while lying next to Brian in the park, consists of flashbacks to cabaret numbers, and divine parties with Brian and Max, being juxtaposed with flashforwards of a bored, neglected child sitting on the stairs, waiting for his mother to return from the cabaret (Figure 3.17). Isherwood describes Sally’s thought process as: “I imagined how it’d grow up and how I’d work for it, and how, after I’d put it to bed at nights, I’d go out and make love to filthy old men to get money to pay for its food and clothes” (Isherwood, 1972: 58).



Figure 3.17: Sally's fantasy sequence amplifies the decision she has to make.

Sally's decision is, however, evident when she returns home early one morning without her fur coat, having had the abortion. Her decision to stay in Berlin, choosing to cling onto the illusion that "life is a cabaret" and hoping that she "would amount to something as an actress" is

contrasted to Brian's decision to leave Berlin as soon as possible. "I suddenly decided, that evening, to cancel all my lessons, leave Berlin as soon as possible... We talked vaguely of her [Sally] joining me later; but even then, I felt that she wouldn't... 'I shall just stay on here. I should be quite happy. I seem to have got sort of used to this place'" (Isherwood, 1972: 59). The *Cabaret* film's departing image of Brian is of him standing at the train station, watching Sally walk away and onto the film's final musical number, "Cabaret".

The *Cabaret* play text concludes in Act II, scene vii, as the audience hears a voice on the loudspeaker calling out for the "Berlin-Paris Express." The stage lights up and reveals Cliff, the fictional Isherwood, sitting in a railroad compartment, busy writing the first words to a short story that is comparable to *Goodbye to Berlin*. "There was a Cabaret and there was a Master-of-Ceremonies and there was a city called Berlin in a country called Germany. It was the end of the world... and I was dancing with Sally Bowles and we were both fast asleep..." (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb. [s.a.]: II.vii.). As the music for "Wilkommen" starts up again, the Emcee appears, asking the audience: "Ladies and Gentlemen. Where are your troubles now? Forgotten? I told you so. We have no troubles here. Here life is beautiful. The girls are beautiful... Even the orchestra is beautiful" (II.vii.). In contrast to the lively performance during the opening number of "Wilkommen," however, the stage now only has an empty bandstand which slowly disappears with the rest of the set, leaving only a white background. The play text of *Cabaret* concludes with a drum roll building up volume and as the Emcee takes off his coat, a loud cymbal crash reveals him only wearing the clothes of a concentration camp prisoner.

The *Cabaret* film similarly concludes with the Emcee repeating the opening lines, "Here life is beautiful..." (II.vii.). The Emcee's unenthusiastic tone, however, suggests that he does not really mean this and along with quick inserts of the Kit Kat Klub audience used during the opening sequence, the Emcee's welcoming creates a feeling of nostalgia for a time when there were no troubles and "life [was] beautiful" in Berlin. A series of slow-motion flashbacks of various musical numbers accompanied by the off-key hammering on a piano further emphasizes that "the tickling and bottom-slapping days are over" (Isherwood, 1972: 186) (Figure 3.18).

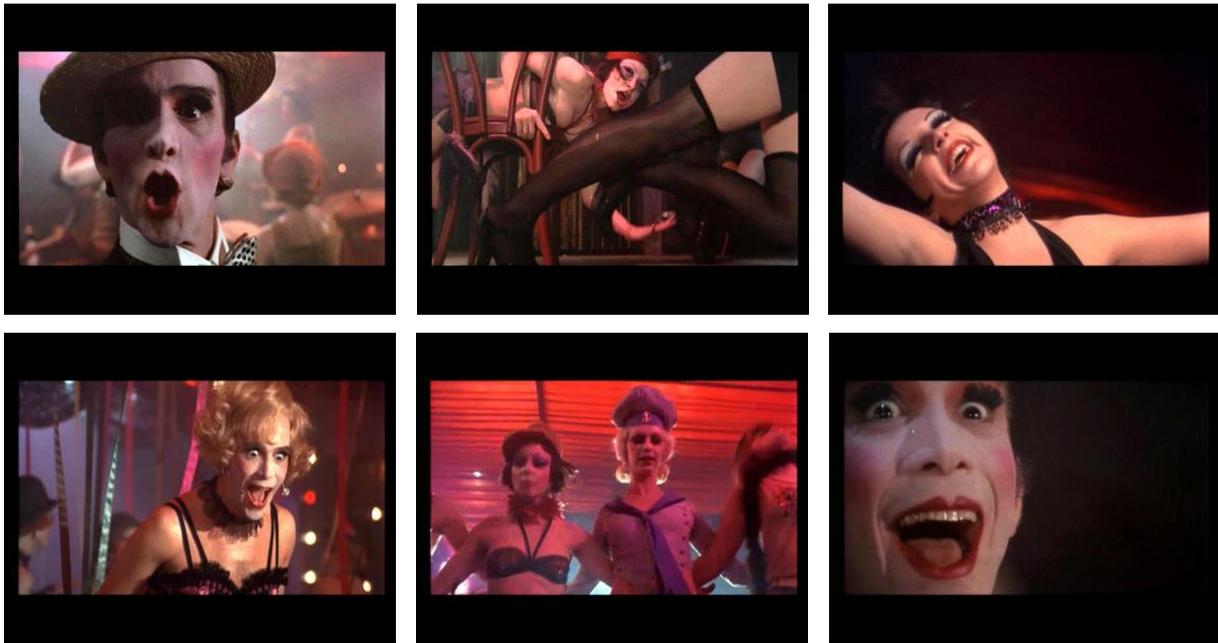


Figure 3.18: Flashbacks to the “beautiful” times at the Kit Kat Klub.

With his final words to the Kit Kat Klub audience and the film viewer: “Auf wiedersehen! À bientôt” (II.vii.), the Emcee makes his final bow and quickly disappears behind the curtain, leaving the film audience with a similar angle used in the beginning of the film. Instead of revealing the Emcee in the clothes of a concentration camp prisoner, the new political circumstances of Berlin is amplified through camera movement. As the camera pans across the mirror, the sound of a drum roll starts building up and finally ends in a cymbal crash as a distorted reflection reveals the Kit Kat Klub to be full of Nazis, camera framing specifically focusing on the multitude of swastika armbands present in the audience (Figure 3.19). Comparing the opening and closing shot of the film emphasizes the transformation that has occurred over the course of the narrative in *Goodbye to Berlin*, as by the time Christopher Isherwood left Berlin in 1933, Hitler was appointed as Chancellor and the Nazi Party had complete power over Germany.



Figure 3.19: Closing shot reveals the Kit Kat Klub to be full of Nazis.

### 3.3. Conclusion

Analysing the adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's themes from *Goodbye to Berlin*, into Henry Cornelius' film *I am a Camera* (1955), the musical play text of *Cabaret* (1966) and Bob Fosse's 1972 film adaptation, amplifies the crucial role that editing plays in establishing a thematic connection through associative montage, intercutting and juxtaposition, between the Kit Kat Klub audience's ignorance and the rise of Nazism across a series of texts and mediums. The political commentary created through editing in the *Cabaret* film, as demonstrated in the above-mentioned sequences, further establishes a connection to the political satire and dark humour delivered by "the real-life Weimar 'Kabarett mit K'" during the mid-1920s in Berlin (Belletto, 2008: 616). Kabarett characteristics such as "disconcerting ambiguity, irony, playful quoting and daring questioning" is foregrounded in the *Cabaret* film by intercutting moments of "divine decadence" promoted by the Emcee in the Kit Kat Klub with instances of fascist brutality, the film thus becoming "a double-edged knife of amusement and resistance, of mockery and melancholy" (Alan Lareau in Belletto, 2008: 617). To a film audience that is historically distanced from the events, the commentary provided by the film makes them realize how futile the various pleasures offered by the cabaret are amidst the reality of the rise of Nazism, and looking back at the events, makes them wonder how Hitler could've happened. Isherwood ends *Goodbye to Berlin* in a similar baffled manner: "The sun shines, and Hitler is master of this city. The sun shines, and dozens of my friends... are in prison, possibly dead. No. Even now I can't altogether believe that any of this has really happened..." (Isherwood, 1972: 204).

## **Chapter 4: Significance of editing techniques in the creation of meaning in adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet***

### **4.1. The process of translating William Shakespeare's play texts into film**

Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, William Shakespeare's play texts were only performed on stage. The first "adaptation" of a Shakespeare play to the cinema screen was Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's silent transfer of select scenes from his production of *King John* in 1899. With the subsequent development in film techniques, Shakespeare's play texts are continually adapted and re-adapted into different contexts, using different film styles and techniques to create a cinematically engaging rendition of the play text that appeals to both audiences familiar, and unfamiliar with Shakespeare's work.

A "Shakespeare screen adaptation" can thus be defined as a Shakespeare play text that has been adapted to film using the possibilities offered by film techniques such as editing, cinematography, production design and music to create a highly personalized cinematic version of the play (Hatchuel, 2004: 15). Often the process of translating Shakespeare's play text, usually filled with metaphors and symbolic meaning, to the film screen requires creative interpretation from the filmmaker to make Shakespeare's plot, dialogue, and characters, more relatable to a modern audience. Whether it is by recontextualising Shakespeare into a modern MTV context as in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 adaptation *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, or using continuity film techniques to transpose the audience back to the Renaissance period in Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), creating a Shakespeare adaptation requires the filmmaker to use the capabilities available to the film medium "to recast and reimage a work conceived in a different language and for a different culture" (Jack Jorgens in Hindle, 2007: xiv-xv). In this chapter, emphasis will thus be placed on the role that different editing conventions play in amplifying the central themes of Shakespeare's play text *Romeo and Juliet* by analysing the use of continuity editing by Franco Zeffirelli and an MTV editing style by Baz Luhrmann in their respective film adaptations of the play text.

