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Adaptation, Hauntology, and the Video Essay: Kubrick's *Shining* - An Adaptive Poem

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Research statement

Research Questions

- In what way can we consider the video essay as a form of adaptation, and a form of creative practice research?
- Does adaptation as creative practice implicitly contain research in adaptation studies?
- Can the concept of palimpsestuousness in adaptation be visualised by superimposition in video editing?
- Do these concepts structurally echo ideas of hauntedness?
- Might adaptation studies benefit conceptually from aspects of hauntology?

“Any attempt to communicate with the past through excavation, exegesis, or hermeneutics is a form of confronting ghosts” (Curtis, 2008: 13)

Context

This videographic poem, as a form of creative practice research anchored on the fringes of the video essay by its research statement, engages ideas of adaptation studies and hauntology to produce a haunted, adaptive work. It strives for the associative and the impressionistic in its approaches, rather than didactic argumentation, following Barthes' discussion of the 'poetic' mode of essaying (1977: 90), and Chiara Grizzaffi's application of these ideas to the video essay (2020).

In *Films as Critiques of Novels: Transformational Criticism* (1995), C. Kenneth Pellow describes the *practice* of adaptation as a mode of scholarship or criticism (see also Wagner, 1975; Sinyard, 1986; Jorgens, 1991), a view which makes adaptations quintessential examples of practice-as-research. From this perspective,

adaptations practice adaptation studies inherently, theorising adaptation by performing it, an idea which aligns with Catherine Grant's view of videographic criticism as "performative" (2016), as well as providing an example of rewriting as poetic 'essayng'.

This has also been argued vice versa, with Timothy Corrigan suggesting that criticism itself is a "textual and intellectual adaptation" (2017: 26). Video essays could be seen to embody this idea particularly well, as their remixing of material from their objects of study is more visibly a critical reinterpretation and rewriting than the ekphrastic criticism of written film scholarship. They read, interpret and then rewrite their sources into condensed versions, a kind of fragmenting and curatorial resetting via analysis and synthesis. Video essays are also highly dialogic, reframing their sources for an active audience who oscillate between the reset fragments and their memory of the source in its entirety.

This project tries to emphasise the adaptive nature of video essay criticism and the critical nature of adaptation by combining Barthes' poetic mode of essaying with the form of videographic poetry. By approaching the video essay-style remixing of imagery from a famous cinematic adaptation – Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) – in an impressionistic and associative manner, and by replacing the usual scholarly commentary with another adaptive "track" – an ekphrastic poem – the sense of the video essay as a form of adaptation and creative practice research is heightened.

Furthermore, the work also tries to underline the point that adaptations undertake adaptation studies (and creative practice research) inherently. To do this, it uses its remixing of *The Shining* to highlight the hauntological nature of adaptation, via formal analogies for critical ideas, which also map onto the film's themes. It therefore uses adaptive practice to reflect critically on adaptation as process and product.

Hauntology in relation to adaptation has been discussed particularly by Monika Pietrzak-Franger, but the language of haunting recurs in the work of Linda Hutcheon (2006: 8) and Christine Geraghty (2007: 195), while Kamilla Elliott's extensive discussions of spirits, ghosting, burial, exhumation, etc. in her "conceptual paradigms for the form/content issues of adaptation" (2003: 136 – 183) demonstrate the relevance of this metaphorical lexicon.

Adaptations are always hauntological in reception. They rely on a spectral cognizance, to adapt a term from Aviva Briefel (2009) for what Linda Hutcheon terms "oscillation" (2006: 121). In oscillating between the adaptation and their memory of the source, the audience participates in a kind of mass ritual raising of the phantom form of a memorially-buried past text. In this sense, adaptations and their relationships to sources exemplify and embody Derrida and Fisher's hauntological reformulations of presence particularly effectively, where "the trope of the spectre foregrounds the palimpsestuous character of the processes and products of adaptation" (Pietrzak-Franger, 2012: 78).

Inserting adaptation as a term into Fisher's summaries of Derrida's haunted ontology evidences this:

[An adaptation] "is possible only on the basis of a whole series of absences, which precede and surround it, allowing it to possess such consistency and intelligibility that it does" (Fisher, 2012: 18).

Often, of course, the "whole series" of an adaptation's intertextual valence recedes into background static, with one key intertext structuring the identity of the adaptation. In this sense, the source has that "agency of the virtual," it is the spectre, "that which acts without (physically) existing" – the trace, the vestige, the shadow, between presence and absence. In our examining of the manifestations of these hauntings, adaptation studies is another "science of ghosts."

