

Review of *The Drift: Affect, Adaptation and New Perspectives on Fidelity*

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Abstract

John Hodgkins' book revitalises the field of cinematic adaptation studies by drawing upon and developing concepts of affect, most notably theorised by scholars such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, contributing to a growing trend in wider areas of film scholarship where these concepts have been used to challenge normative ideas and methodologies.

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Review of John Hodgkins, *The Drift: Affect, Adaptation and New Perspectives on Fidelity*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 170 pp. ISBN 9781623560706, £54.00 (hbk), £16.99 (e-book).

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John Hodgkins' book revitalises the field of cinematic adaptation studies by drawing upon and developing concepts of affect, most notably theorised by scholars such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, contributing to a growing trend in wider areas of film scholarship where these concepts have been used to challenge normative ideas and methodologies. In particular Hodgkins questions notions of fidelity, which, as he highlights in his first chapter, have dominated adaptation studies, where the cinematic text is analysed in relation to an originary literary text, considering to what extent the cinematic text successfully adheres to it, often resulting in negative perspectives where the adaptive cinematic text is seen to be subordinate to and a violation of the original. Through his development of a theoretical framework based around affect, which, in particular, draws upon Lyotard's notion of drift or the transmission or fluidity of affective intensity, Hodgson conceptualises "literary and filmic texts as affective economies that communicate with each other and with audiences through the transmission of affective intensities from one medium to another" (p. 2), providing new experiences, new affective intensities upon the body, and facilitating changes (or new becomings) in thought and being amongst consuming audiences. This therefore challenges the predominant negative views that literary texts are superior to their cinematic adaptations, that they do not enrich cultural and consumption experiences, and contributes to the development of the field of adaptation studies

introducing approaches which can, unlike ever before, account for the complexities of adaptation in the contemporary digital era of media saturation, hypertextuality and remediation.

Providing an excellent introduction to the application of his methodologies, Hodgson explores the USA trilogy of books by John Dos Passos, which, challenging the normative methodologies of conducting adaptation studies, have not been adapted into films but have translated the affective energies of films into a literary form. In particular Hodgson argues that within this trilogy Dos Passos attempted “to adapt the affective energies of experimental Soviet filmmaking” (p. 29), particularly the documentaries of Dziga Vertov with their often dizzying aesthetic intensity, which he believed, although specific to a Soviet context, could also adequately capture and speak directly “to the experiential flow and flux of life in early Twentieth Century America” (p. 29). Thus, rather than merely fostering an understanding of life in Twentieth Century America in terms of objective, distanced language, Dos Passos attempted to create an understanding and resonance amongst readers at the level of the body. In particular, to do so, Dos Passos adapted the affect-inducing qualities of Vertov into his prose, thus making this critically acclaimed trilogy inescapably indebted to cinema and contradicting the standard adaptation scholar’s view that cinema cannot enrich literature and that it is fundamentally inferior.

Continuing along similar lines, albeit focussing more in this instance on the organizational and temporal structures of novels, Hodgkins’ third chapter explores Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* (1997) and its adaptive impulses, which draw upon and translate the affective languages of the films of Sergei Eisenstein in particular. As Hodgkins demonstrates, DeLillo’s novel draws upon Eisenstein’s cinematic strategies of “metric, rhythmic, tonal and intellectual montage”

(p.54), which create an “affective logic” (P.54), to render, make understandable, be complicit in and even critical of the complexities of post-modern societies and our position within them, with their fragmentary, disjunctive and unstable nature, their challenges to “historical unity and continuity” (p. 55) and, in particular, their image and media saturated environments which blur the boundaries between real and virtual.

Within the book’s fourth chapter, rather than continuing to apply his methodologies to novels which have adapted cinematic languages, Hodgkins explores the relationship between Susanna Moore’s novel, *In the Cut* (1995), and the adapted film (2003) of the same name directed by Jane Campion. In one of his most challenging chapters, Hodgkins explores both texts, not in terms of fidelity, but rather in terms of the “affective forces...operating within Moore’s text, and how those are tapped into by Campion’s adaptation” (p. 77). In particular Hodgkins highlights how both texts subvert and deterritorialize different traditional and generic codes and conventions, most notably the traditional representations of women within the noir genre and the use of the cinematic investigative “gaze”, creating in both cases, a schizophrenic, ungrounded protagonist and affective intensities of dread and anxiety, which “speak to our present postmodern experience” (p. 99) of subjective fragmentation, disorientation and incoherence.

Finally, Hodgkins’ fifth chapter, analysing *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property* (2003), directed by Charles Burnett, arguably demonstrates most profoundly the potential of methodologies more attuned to affect to produce radical new understandings of adapted cinematic texts. As the film is disparate, “in part a documentary,... in part speculative fiction... and in part a meditation” (p. 105), unfaithfully adapting a variety of literary depictions of Nat Turner, the leader of a slave rebellion, it is difficult to fully apply and understand the text

through standard adaptation studies concepts. However, by conceptualising the film's adaptive processes as capturing the affective intensities of these diverse narratives, we can grasp the very essence of the film, as a text which sees no more truth in one representation or adaptation than another, furnishing an array of images that "shed light upon... the myriad ways in which Nat Turner has been perceived and...reinvented" (p. 131 – 132), and conceptualising that understanding of this seemingly fragmented figure can only be found in a collection of the open-ended, un-objective, affective logics and the intense embodied responses that these diverse narratives produce.

In conclusion, this book lays the groundwork for an essential radicalising and broadening of the field of adaptation studies, presenting new ways of thinking about and analysing the relationship between films and literary texts which, if developed further within future research, would certainly enliven and transform the ways in which we think about intertextuality and inter-media relationships in a variety of fields.