## 4.2. The “theatrical” and “filmic” mode of representation

In his book *Shakespeare on Film*, Jack Jorgens presents three modes of representation according to which Shakespeare film adaptations can be categorized. These are known as the “theatrical”, the “realistic”, and the “filmic” mode. In *Studying Shakespeare on Film*, Maurice Hindle adds a fourth category according to which Shakespeare film adaptations can be analysed known as the “periodising” mode which refers to those adaptations that “dramatise a play by transposing it to the culture and society of a distinct historical period” (Hindle, 2007: 68). Each mode of representation has its own cinematic codes and conventions according to which it presents Shakespeare’s play text.

Shakespeare films that have been adapted according to the “theatrical” mode of representation have “the look and feel of a performance worked out for a static theatrical space and a live audience” (Jack Jorgens in Hindle, 2007: 69). Film techniques used in the “theatrical” mode of representation are therefore not primarily used to amplify the dramatic effect of the production, but rather to create the illusion of “filmed theatre”. This is achieved by filming the stage production from a fixed position, using wide to medium shots to capture the *mise en scène*, which includes the set design, costumes, props, lighting, and the actors’ performance. The dramatic effect of a “theatrical” mode production is created through the actors’ performance of a predominantly unedited Shakespeare text which is presented in long, continuous shots. While the “theatrical” mode of representation favours “the means of theatre and concentrates on the actors, the sets and the *mise en scène*,” the “filmic” mode of representation uses film techniques “with the intention of cinematic creation” (Hatchuel, 2004: 12).

The “filmic” mode of representation requires translating the meaning and symbolism of Shakespeare’s text, which includes intricate themes, elaborate plotlines, and complex characters, into the cinematic form. Peter Holland suggests that in order to do so, “there must be an imaginative recreation of the language of the play into the terms of the film” (Hindle, 2007: 78). In the process of recreating Shakespeare for the film screen, filmmakers have incorporated film techniques such as cinematography, *mise en scène*, and editing, to present Shakespeare’s text through literal illustration and/or metaphorical association. Presenting Shakespeare’s text through literal illustration consists of using images that directly amplify the literal meaning of the words, thus “showing pictorially what is expressed textually,” while metaphorical associations creates “visual analogies [that] transcends literal significance”

(Hatchuel, 2004: 19). As “the aural has been made visual” in the adaptation of a Shakespeare play text into the “filmic” mode, audience’s must therefore “decode” the cinematic signs, whether it is presented through literal illustration or metaphorical association, in order to fully appreciate the meaning of Shakespeare’s text (Grigori Kozintsev in Hindle, 2007: 77).

### **4.3. Continuity editing in Franco Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet* set in the “realistic” mode of representation**

Literal illustrations of Shakespeare’s play text are often found in the “realistic” mode of representation. The “realistic” mode is regarded as the most popular method for transferring Shakespeare’s text to screen as film techniques such as classic Hollywood cinematography, production design, period costumes, continuity editing, and naturalistic acting, have the capacity to adapt the play text’s settings, dialogue, characters, and events, into a realistic-looking film that transposes audiences back to the historical setting of the play text without drawing attention to the cinematic medium (Hindle, 2007: 74). An example of a “realist Shakespeare film” is Franco Zeffirelli’s 1968 film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. In the process of updating Shakespeare’s text for a late 1960s audience, Zeffirelli focused specifically on several of film’s *mise en scène* techniques, including cinematography, production design, costumes, lighting, and performance, to establish a realistic environment within which the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* can be placed. One of the stylistic choices Zeffirelli made was to establish Verona as a romantic setting during the Renaissance period by incorporating historical reconstructions of architecture and period costumes. The parts of “Romeo” and “Juliet” were also not to be portrayed by older stage actors, trained in the performance of Shakespearean verse, but rather Zeffirelli chose to bring the play’s star-crossed lovers to life through two young unknown actors, whose passion and spontaneity makes “an old play seem both new and inviting” (Cartelli & Rowe, 2007: 10). In addition to the above-mentioned techniques, Zeffirelli’s vision to create a “realistic” rendition of *Romeo and Juliet* is amplified when he resorts to continuity editing conventions to portray his interpretation of the play text.

The continuity editing system consists of a series of rules used to create a smooth flow across different shots. As each shot consists of a variety of factors that relate to cinematography and *mise en scène*, the editor has “four basic areas of control: graphic, rhythmic, spatial and temporal” (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 154-154). Maintaining continuity across different shots in terms of these areas promotes the clear unfolding of the narrative’s plot line and

character development, and thus presents the film in the most dramatically effective way without drawing the audience's attention to the filmic construction involved and thus maintaining the illusion of realism. On the other hand, continuity editing conventions may also be disrupted for dramatic effect. In Zeffirelli's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, he creates a fine balance between using continuity editing techniques to conceal the artifice of film, presenting Renaissance Verona as a natural autonomous world, but also using these techniques in a highly self-conscious manner in order to amplify certain themes, moments and emotions of the film, so that "seeing becomes feeling" for the viewer (Pursell, 1986: 173).

### 4.3.1. Graphic relations

Editing two shots together based on the graphic qualities present in the *mise en scène*, such as production design, costume, lighting, camera framing, and shot size "permits the interaction, through similarity and difference, of the purely pictorial qualities of those two shots" (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 154). Aside from maintaining continuity across different shots, the graphic quality of two shots edited together also amplifies the subtext of a scene. During the opening brawl in *Romeo and Juliet*, Zeffirelli creates a graphic match between the Capulets and the Montagues strolling through the market square. Zeffirelli firstly frames the Capulets through a market stall that sells red and yellow peppers which compliments the red and yellow colours of the Capulets' clothes. It is here that they spot "the house of the Montagues" (Shakespeare, 1984: I.i.28) and by cutting on the Capulets' eye-line, editing establishes spatial and directional continuity to an introductory shot of the Montagues and their priest framed through a stall that sells purple onions, also visually amplifying their dark blue attire (Figure 4.1). In addition to creating a cinematically engaging image, Zeffirelli establishes from the beginning how this "ancient grudge" (Prologue, 3) affects the whole of Verona by constantly framing the Montague and Capulet kinsmen between Verona citizens and market stalls that visually amplify their households' colours.



Figure 4.1: Capulets and Montagues framed amidst Verona's market stalls.

### 4.3.2. Rhythmic relations

A film's basic rhythmic potential is determined by the respective lengths of shots in a scene, and whether these shots are a few frames long or span across multiple seconds, the pacing they provide are important in amplifying the dramatic emphasis between shots, within a scene and indeed the overall film (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 158). When employing the manipulation of pace within a scene, there are no strict rules for determining shot length. Some guidelines that, however, prove useful in determining the pacing of shots include taking into consideration the amount of visual information present within the shot, and the purpose of the scene's emotional subtext in the film as varying shot lengths can influence the dramatic impact of a scene. For instance, longer, slower paced shots tend to amplify control within a scene while shorter, fast paced shots often amplify suspense or a sense of excitement typical of an action sequence. The knowledge of the dramatic character of a scene therefore guides the editor in manipulating the pace as varying shot lengths are more engaging than shots of equal length. Dramatic rhythm within a film is thus born out of the variation and interplay of length between different shots (Dancyger, 2002: 364-365). When determining a shot's length within the overall cutting pace of a scene, the editor therefore needs to consider the content of the shot and the amount of visual information it presents, and the context of the scene, as the use of pace and rhythm within all sequences are to amplify the audience's understanding of the narrative and to further their engagement in the film (Reisz & Millar, 1968: 242-243).

Zeffirelli uses the rhythmic manipulation of pace at certain moments during his adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* to firstly amplify a certain emotion within a scene, and then secondly contrast it to the established environment of Verona. This use of cutting pace is particularly apparent during the opening brawl sequence where Zeffirelli firstly establishes "fair Verona" (Shakespeare, 1984: Prologue, 2) as a place of order and community, visually amplified through

controlled camera movement, wide establishing shots, slow cutting pace, and continuity editing, but then disrupts this peaceful environment with a violent fighting sequence between the Montagues and Capulets. The suspense of the brawl is amplified by a sudden increase in cutting pace, quickly intercutting between wide shots of the two households fighting within Verona's walls, medium shots focusing on Tybalt's duel with Benvolio, and close-ups of the participants' heated reactions upon each other's jests. Along with quick panning shots, the dynamic use of extreme high-angle shots of the Montagues and Capulets fighting and extreme low-angle shots of the town's bell sounding the alarm and citizens throwing sand and objects out of their windows, chaotic handheld camera movement and zoom-in shots of Lord Capulet running with his sword while shouting "Kill that villain Montague!", takes the audience into a densely packed fighting sequence that is contrasted to Verona's previously established environment and thus amplifies the disruption caused by the two households' grudge (Hindle, 2007: 173). The sound of a trumpet announcing the sudden arrival of the Prince to the fray, however, marks a stylistic change in the sequence as the Prince orders his "rebellious subjects" (Shakespeare, 1984: I.i.72) to throw their "mistempered weapons to the ground" (I.i.78). The newly restored order is visually amplified by using a slower cutting pace, framing the Prince from a powerful low-angle shot, and by replacing the disorientating handheld shots used during the fray with static medium-wide shots of the Montagues and Capulets as the Prince gives them their final warning. The constant interplay between different shot lengths and pacing throughout the sequence, contrasting the slower cutting pace to amplify control in Verona with the chaotic, fast paced editing used during the brawl, thus establishes the disorder that the Montague and Capulet's feud brings to the city.

In addition to establishing the environment of Verona, Zeffirelli uses the manipulation of pace to amplify the excitement of Romeo and Juliet falling in love. During the Capulet ball, Zeffirelli gradually builds towards Romeo and Juliet's sonnet by having them meet several times over (Michael Anderegg in Burt & Boose, 2003: 60). Each meeting brings them closer together and establishes a stronger emotional connection that is visually amplified through increasing shot sizes, camera framing and cutting pace. After their initial exchange of glances, Romeo and Juliet are brought into closer proximity when they both join in the Moresca dance. At first the Moresca dance is presented in a wide establishing shot showing Romeo and Juliet dancing in formation along with the other guests. As the dance progresses and their emotional connection continues to grow, Romeo and Juliet are gradually brought closer together until they finally appear opposite each other in the dance, camera framing and shot size thus having progressed from presenting them as part of the crowd to filming them in a medium two-shot with both of them

occupying extreme opposite sides of the frame. The physical distance between Romeo and Juliet within the frame signifies an uncertainty in their relationship but this physical and emotional distance is, however, quickly overcome when the Moresca finally brings them to dance together in a more intimate medium close-up shot, with both lovers now occupying the same frame space (Figure 4.2).