In adaptation, the source is the "unpresence" which disrupts categories of past and present through the audience's memorial oscillations. Presence and absence become fused in the experience of the adaptation, with our awareness of the adaptive relationship performing the function which Fisher ascribes to grain and crackle in hauntological music; preventing us from "falling into the illusion of presence" (Fisher, 2012: 21). For the knowing audience and their observer-effect (for spectres need a spectator), the pleasure of the adaptation is that "the time is out of joint" – that key hauntological phrase.

We might also see a hauntological aspect to video essays, particularly in the way in which they can act as spaces for revenant texts to return in an out-of-joint time. In this sense they can be metaphorically conceptualised as haunted houses, as spatio-temporal crossroads-sites of liminal textual encounters. An example of this can be found in Catherine Grant's *The Haunting of the Headless Woman* (2019), where a buried intertext is exhumed and raised as a ghost to haunt the source film on screen, reconstructing an occulted adaptive relationship, doubling the sense of haunting. Grant uses the video essay as a medium, summoning an intertextual spectre and making it manifest visually.

In this example, the hauntological experience of adaptation is materialised via the potential afforded by the video essay, turning Hutcheon's oscillation into simultaneity (and in this case, embedding spectral content in form). Editing techniques of split-screen, masking, and superimposition in video essays can instantiate the "palimpsestuousness" (Ermarth, 2001: 47) of adaptations, highlighting their hauntological nature. In superimposition, with its quintessential hauntedness, palimpsestuousness moves from a dialogic oscillation between present experience and past memory to a syncretic simultaneity of past *and* present. The viewer perceives an intertextual haunting as the veil of the present thins and allows an

uncanny return within the haunted house space of the video essay, itself an adaptive container for these films as intertexts.

In this sense, the ectoplasmic superimposition possible in a video essay also creates an illustration of adaptation's hauntological *superposition*, where presence and absence, past and present, collapse from either/or states into a postmodern and/both fusion for the adaptive audience. We can perceive the adaptation and its source in superposition, haunting one another in out-of-joint time, the ontological state of the adaptation defined by its hauntedness.

As discussed by Mark Fisher (2006), *The Shining* is a quintessentially hauntological text. It is therefore primed for a critical adaptation that deploys the film's hauntological form and content in an associative rewriting – one which seeks to evoke the hauntological aspects of both adaptation and video essays (as the combining creative-critical modes of this project). In this sense, the work attempts to be self-reflexive whilst remaining open; using the ambiguous approaches of written and videographic poetry to suggest these ideas in practice. The following section unpacks the techniques utilised in more detail.

Methods

Kubrick's Shining: An Adaptive Poem attempts to embody and evoke these ideas within a form which blurs the videographic poem and the video essay as modes of creative practice research. The work seeks to present a version of the video essay as adaptation which highlights this textual identity through using a single case study, and by removing the didactic argumentation of 'ideological' video essays. Instead of the critical framing, another layer of adaptation (the ekphrastic poem) is added, emphasising the adaptive element of the film remix, which is a compressing, eliding form of adaptation.

The choice of *The Shining* for this project is due to its status as a famous adaptation, its engagement with haunting, and its strange geometries of space and time which produce palimpsestuous confluences within the narrative. The Overlook Hotel is a place where space and time fold inwards and upon each other to allow for the echoes of hauntings and impossible architectures, and so presents evocative material for embodying content in form, when wishing to layer imagery. The approach here is a folding-in of the film upon itself, a kind of video origami which attempts to layer spaces upon each other to emphasise their palimpsestuousness.

Following this, I wanted to construct an *intratextual* sense of the video essay as haunted house, in contrast to the intertextual version discussed via the example from Catherine Grant. Here, the video essay constructs a further spectral container for the Overlook – itself a conjuring medium-container for phantoms – and so to mirror the haunted house of the Overlook in a version of the video essay as haunted house. Essentially, to allow the Overlook to haunt itself by further folding its spatio-temporalities inwards, creating a condensing, intense palimpsest which formally adapts this element of the film's content (arguably its central "character"). To do this,

I focused on the Overlook's spaces, including its setting, rather than any of the characters from the film. The Overlook, as a haunted house, is adapted into the form of the poetic video essay, in order to suggest the video essay's potential as a mode of critical adaptation, and as haunted house space for inter- and intratextual hauntings.

The initial ekphrastic poem was an exercise in condensation, attempting to distil the imagery and themes of the film into poetic language. Elements of form were also deployed conceptually here, with the doubled lines mirroring the appearance of the Grady twins as synecdoche for the larger structures of uncanny doubling and mirroring within the narrative (including across time). When considering the form on the page, reading momentum and impact dictated some of the placement, while other choices attempted to spatialise different temporal perspectives (such as that of the hotel as a sentient entity). I attempted to retain this in the placement of the text on the imagery, keeping the central logic while also allowing the text to play off the visuals in colour and associative juxtapositions.