*Figure 4.2: Romeo and Juliet's growing emotional connection at Capulet ball.*

Up until now, Romeo and Juliet's connection has been predominantly amplified through increasing shot size and camera framing but as the rhythm of the music starts to increase, the cutting pace is used to heighten their excitement of falling in love. As the Moresca dance builds up, Romeo and Juliet are divided into two circles. Even though Romeo and Juliet's respective circles move in opposite screen directions, editing creates the effect as if the two lovers are actually moving towards each other by quickly intercutting between matching medium to more intimate close-up shots of Romeo and Juliet dancing and laughing. During this sequence, the effect of the Moresca dance is primarily focused on Juliet as she is privileged in the foreground position, making her reaction more prominent than Romeo's, who is framed in the mid-ground amongst the other guests. The effect the dance has on Juliet is visually amplified by quickly intercutting between Juliet's point-of-view of the Nurse, Lord and Lady Capulet cheering on, and other guests twirling past. The quick pan movement across Romeo, Juliet, and other guests is, however, quickly juxtaposed to a static shot of Tybalt sneering at the events. The contrast created between the static shot of Tybalt, a key player in their families' feud, and the panning camera movement signifies the resistance against the excitement of Romeo and Juliet's youthful love. As the music and the guests' movement continue to increase, so does the cutting pace and soon the rapid intercutting between shots and the alternating camera movement becomes too disorientating for Juliet and she falls out of the circle. The Moresca dance comes to an end in a static high-angle wide shot, the manipulation of pace thus having established the emotional connection between the star-crossed lovers (Figure 4.3).



*Figure 4.3: Moresca dance montage amplifies the excitement of falling in love.*

While graphic and rhythmic relations between shots are important qualities to take into consideration when maintaining continuity across shots, it is rather through spatial and temporal relations between shots that narrative continuity and character development is advanced.

### **4.3.3. Spatial relations**

Continuity editing conventions include a variety of editing techniques used to enhance the audience's spatial awareness of the environment between shots and within a scene. Spatial continuity techniques such as shot/reverse shots, maintaining constant screen direction and camera angles between shots, and constructing the action of the scene along a 180° line, ensures that the film environment will correspond across the different shots which thereby aids a continuous narrative unfolding throughout the scene. Another example of a technique that creates spatial co-existence within a scene is the eye-line match. The eye-line match is predominantly used when two characters or a character and an object is not present in the same

shot. The directional quality of a character's eye-line, looking at something off-screen, and then revealing in the next shot what is being looked at, creates spatial continuity between the two shots as the audience assumes that the character and object are in the same vicinity. Spatial continuity is also maintained through match on action cuts involving a distinct action, movement or gesture being carried through from one shot to another (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 165-168). All of the above-mentioned techniques are, however, dependent on the establishment of the cinematic space within which the narrative takes place. A popular editing technique used to establish the environment of the film is by introducing the location with an extreme wide or wide shot at the beginning of the scene. "An establishing shot of the location sets the context for the scene and provides a point of reference for the close-ups, the follow action shots, and the visual details of the location" (Dancyger, 2002: 357). After establishing the details of the location in the wide shot, spatial continuity can then be maintained when moving into the action of a scene.

Spatial continuity is established in the opening panoramic shot of Zeffirelli's film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. A slow pan across the city pays special tribute to the opening of Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (1944), one of Zeffirelli's greatest inspirations, and introduces the audience to his filmic representation of the "fair Verona where we lay our scene" (Shakespeare, 1984: Prologue, 2), a city amidst dark and gloomy mist that looks like we've been transported back to the fourteenth or fifteenth century. As continuity editing is the dominant editing style used throughout the film adaptation, Zeffirelli's role as authorial figure is only subconsciously registered when he resorts to cinematic devices such as camera movement and lighting to amplify Shakespeare's theme of Romeo and Juliet's youthful and true love breaking through the "ancient grudge" (Prologue, line 3) that exists between their "two households" (Prologue, line 1). By zooming in from the slow pan across the wide establishing shot of the gloomy Verona into the bright new morning sun breaking through the mist, Zeffirelli is thus able to offer in "condensed cinematic form the contrasts of cold tragic death (the white veil of mist) and the passions of love and hate (the circle of burning sun) of which the prologue speaks" (Hindle, 2007: 172). After having introduced the details of the location, the Prologue is able to progress into an establishing medium shot of Verona's market square with the title of "Romeo and Juliet" consciously framed within the walls of the city (Figure 4.4). Through the film title's framing, Zeffirelli amplifies Shakespeare's theme that the lovers' tragedy comes as a result of their families' feud set within the walls of Verona. The Prologue is concluded with a slow pan across the market square, focusing on vendors entering the walls of Verona and leading the audience into Zeffirelli's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. The use of wide to medium establishing shots

and slow panning camera movement thus sets up the environment within which the narrative of *Romeo and Juliet* is to take place and allows for spatial continuity to be maintained when moving into the events of the film.

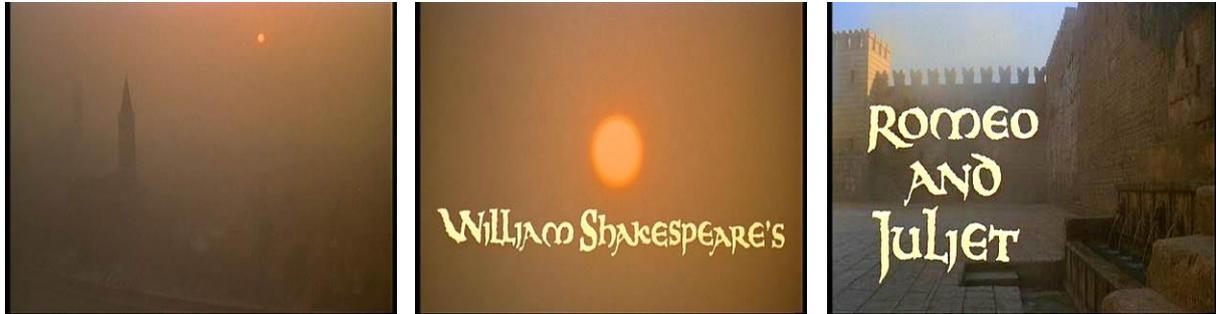


Figure 4.4: Establishing the cinematic representation of fair Verona.

#### 4.3.4. Temporal relations

Along with graphic, rhythmic and spatial relations, temporal relations between shots form part of the classic Hollywood continuity system as it is used to enhance the smooth unfolding of the film's narrative through the manipulation of "order", "frequency", and "duration". Temporal "order" relates to the film's chronological presentation of events. In conjunction to the logical presentation of events in a 1-2-3-4 order, the smooth unfolding of the narrative's cause-and-effect is maintained through temporal "frequency" which requires that events only be presented according to their dramatic purpose within a film and not be unnecessarily repeated. In terms of "duration", temporal continuity is maintained when the duration of screen time is equal to the duration of the narrative, but more often the natural duration of a scene is either expanded, using overlapping editing to amplify a certain emotion or plot point in the narrative, or elided to allow the narrative's complete storyline, which may span across several days, years, or even centuries, to be presented within a space of a few hours on the film screen. Temporal ellipses is thus often used to either omit unnecessary information from the film, such as a character waking up in the morning, getting dressed, and going to work, or to signal that time has passed through the use of cuts, fades, dissolves, wipes, montages indicating the passing of time, and sound edit transitions (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 171-173).

#### 4.3.5. Summary of successive continuity editing techniques: the sequence shot

Zeffirelli's use of temporal and spatial continuity in amplifying his "realistic" rendition of *Romeo and Juliet* is often by establishing a direct correlation between the screen time and story time through his predominant use of continuous, unedited sequence shots. These sequence shots are less dependent on editing techniques used to amplify continuity and more focused on using the actor's performance and cinematography, including framing, depth of field and camera movement, to provide the dramatic emphasis and flow in the scene. The absence of editing within a sequence, however, doesn't mean "suppression of cinematic narration" as the filmmaker is still able to amplify the narrative and emotional character of a scene through the use of cinematography and mise en scène techniques (Hatchuel, 2004: 58). In *Romeo and Juliet*, Zeffirelli successfully integrates the above-mentioned graphic, rhythmic, spatial and temporal techniques in his use of continuous, sequence shots to progressively reveal important plot points in the narrative, create suspense within a scene, amplify performance, and enhance dramatic conflict between characters. The sequence shot can thus be regarded "as the sum of successive editing effects" while maintaining continuity in the scene (Hatchuel, 2004: 60).

During the first scene of Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, the peaceful community of Verona is constantly threatened to be disrupted by the Montague and Capulet's feud and Zeffirelli amplifies this initial conflict between the two households without the excessive use of editing but rather through the controlled use of camera movement, depth of field and camera framing to firstly amplify the Capulet youth's sexually obsessive and violent nature, and secondly, to establish the dramatic conflict between the Montagues and the Capulets. The first example is when a tracking shot follows the Capulets' feet walking through the market square, then pans up and through careful framing draws specific attention to the Capulets' codpieces and one of their kinsmen kicking a dog. This serves as an example of Zeffirelli's preference for presenting action over dialogue as Shakespeare's offensive jests spoken by Sampson and Gregory in Act I, scene i is largely replaced by Zeffirelli dressing them up as jesters and placing particular emphasis on the Capulets' codpieces through camera movement and by underlining it with the bottom frame line (Pursell, 1986: 174).

Zeffirelli further amplifies the tension between the Montagues and Capulets by creating visual conflict through camera framing and depth of field. After deciding to quarrel, a Capulet's thumb

enters the foreground position of the frame, creating a physical obstacle for the Montagues walking peacefully in the mid-ground, and Verona citizens shopping in the background. Camera movement further amplifies the Capulets' malicious intent as the camera tracks back to reveal them spitting in front of the Montagues' feet, ending in a medium shot of the two households quarrelling in the foreground. The Montagues then move past the Capulets, trying to avoid conflict, and as a result take the foreground position while leaving the Capulets looking smaller in the mid-ground (Figure 4.5). Zeffirelli's constant interplay of which group of kinsmen holds the foreground position of the frame visually amplifies the conflict between the Montagues and the Capulets as the foreground holds the most dominant position in terms of camera framing. The struggle for power is thus amplified without the need to cut as conflict is created by maintaining the long tracking shot and focusing on the Capulets trying to regain their initial central framing position by constantly running up to the Montagues and insulting them.



*Figure 4.5: Camera framing amplifies the conflict between the Montagues and Capulets.*

In order to amplify performance in a scene, instead of cutting to a close-up of the character's face to emphasize a dramatic moment, the same effect can be achieved by having the character move closer to the camera or alternatively have the camera track into a close-up of the character (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 184). Instead of cutting to amplify the fatal consequence of Romeo's decision to go to the Capulet ball, Zeffirelli instead presents Romeo's soliloquy in a single, unedited shot. The continuous shot amplifies Romeo's emotional struggle with himself, as his mind "misgives some consequence yet hanging in the stars" (Shakespeare, 1984: I.iv.106-107), by slowly tracking in from a medium shot, focusing on Romeo looking up at the stars, into a close-up, allowing the audience greater character identification (Figure 4.6). Used in conjunction with the continuous camera movement, the sound of a tower bell striking emphasizes the line "By some vile forfeit of untimely death" (I.iv.111) and serves as a foreshadowing device as the same bell announces Romeo and Juliet's tragic death at the end of the film. As the bell continues to strike, serving as a constant warning, Zeffirelli is thus able to

create a connection between Romeo’s decision that fate should “Direct [his] sail” (I.iv.113) and the fatal outcome of going to the Capulet ball while maintaining a “realistic” representation of the spatial and temporal continuity in the scene.



*Figure 4.6: Romeo’s decision to go to the Capulet ball.*

Another example of using continuous camera movement to amplify the emotional character of the scene is when Romeo and Juliet part from each other at the Capulet’s balcony. By first focusing a close-up on their hands taking their last touch, camera movement slowly zooms out to reveal Romeo busy climbing down the wall. The distance between Romeo and Juliet is amplified as the camera continues to zoom out showing Romeo and Juliet parting with their hands still reached out towards each other. Their parting finally ends in a medium-wide shot with Romeo and Juliet in extreme opposite corners of the screen (Figure 4.7). While Zeffirelli used a dynamic cutting pace to heighten the excitement of falling in love during the Capulet ball, he now resorts to a continuous, unedited shot to amplify Romeo and Juliet’s difficult parting at the balcony.



*Figure 4.7: Camera movement amplifies the lovers’ difficult parting.*

In camera movement is also used to amplify Romeo’s misfortune upon hearing the news of Juliet’s death from Balthasar and missing the Friar’s letter. Upon Romeo and Balthasar’s return to Verona, the camera pans to follow their movement but Romeo’s misfortune is amplified when

their horses momentarily fills the entire space of the screen and then gives way to reveal a medium shot of the priest appearing from behind his donkey and continuing to walk towards Mantua (Figure 4.8). The horror of Romeo's unfortunate mistake is amplified by dramatic extra-diegetic music building in volume. By making the audience privy to this information, Zeffirelli heightens the sheer misfortune of the events, wishing that Romeo did "have patience" (Shakespeare, 1984: V.i.27) as Balthasar pleaded in the text, but at the same time it amplifies the sense that fate is still directing Romeo's sails, leading him towards the Capulet tomb and his eventual death.



Figure 4.8: Camera movement amplifies Romeo's misfortune of missing the Friar's letter.

Camera movement is also able to create suspense within the Capulet tomb scene by withholding information from the audience. The moment when Juliet discovers Romeo's dead body is amplified by withholding her reaction from the audience and instead focusing on the Friar dropping his lantern. As the extra-diegetic music builds in volume and intensity, the camera follows the Friar's hand moving towards Juliet and finally reveals her looking off-screen at Romeo. Instead of cutting to Juliet's point-of-view of Romeo, suspense is maintained by focusing on the Friar trying to pull Juliet away from the tomb as the sound of the Watch's trumpets draws nearer. As she continues to resist, the Friar leaves Juliet behind and in a panic runs out of the tomb while repeatedly shouting "I dare no longer stay" (V.iii.159). Zeffirelli amplifies Juliet's reaction to the horror of Romeo's death by bringing the music to its full climax and using camera movement to track in from a medium to a close-up shot of Juliet looking off-screen (Figure 4.9). Camera movement in the continuous shot is thus used to create suspense within the scene by firstly concealing Juliet's reaction from the audience, and then progressively revealing her reaction but then withholding her point-of-view of Romeo from the film audience. "This tension between absence and presence arouses desire as the spectators generally want to see what is being hidden from them. It can also be used as a major aesthetic tool to create suspense or dramatic irony, since part of the action might be hidden from the on-screen

character but revealed to the audience. Any screen adaptation of a Shakespeare play notably involves the introduction of this tension between hidden and disclosed action” (Hatchuel, 2004: 70).



Figure 4.9: Camera movement amplifies suspense by gradually disclosing Juliet's reaction.

#### 4.4. MTV editing in Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* set in the “periodising” mode of representation

While some film adaptations prefer historical reconstructions and literal illustrations when transferring Shakespeare's play text to screen, other films revert to the “periodising” mode which involves remaking a work such as *Romeo and Juliet* within a new reception context, using the possibilities offered by cinema to assign new meanings and create metaphorical associations to help guide the film's intended target audience to a preferred reading of *Romeo and Juliet*. “The primary feature of the ‘periodising’ mode is taking the story and characters of a Shakespeare play and transporting them wholesale into the cultural trappings and social dynamic of a distinctly recognisable historical period” (Hindle, 2007: 82). Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, released in 1996, can be regarded as an example of the “periodising” mode as it recreates and popularizes Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for a “turn-of-the-millennium audience” by recontextualising it within a contemporary 20<sup>th</sup> century city, known as Verona Beach (Burt & Boose, 2003: 8).

In the process of adapting Shakespeare's play text for a contemporary, MTV-influenced youth audience, Luhrmann directed his film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* according to the following two principles: firstly, to present Shakespeare's language within a context that makes it accessible to a predominantly young audience, and secondly, to express a unique cinematic vision of the play text using modern film techniques and conventions (Hatchuel, 2004: 27). Instead of creating a verbal language that will better suit the modern context in which *William*

*Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* is set, Luhrmann keeps the majority of Shakespeare's play text with only a few omissions and alterations to the scenes and dialogue that he regarded as possibly confusing to a modern audience. In an attempt to make the remaining scenes and dialogue more relatable to a contemporary youth audience, whose preferences and level of engagement are determined by their cultural surroundings, Luhrmann uses the "potential of cinema to place the language [of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*] in a new space, a space where it sounds a little different to the ear precisely because it appears so different to the eye" (Lorne Buchman in Walker, 2000: 138). As opposed to classic Hollywood cinema that strives for a viewing experience that will completely immerse the viewer in the presented *mise en scène* by hiding all traces of filmic enunciation, as demonstrated in Zeffirelli's presentation of a "realistic" Renaissance Verona, Luhrmann instead leaves a visual footprint signalling his role as the filmmaker in his rendition of *Romeo and Juliet*. Primarily through the use of cinematic techniques, particularly focusing on *mise en scène* and MTV editing conventions, "Luhrmann's movie communicates with and convinces its sophisticated street-savvy Generation X audience best when it puts the tragic story of Shakespeare's play across using a brash MTV visual style and soundtrack" (Hindle, 2007: 85).

Even though Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* has often been criticised as "MTV Shakespeare": the kind of mindless visual candy we associate with rock videos" (Walker, 2000: 132), Luhrmann's MTV style, which includes fast paced editing, juxtaposition, chaotic cinematography, speeded-up actions and slow motion effects, are less driven by the illusion of "reality" and continuous narrative development, but rather more focused on creating a particular emotion and atmosphere to guide the audience in their experience of the film. The motto of an MTV-style film is thus "narrative is less important; a feeling state is more important" (Dancyger, 2002: 185). This is achieved by undermining the traditional Hollywood continuity conventions and freely disrupting graphic, rhythmic, spatial, and temporal relations between shots to amplify a particular emotion. This is primarily achieved by presenting the narrative through fast-paced, conspicuous editing, dynamic camera movement that includes whip pans, slam zooms, and handheld shots, differing film stocks, colour grading, film speed, and special effects. Through these techniques, the MTV film has the opportunity to disrupt the classical continuity system, shifting focus from narrative, structure and character, to MTV's preference for feeling, intensity and mood. When the film's visual and auditory style is extended with references to the audience's popular culture, which includes music videos, television, film references, commercials, computer games, designer clothes, sex, youth gang violence, and

drugs, the film creates “a cinematically convincing semiotic that is richly satisfying” to a contemporary audience (Hindle, 2007: 85).

#### **4.4.1. Graphic and rhythmic discontinuity**

As an alternative to the classic Hollywood continuity system and its focus on maintaining spatial and temporal continuity, MTV editing places more emphasis on creating a specific atmosphere or feeling state in a film through the use of graphic and rhythmic relations between shots. Editing according to graphic relations between shots involves joining or juxtaposing shots based on their visual content, which includes the shape of an object, size, texture, colour grading, camera framing, or lighting effect. This type of editing was extensively explored by Stan Brakhage, whose work is a well-known influence on MTV editing techniques (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 174).