The choice of music, drawn from the film's soundtrack, was chosen initially for its overwhelming nature when layered upon the various superimposed images and the text. This effect, which initially seems to go against the grain when it comes to absorbing the text, was cultivated in order to produce an intensity of affect, a disorientation and overstimulation. This is an analogue for the vertiginous perception of layered temporality experienced at certain moments of revelation within the Overlook. The other consideration here is a hope that, by blocking the easy absorption of the combinations of images (various visual layers, text and its evoked imaginative imagery, sound and its emotional affects), the viewer is encouraged to return and view the text again (the short, intense runtime also seeks to promote this). If this impulse is followed, then a further superimposition is created in the audience's mind, as layers of memory and interpretation build a palimpsest with each viewing, further embodying the themes of the project.

The key creative decisions here are the choices around superimposition (via multi-track images of varying opacities). The superimpositions aim to conflate times and spaces, producing a sense of the Overlook's history hanging in superposition, a haunted topology. The viewer therefore experiences, like the characters in the film, an awareness of the time out of joint, of absence and presence losing their separateness as the video essay-as-adaptation summons elements of character and narrative from our memories via its fragments. This video essay seeks to create a visual palimpsest of the Overlook, sedimenting the imagery to create a sense of reading-across and reading-through, of an oscillation between trace and unpresence with an underlying atmosphere of dread and an intensity of sensory experience.

Images from different parts of the film are overlaid, and images are repeated, slowed, recombined, in an attempt to adapt the historical rhymes of the ghosts in the Overlook. The underlying labyrinthine geometry, the closed system of layered mazes, is returned to in this condensed combination where past and future are

folded into each other. The project seeks to evoke ideas of video essays as adaptations, as well as adaptations and video essays as being inherently hauntological. It strives to do this in an impressionistic, associative style, somewhere between the video essay and the videographic poem, performing its research by performing adaptation, and evoking spectral linkages between palimpsestuousness, oscillation, hauntology, superimposition, and superposition.

Outcomes

This work aims to contribute to scholarship in adaptation studies, creative practice research, the video essay, and hauntology. In particular, it highlights spaces of productive crossover (or superimpositions) between these (inherently liminal) fields, hopefully opening up new routes for others to explore further. In addition, it provides fresh angles for scholarship on videographic poetry – an under-theorised area.

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Peer Reviews

All reviews refer to original research statements which have been edited in response to what follows:

Review 1: Accept submission subject to minor revisions of written statement (these should be outlined in detail in the review).

This is an original and both effective and affective take on videographic poetry (or poetic videography). The video essay's use of superimposition and text-on-screen evokes the theme of layered hauntedness and the image of the palimpsest strongly, and in so doing directly connects to *The Shining's* own multi-layered adaptations.

The written statement provides important theoretical framing for the maker's use of the key terms "hauntedness" and "palimpsestuousness" and connects it to Catherine

Grant's foundational work in videographic criticism. The written statement falls short in its explanation of the video essay itself. I would be curious to hear more about the poetic text itself and the maker's choices with regards to the placement of text on screen in their layering. I also think the written statement would benefit from a brief discussion of the choice of music, given Kubrick's elaborate use of both pre-existing canonical classical avantgarde music and Wendy Carlos' contributions, which constitute a 'layered' soundtrack.

Review 2: Accept submission subject to minor revisions of written statement (these should be outlined in detail in the review).

The research project – both the research statement and the video essay – is a novel approach to the video essay as a form of creative practice that *performs* adaptation. And it takes as its case study the appropriate example of a poetic adaptation – in the 'ekphrastic tradition' – Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. This allows the author to reflect on questions of how the performance of adaption haunts the visual image, using superimposition to investigate this idea. The research statement thoroughly contextualises the video essay and clearly builds upon the existing work of scholars such as Catherine Grant. Throughout the video essay, footage from *The Shining* is superimposed on itself, allowing for emphasis to be placed on concepts of palimpsests and hauntology. The latter provides the theoretical framework for the project as a whole, bringing it into conversation with adaptation studies and creative practice to demonstrate how 'presence and absence, past and present' collapse for the audience. It also allows for emphasis to be placed on concepts of the uncanny and temporality that are central not only to *The Shining*, but to adaptation more broadly. As such, this research project is a novel and insightful approach to understanding adaptation and the video essay, which will no doubt be of use to those in the respective fields of adaptation studies, Kubrick studies, and creative practice. And at a poetic level, the video essay engages with and reflects upon the many temporal, spectral, and historical levels present and absent within *The Shining*.

All reviews refer to original research statements which have been edited in response.