In an MTV film, rhythmic editing often disrupts spatial and temporal continuity as it is primarily focused on creating an emotional response within the audience rather than maintaining the narrative’s continuous development across scenes. MTV film sequences are often extremely fast-paced, intercutting individual shots of varying length at a rate that is too quick for a film viewer to register consciously, but is able to signify a definite feeling state or theme that is important for the audience's interpretation of the film. The manipulation of pace is therefore no longer primarily used to build character identification, provide meaning or to guide the audience along a continuous narrative development, but instead it is used to intensify a particular atmosphere or feeling state in a scene, and ultimately to increase audience engagement as pacing becomes “the source of energy” in an MTV film (Dancyger, 2002: 185). Luhrmann’s use of graphic and rhythmic editing in *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* is best demonstrated in the film’s montage sequences, which will be discussed in more detail after viewing the techniques available to disrupting spatial and temporal continuity.

#### **4.4.2. Spatial discontinuity**

As spatial and temporal continuity across shots are vitally important to the presentation of a “realistic” environment and the logical unfolding of the narrative’s timeline in a classic Hollywood film, MTV editing resorts to techniques that disrupts the audience’s spatial and temporal awareness in order to amplify a particular emotion or plot point in the narrative. For

example, the predominant use of match on action cuts used to amplify spatial continuity across movement in different shots is replaced by the “jump cut”. The development of the jump cut is founded in the French New Wave period, starting with the release of Francois Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959) and Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960). Instead of creating their work according to the conventions of continuity editing, the filmmakers from the French New Wave movement resorted to long, continuous camera movement and the joining of non-continuous shots, creating a jump cut, to “challenge continuity editing and all that it implied” (Dancyger, 2002: 132).

In addition to the jump cut, MTV editing further disrupts spatial continuity by using the “360° space” system to present an event in a film. Developed by filmmakers Jacques Tati and Yasujiro Ozu, the 360° system is contrasted to the 180° line technique that is used to ensure spatial coexistence across different shots. Instead of constructing the action of a scene along a 180° line, and filming it from one side of the “axis of action”, “these filmmakers work as if the action were not a line but a point at the centre of a circle and as if the camera could be placed at any point on the circumference” (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 176-177). This technique often results in a disruption of film space but can be effectively used for amplifying emotion within a scene. In *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, Baz Luhrmann uses the 360° system to create a timeless kiss between Romeo and Juliet. In a similar way to Zeffirelli's treatment of the lovers' first meeting, Luhrmann “gives us the meeting of Romeo and Juliet in effect several times over through time expansion and repetitive editing patterns” (Michael Anderegg in Burt & Boose, 2003: 60-61). He firstly precedes their sonnet meeting by merely having Romeo and Juliet's eyes meet and exchange glances several times over, first at the fish tank and then as Juliet dance with Paris. Luhrmann further amplifies this special moment by fading out all of the sound created by the flashy, extravagant Capulet party and transforming the love song “Kissing You”, as performed by the solo artist at the Capulet ball, from a diegetic moment in the film into a recurring, extra-diegetic melody that amplifies the lovers' growing connection. When Romeo and Juliet finally come together in an elevator, Luhrmann creates a timeless kiss by using a circular track that moves around the young lovers as they embrace, focusing them as the centre point of their personal cinematic space. Luhrmann further amplifies a recurring theme in Shakespeare's sonnet, ranging from Romeo's “unworthiest hand” (Shakespeare, 1984: I.v.92) kissing Juliet's “holy shrine” (I.v.93) and ultimately having “lips do what hands do” (I.v.103) by alternating shots that focus on their lips and their hands (Figure 4.10). Along with sound editing, Luhrmann is thus able to create an “out-of-time” moment, separating Romeo and Juliet's love from the Capulet ball, their families' feud and the rest of Verona.

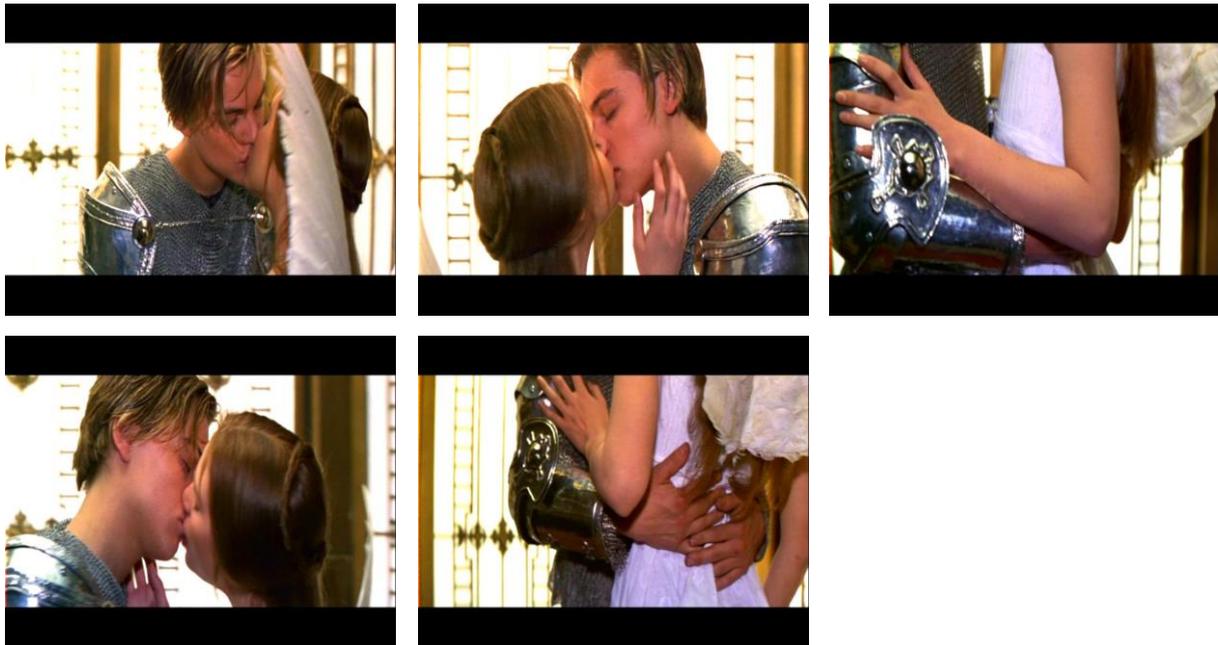


Figure 4.10: A circular track creates a timeless first kiss.

Another popular technique that is often used in the MTV-style film is the “non-diegetic insert”, or also known as a cutaway. The “non-diegetic insert” violates spatial continuity as it is often an inserted “metaphorical or symbolic shot that is not part of the space and time of the narrative” (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 178). The function of the “non-diegetic insert” is thus to add new meaning to the scene and guide the audience’s interpretation of the film narrative. In the sequence that leads up to Romeo’s return from exile, Luhrmann uses a cutaway to emphasize the sheer misfortune of Romeo missing the Friar’s letter. During Post Haste Dispatch’s first attempt to deliver the letter to Romeo, a pan from the postman to the caravan’s backyard reveals Romeo a mere few feet away busy hitting rocks with a wooden stump. As Romeo throws another rock and hits it, editing cuts to a cutaway of Juliet trying on her wedding dress (Figure 4.11). Luhrmann emphasizes the serious consequence of Romeo missing the letter by matching this cut to the sound of a gunshot which firstly foreshadows how Juliet is going to die, and secondly visually amplifies her fear that her “grave is to be [her] wedding bed” (Shakespeare, 1984: I.v.134).



Figure 4.11: Non-diegetic insert amplifies the tragedy of Romeo missing the Friar's letter.

### 4.4.3. Temporal discontinuity

As the temporal relation between shots in a MTV-style film is no longer primarily driven by the continuous unfolding of narrative and character development, the MTV editing style often subverts temporal continuity by manipulating the “order”, “frequency”, and “duration” of events to produce a different effect. For instance, the order of events in a MTV film can be changed as it doesn't have to be presented in chronological order to maintain a clear understanding of the narrative's cause-and-effect, but rather it can be altered to present the events in reverse (4-3-2-1) or in a discontinuous order (3-2-1-4). Such manipulation in the order of events are normally seen in the form of flashbacks and flashforwards. The flashback allows the filmmaker the opportunity to explore the past by either presenting events that took place before the start of the film's narrative, or to repeat a scene for dramatic effect. It is thus normally the character's “memory [that] motivates the ‘violation’ of temporal order” of continuity editing (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 161). On the other hand, the flashforward intercuts the present with moments of the future but is not often used as “the process of memory and recalling is, indeed, more natural and common than the process of premonition and anticipation” (Hatchuel, 2004: 43). The effect of altering the order and frequency of events, which is no longer based on a “one-to-one” ratio but can now be repeated numerous times throughout the film, is to focus more on emphasizing a character's decision, amplify the themes of the narrative, and to manipulate the audience's expectations.

In Luhrmann's modern interpretation of the play text, he resorts to the flashback and flashforward technique to amplify the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet's star-crossed love by setting up the audience's expectations of a possible happy ending, but then diminishing their hope for peace at the end of the film. Luhrmann firstly amplifies the importance of Romeo's decision to go to the Capulets' masked ball by inserting a flashforward of the lovers' tragic outcome. Before

going to the Capulet ball, Mercutio gives Romeo the drug “Queen Mab... the fairies’ midwife [that] comes in a shape no bigger than an agate stone on the forefinger of an alderman” (Shakespeare, 1984: I.iv.53-56). This small pill, presented to Romeo on Mercutio’s outstretched forefinger, is revealed in an extreme close-up with a red pierced heart on it, further amplifying its purpose as it lets lovers “dream of love” (I.iv.71). It is, however, with nervous deliberation that Romeo takes this love drug “for [his] mind misgives some consequence yet hanging in the stars” (I.iv.105-106). During Romeo’s soliloquy, he prophesies his own death that will come as a result of some event that will take place at the Capulets’ masked ball. Luhrmann emphasizes the fatal connection between “this night’s revels” (I.iv.109) and the lovers’ “untimely death” (I.iv.111) by constantly intercutting between a close-up of Romeo looking up at the stars, deliberating whether he should take the drug and let fate “direct [his] sail” (I.iv.113), and a medium-wide to medium tracking shot, foreshadowing Romeo walking down a cross blazoned aisle, which the audience at this stage of the film can only assume is the Capulet tomb. As the intercutting pace increases, with Richard Wagner’s *Liebestod* building in volume and intensity, the importance of Romeo’s decision is amplified and with one final look up at the stars being intercut with a flashforward view of Romeo in the Capulet tomb, Romeo takes the drug and sets in motion the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* (Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.12: Flashforward amplifies the fatal consequence of Romeo’s decision.

Luhrmann initially sets up the audience’s expectation of a peaceful reconciliation between the Montagues and Capulets through Friar Lawrence’s “vision” of peace, juxtaposing flashbacks of their families’ feud and flashforwards of a possible resolution through the marriage of Romeo and Juliet (Hindle, 2007: 180). The vision starts with Friar Lawrence looking at the church choir practising. The medium wide shot of the choir fades into a flashback of a newspaper, displaying the headline “Ancient grudge”, caught up in flames. The sequence then cuts to a flashforward of a newspaper stating “Montague & Capulet Reconcile” and a newspaper image of Romeo and Juliet kissing. Luhrmann hints at the subjectivity, and thus possible unreliability, of these

flashforwards of peace by divulging the image in flames. Friar Lawrence's subjective vision of peace ends with a white dove flying across the frame and entering the Sacred Heart of Christ before returning to the present tense. In a second example, Luhrmann further builds up the audience's expectation of a possible happy ending by using flashforwards to visualize Friar Lawrence's plan of reuniting the young lovers after Romeo has been banished to Mantua. In this sequence, Friar Lawrence is presented in the foreground, describing his plan directly to the camera while the background displays a montage of Juliet sleeping, Fulgencio and Gloria Capulet burying her in the Capulets' tomb, Friar Lawrence sending a letter to Romeo in Mantua, and a clock counting down the hours until Juliet is awoken by a smiling Romeo (Figure 4.13).



Figure 4.13: Friar Lawrence's plan is described in a series of flashforwards.

By presenting these images before the start of the final act, Luhrmann is able to cut sections of the scenes described in Friar Lawrence's plan, thus building up intensity and suspense during Romeo's return from exile, but also to manipulate the audience's expectations by juxtaposing Friar Lawrence's vision and the ultimate outcome of the events (Hatchuel, 2004: 43-44).

Lastly, in terms of manipulating the duration of a moment, temporal expansion can stretch an event beyond its natural duration in order to amplify a theme or emotion in the scene. Sergei Eisenstein often resorted to "overlapping editing" to amplify a specific moment in his films, for example *Strike* (1924) and *October* (1928), by repeatedly overlapping shots showing the same event from different perspectives. In *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, Luhrmann resorts

to cross-cutting and the use of slow motion to extend and amplify Romeo and Juliet's last moments together, and at the end of the scene uses flashbacks to create nostalgic reminders of the young lovers time together. As Romeo approaches Juliet's death bier, repeating the moment that has already been foreshadowed during Romeo's soliloquy before going to the Capulet ball, a slow track reveals the full extent of the theatrically decorated Capulet tomb that can be described as "a set illuminated by hundreds of candles and dozens of neon crosses, a neo-baroque wedding of sixteenth- and twentieth century light sources, self-consciously decorated as no church or tomb has ever been, and seemingly prepared in advance for the lovers' final meeting" (Michael Anderegg in Burt & Boose, 2003: 60). This dramatic moment is further amplified by the extra-diegetic music of Richard Wagner's *Liebestod* from the opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1859). The aria *Liebestod*, meaning "Love death" in German, refers to an eternal love continuing beyond death and thus effectively amplifies the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet's love. The aria reaches its climax in Luhrmann's film when in a high angle shot, as if fate is looking directly down upon them, Romeo is shown standing over Juliet, believing his love to be dead.

For the tragic ending of *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, Luhrmann chooses to alter the death scene in the same way that Thomas Otway had done for his adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which he renamed *The History and Fall of Caius Marius* and showcased in the late seventeenth century. In Otway's Restoration version of the play he allows a brief reunion between the two lovers by having Juliet wake up before Romeo dies (Hindle, 2007: 182). In Luhrmann's interpretation of Shakespeare's text, he places particular emphasis on fate and the doomed nature of Romeo and Juliet's love by firstly creating hope for the lovers' reunion and then diverting from it. Luhrmann creates the hope for an alternate, happy ending by cross-cutting between Romeo believing his love to be dead and close-up shots focusing on Juliet's head and fingers moving slightly, signalling that she is slowly regaining consciousness. Along with a very slow cutting pace, the time it takes for Juliet to awaken and reach out to Romeo, however, seems to be endless and is amplified by slowly cross-cutting between Romeo holding the poison while looking up at the "inauspicious stars" (Shakespeare, 1984: V.iii.111), and Juliet slowly reaching out to Romeo. Despite momentary speeding up the intercutting between Romeo lifting up the poison and Juliet's hand reaching out to him, amplifying the possibility of a happy ending, her movement is unfortunately too slow and only reaches him when he has just swallowed the poisonous drink. Romeo's shock is amplified by quickly cutting to an extreme close-up point-of-view of Juliet's eyes looking up at him, emphasizing the fact

that she is alive. (Figure 4.14) “Editing here generates dramatic irony, emphasizing the tragic bad timing as Romeo fails to notice what is happening” (Hatchuel, 2004: 41).



Figure 4.14: Cross-cutting creates the hope for a happy ending but then diverts from it.

After Romeo's death, Luhrmann cuts back to a wide shot of Juliet alone in the Capulet tomb. The wide shot makes Juliet seem very isolated, a victim of her surroundings, and is used in contrast to the very personal close-up shots used during the lovers' final moments together. When Juliet's hand touches the gun, the dawning reality of her fate is amplified by making the action of her picking up the gun happen in slow motion. The use of slow motion creates a dramatic pause, producing “an effect of contemplation [and] emotional emphasis” within a film that has been predominantly governed by fast paced editing (Hatchuel, 2004: 63). The sequence then cuts back to a high angle shot, signifying fate looking directly down at Juliet as she slowly pulls back the hammer of the gun and lifts it up to her temple. In her final moments, Juliet looks directly up at fate in a close-up shot before she finally pulls the trigger, the sound of the gunshot echoing against the walls of the tomb. Now that Romeo and Juliet are reunited in death, the camera tracks up from a high angle, medium shot focusing on the “pair of star-cross'd lovers” (Shakespeare, 1984: Prologue, 6) while the aria *Liebestod* slowly builds up in volume and fittingly amplifies the romantic yet sad conclusion. As the high angle, medium shot continues to slowly track further away, inserted flashbacks of Romeo and Juliet's first glance through the fish tank, Romeo's wedding ring, and the morning of their wedding night serve as nostalgic reminders of the young teenagers' love. Luhrmann, however, constantly reminds the audience

of the lovers' tragic ending by cutting back to the image of Romeo and Juliet lying in Capulet tomb. A final wide shot of Romeo and Juliet very small amidst the elaborately decorated Capulet tomb slowly fades to their kiss under water which, with the aid of the extra-diegetic music and slow motion, gives the impression of a love that is out of reach from Verona and their families' feud. As a freeze frame of Romeo and Juliet kissing slowly dissolves into white, Luhrmann brings the curtain down on this dramatic ending and "with this journey into the past, Luhrmann constructs the idea of an eternal love, continuing even beyond death" (Hatchuel, 2004: 42) (Figure 4.15).



Figure 4.15: Flashbacks serve as nostalgic reminders of Romeo and Juliet's love.

#### 4.4.4. Compilation of MTV editing techniques: intellectual montage

A combination of the various MTV editing techniques used to disrupt graphic, rhythmic, spatial and temporal continuity in a film can be found in Sergei Eisenstein's theory of montage. In the development of the metric, rhythmic, tonal, overtonal, and intellectual montage, Eisenstein constructed meaning by freely disrupting the conventions of continuity editing. Like Dziga Vertov, who defined the process of editing as the means "to 'write' a film with the shots," Eisenstein regarded editing as having the potential to create meaning that extends beyond the audience's perceptual decoding abilities by actively engaging them in creating intellectual and emotional connections within a film (Bordwell & Thompson, 1980: 179).

In *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, Luhrmann presents the film's prologue through an intellectual montage. Eisenstein's intellectual montage refers to "the introduction of ideas into a highly charged and emotionalized sequence" (Dancyger, 2002: 20). During the opening sequence, Luhrmann introduces certain concepts to aid the audience's understanding of Shakespeare's play text being recontextualized in a modern setting. Luhrmann firstly comments upon the MTV generation as a media-obsessed society by presenting the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* as a long news item, often intercutting news archive footage with the presented reality. As the montage progresses, Luhrmann uses MTV editing techniques such as juxtaposition, whip pans, slam zooms, and fast paced editing, to establish Verona Beach as a hostile environment, reigned by urban violence, in which Romeo and Juliet's pure love must triumph. Luhrmann then concludes the prologue sequence by inserting a montage that foreshadows the events of the film, thus amplifying Shakespeare's theme that the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet comes as result of their families' feud as described in the beginning of the play text.

Luhrmann comments upon the society of the MTV generation by presenting the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet as merely another long item on a television news broadcast. The opening shot features a retro 1970s/1980s television set floating in a non-realistic vacuum space in the middle of the film screen. As if a bored teenager is flipping through different television channels looking for something to watch, Luhrmann visually mimics the MTV generation's constant need for aural and visual stimulation by changing the television screen from the title "Twentieth Century Fox presents" to "A Bazmark Production". A final click from the remote brings up an African-American newsreader who reports Shakespeare's prologue with the same predictable blandness in which newsreaders often deliver the news of modern life tragedies. As the prologue news report continues, a slow zoom enlarges the television set until the projected headline icon "Star-Cross'd Lovers" along with the image of Romeo and Juliet's broken wedding ring is clearly visible over the newsreader's shoulder (Figure 4.16). The use of the television set enables Luhrmann to amplify his representation of Verona Beach and the film's contemporary audience as a media-obsessed society by framing *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* as a long news item within a television news broadcast. "What this highly self-conscious 'containing' filmic device suggests is not only that what we see between Prologue and Epilogue is in a sense no more or less than another news 'story' rather than 'Shakespeare', but that communications through screen and image in modern culture are so pervasive that there is little difference between our experience of reality and its media representations" (Hindle, 2007: 178). For the film's epilogue, Luhrmann returns to the same newsreader reporting the events in the same emotionless tone, while news footage shows Romeo and Juliet's bodies being lifted into

“St. Katherine’s Hospital” ambulance. “The kind of comic, self-conscious detachment invoked by the newscaster’s delivery of the prologue [and epilogue] becomes a poignant reflection on the media’s ability to trivialize and, through glib sensationalism, to empty a tragic event of meaning” (Walker, 2000: 135). The use of the television set thus reduces the passion of *Romeo and Juliet* to insignificant news as the young lovers “become merely another lurid image for a media-besotted culture, body-bagged victims in a grainy news video” (James Loehlin in Burt & Boose, 2003: 63).

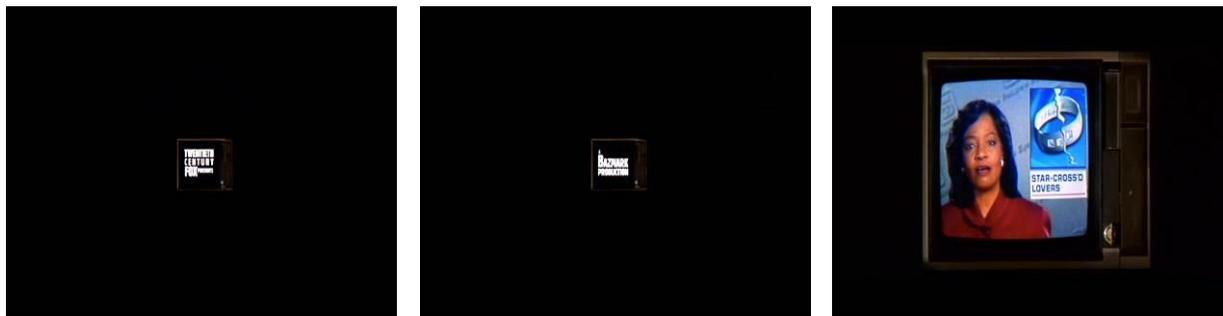


Figure 4.16: The tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* is presented as an item on a news broadcast.

In the opening sequence, Luhrmann establishes the environment of Verona by slam zooming into the television screen, taking the audience through the news broadcast and into the cityscape of Verona Beach as studio coverage goes live. Editing erases the material limits of the television set by continuing with the fast motion and cutting directly into a similar slam zoom shot of Verona Beach, thus completing the transition from media representation into the reality of “fair Verona” (Shakespeare, 1984: Prologue, line 2). Indeed what is meant by Shakespeare to be “In fair Verona” (Prologue, line 2) is immediately juxtaposed to the reality of Luhrmann’s Verona Beach by intercutting the fast movement of the slam zoom shot with a static titling shot displaying the text. This contrast is further amplified by first focusing the audience’s attention on a close-up shot of a monument of Christ but then slam zooming out to a wide shot, revealing the religious monument to be dominated by the Montague and Capulet business corporations. The hostile environment of Verona Beach is further established by rushing the audience through a montage of slam zooms, fast cuts and whip pans focusing on Captain Prince, the chief of police’s helicopter trying to control the outbreaks of violence while a choral piece reminiscent of Carl Orff’s “O Fortuna” amplifies the dramatic effect of the film’s opening sequence. During the opening sequence, the prologue is repeated by the British Shakespearean actor Pete Postlethwaite, who plays Friar Lawrence in Luhrmann’s adaptation. The purpose of the twice-

repeated prologue is to provide visual clarification to the meaning of Shakespeare’s text, introducing the audience to the environment of Verona Beach and key characters that will play an important part in the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets. For instance, a line such as “Two households, both alike in dignity” (Prologue, 1) is visually extended by inserting an image of a news article presenting the Montagues and Capulets on either side of the monument of Christ, while “In fair Verona where we lay our scene” (Prologue, line 2) is visually clarified by cutting to establishing shots of the city. Other visual aids include shots of newspaper prints displaying the headlines “Montague vs. Capulet”, “Ancient Grudge”, “New Mutiny”, “Civil blood makes civil hands unclean” being intercut with shots of Captain Prince trying to control the outbreak of violence in Verona Beach. In addition Luhrmann introduces some of the key characters that forms part of the feud through magazine covers and by using titling that is comparable to the opening of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966). Characters such as “Mercutio: Romeo’s best friend”, “Fulgencio Capulet: Juliet’s father” and “Captain Prince: Chief of police” are introduced by freeze framing them during a dramatic moment while bold titles announce their names and their relationships to Romeo, Juliet and Verona. Only Romeo and Juliet remain unnamed throughout the Prologue sequence with the only reference to them being the final line of the Prologue as spoken by Friar Lawrence, “A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life” (Prologue, line 6) being displayed in white gothic lettering on a black background with the “t” of “take” looking like a cross (Hindle, 2007: 178-179) (Figure 4.17).

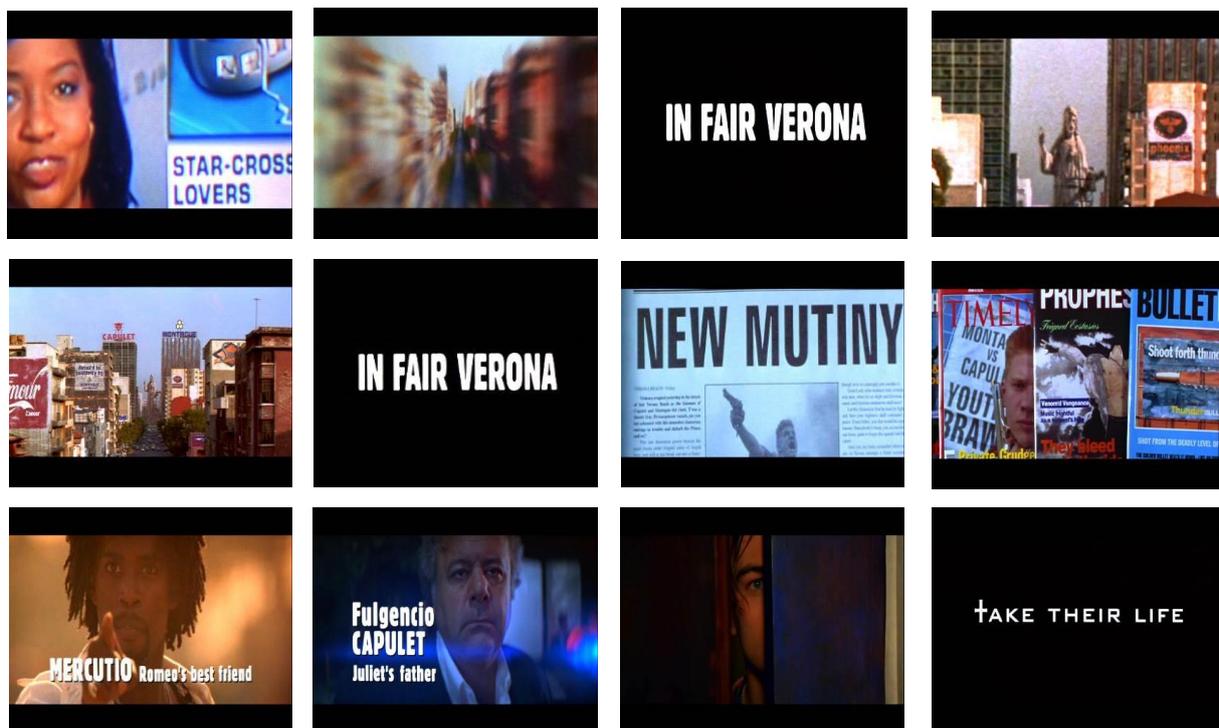


Figure 4.17: Montage establishes the hostile environment of Verona Beach.

Luhrmann's filmic representation of Shakespeare's text, in particular the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*, focuses on the doomed nature of Romeo and Juliet's love being set amidst their families' feud. "As the Chorus makes clear, this is a story already told, already done, its end is in its beginning" (Michael Anderegg in Burt & Boose, 2003: 59). From the beginning of the film, Luhrmann focuses the audiences' attention on the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet as a story that is already over even before it begins by presenting the prologue sequence as a montage of scenes drawn from later points in the film, thus visually amplifying the sense of fate and foreknowledge in the play. The prologue sequence, which has thus far served as an introduction to the environment of Verona Beach and some of the characters of *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, comes to a dramatic climax by presenting an amazing 10 second montage of 39 shots, representing the most important events in the play, rapidly cut to the pace of the music. After briefly viewing Romeo, who remains unnamed, looking through the church door at the cross-blazoned aisle leading to Juliet's death bier, the final montage begins by presenting the prologue for a third time through title shots that are rapidly intercut to display the text from line 1 to 6. The impact of the thrice repeated Chorus, intercut both verbally and visually throughout the prologue sequence, amplifies Shakespeare's theme that Romeo and Juliet's death comes as a result of their families' ancient feud set within the established environment of "fair Verona" Beach. This effect is intensified by including shots in the montage that highlight important scenes from the film such as the opening brawl where the Montagues and Capulets play fight with each other in Act I, scene i; Romeo and Juliet's unknown identities when they fall in love at the Capulet Ball; Tybalt killing Mercutio which is followed by Romeo killing Tybalt in Act III, scene i; shots showing Juliet wearing a wedding dress that represents her marriage to Romeo but also her forced marriage to Paris which in turn leads to shots of Romeo returning from exile and buying poison from the apothecary. The rapid montage concludes with the Montague and Capulet boys taking aim at each other, with Tybalt pointing his gun to screen right and the Montague kinsmen Sampson taking aim at screen left. The last shot shows Tybalt being thrown onto a plane of glass which eventually leads to both his and Mercutio's death. The last shot is replaced by a red gothic cross with a tiny ampersand in the middle, finally shrinking to the "+" of the film's titling shot "William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet" (Hindle, 2007: 179) (Figure 4.18).

The shots in Luhrmann's opening montage are often so rapidly intercut that the viewer cannot register and analyse each shot individually, but rather subconsciously perceives the full effect of the montage and the themes it represents. The purpose of the opening montage, according to Eisenstein's principles, is to actively engage the audience in forming intellectual and emotional

connections which, in the context of Luhrmann's modern adaptation, will benefit a young MTV generation's understanding of Shakespeare's play text. The montage thus becomes one of the key filmic devices used to amplify meaning in *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*.

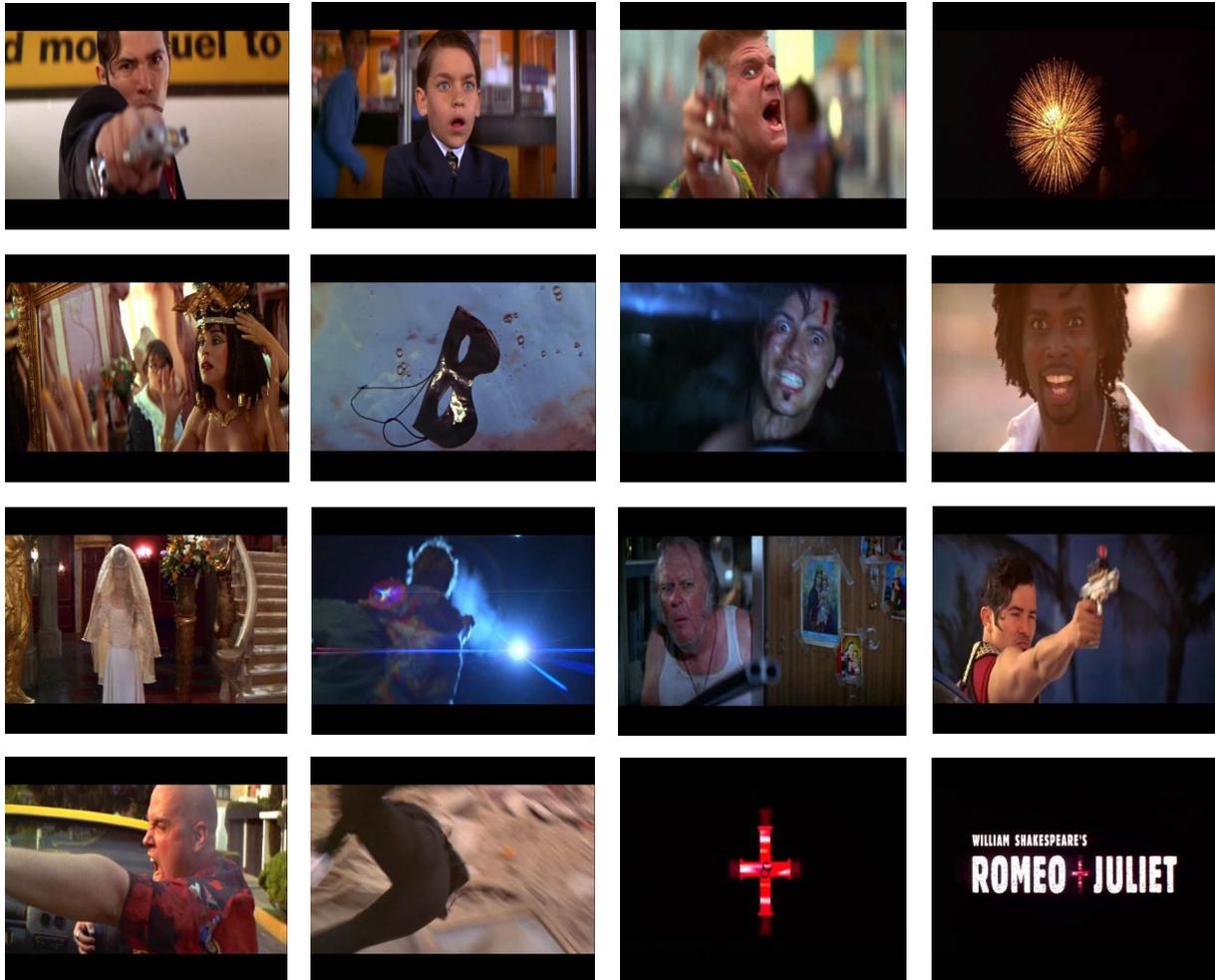


Figure 4.18: Montage amplifies the sense of fate of Romeo and Juliet's doomed love.

## 4.5. Conclusion

Both Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* and Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* use Shakespeare's play text as their source material and despite some omissions and alterations, these adaptations closely follow the original play text. Their adaptations were, however, made in very different cinematic traditions, reception contexts and modes of representation. In each of these cultural environments the films reflect a different vision of Romeo and Juliet's theme of love, youth and violence presenting a cinematic version of Shakespeare with which the audience will be able to relate to, understand and engage.

Robert Hapgood labels Shakespeare as a “popularizer”, “transferring from page to stage and from narrative to drama some of the central writings of his time” (Walker, 2000: 135). In the adaptation of Shakespeare’s play, Zeffirelli and Lurhmann can thus be regarded as “re-popularizers” as they updated Shakespeare’s text using the capabilities of the cinematic medium, whether continuity or MTV editing, to achieve the goal of bringing Shakespeare to the audience.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study started with the premise that the process of adaptation involves the constant interpretation and recontextualisation of stories within different mediums and modes of engagement in order to appeal to new audiences. To be able to determine how stories travel between different mediums, this study has set out to explore the process of adaptation that occurs in translating a dramatic play text into film. Even though there are various ways of defining an adaptation as “successful”, for instance its financial success or its fidelity to the source text, a “successful” adaptation can also be regarded a suitable representation of the source text in so far it represents the themes of the play. In order to determine how a film adaptation is able to “retell the story” of the play text, a comparative analysis needs to be established to find equivalences in meaning between the different sign systems involved in the process of adaptation. It is therefore at the level of enunciation that a literary play text can be compared to the audio-visual medium of film, by analysing how meaning is generated and translated across different sign systems using *adaptation proper* processes. As opposed to focusing on other signifying practices according to which film generates meaning, such as cinematography, production design or music, this study specifically focused on how editing techniques are able to translate meaning from a play text’s verbal sign system to the audio-visual sign system of film in the process of adaptation. But, finally, what is the significance of editing techniques in the process of adapting a play text into film?

The comparative analyses of Bob Fosse’s musical film *Cabaret* (1972), and the film adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* by Franco Zeffirelli and Baz Luhrmann, have demonstrated how different editing conventions are able to add dramatic insight to the audience’s understanding and appreciation of the original source text. Indeed, this is the fundamental purpose of adapting a play text into film, as with each reinterpretation and recontextualisation, filmmakers present a new perspective on the context, themes, narrative, and character development of the play text. By presenting their cinematic representations of the play text within a particular reception context, filmmakers such as Fosse, Zeffirelli, and Luhrmann, amongst many other film adapters, amplify their vision by using specific film styles, genres and especially editing conventions to make the source play text relatable and engaging to new audiences.

The use of editing techniques to create meaning and alter the audience's interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* is demonstrated by comparing sequences from Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) and Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996). As modern audiences are not able to experience and understand Shakespeare's work as the Elizabethan audiences did, their interpretation of a play text such as *Romeo and Juliet* is primarily determined by classroom assignments, stage productions and the occasional film adaptation. In an attempt to create a cinematically engaging adaptation that would benefit the audience's understanding of a play text written in the 1590s, Zeffirelli and Luhrmann employ specific film styles and editing conventions to amplify their interpretation of the play text's themes of love, youth and violence. In Zeffirelli's "realist" rendition of *Romeo and Juliet*, he uses continuity editing conventions to maintain the focus on the chronological unfolding of the narrative and character development, highlighting the romance, innocence and passion of the young lovers. Luhrmann's implementation of disruptive MTV editing effects focuses on actively engaging the film viewer in forming intellectual and emotional connections that will aid their understanding of the play text and enhance their appreciation of the narrative. Luhrmann specifically focuses on amplifying the oppressive environment of Verona Beach and the violence of the feud between the Montagues and Capulets, visually clarifying the hostile environment within which Romeo and Juliet's love must triumph through the use of conventions familiar to viewers of the contemporary popular media. Including the sense of fate and foreknowledge of Romeo and Juliet's death, Luhrmann amplifies Shakespeare's theme of the lovers' end being implicit in the beginning by incorporating specific editing techniques. As each editing convention has its own rules and effects according to which it creates meaning and amplifies engagement, each film adaptation highlights different themes that are important to the audience's conceptualization of the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, as hopefully intended by Shakespeare.

While the film adaptations of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrate the significance of different editing techniques in altering meaning, the adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) into Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* (1972) illustrates how editing techniques are able to transfer themes and amplify political commentary across various reinterpretations of the same source text in the process of adaptation. In the *Cabaret* film, Fosse specifically uses editing techniques such as intercutting and juxtaposition to deliver commentary upon Weimar Berlin's changing political situation by contrasting the musical numbers presented in the Kit Kat Klub, promoting the personal pursuit of "divine decadence", with instances of fascist brutality and Berlin's growing support for Nazi ideology. By creating a thematic connection

between the Kit Kat Klub audience's ignorance about the rise of Nazism, editing effectively recasts the *Cabaret* film as a real-life "Kabarett", as it comments upon a particular society's mind set and the horrific consequences of political naiveté. Editing therefore uses the characteristics of a cabaret to amplify the themes of Isherwood's short stories that have been adapted and re-adapted into various mediums and film genres.

The different case studies presented in this comparative analysis demonstrate the role that editing techniques fulfil in the process of adapting the play text's themes, plot line, characters and emotions into film. Different editing conventions are thus significant in the creation of a cinematic representation of the play text as they lead audiences to "read" the dramatic narrative within new contexts, using the visual language of film to create new insights that will, among other things, add to the audience's understanding and appreciation of the original source text.

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