BONDS: A THEORY OF APPROPRIATION FOR SHAKESPEARE’S THE 
MERCHANT OF VENICE REALIZED IN FILM

A dissertation presented to the faculty of
College of Fine Arts
of
Ohio University
In partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Carolina Siqueira Conte

March 2005
This dissertation entitled

**BONDS: A THEORY OF APPROPRIATION FOR SHAKESPEARE’S THE MERCHANT OF VENICE REALIZED IN FILM**

BY

CAROLINA SIQUEIRA CONTE

Has been approved for
the School of Interdisciplinary Arts
and the College of Fine Arts

Keith Harris
Professor of Film

Raymond Tymas-Jones
Dean of the College of Fine Arts
To Teo, Joe, Pai and my family-friends Carolina, Leila,
  Daniela, Ben, Beth and Erinn
This dissertation re-names and re-defines the process of film adaptation by presenting a theory of appropriation realized in film. The theoretical formulation proposed is further developed and illustrated in its application to William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*.

The theory of appropriation realized in film is elaborated through interdisciplinary and intertextual approaches. Aiming for the achievement of a contemporary film, for a specific contemporary audience, the theory focuses on the particularities of the film medium and the historical and cultural conditions determining the realization. It is important for this theoretical proposal to emphasize that the reality informing the contemporary process is inherently distinct from the reality informing the material appropriated.

Approved:

Keith Harris
Professor of Film
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Introduction

How can the story of a play by William Shakespeare become an original and popular film four hundred years later?

A film adaptation entails a process of re-telling: the re-shaping of newly conceived and presented artistic material. What I am proposing here is to re-name and re-define the process of film adaptation as an interdisciplinary and intertextual appropriation realized in film. This process is not applicable to all sorts of film adaptations. It is developed for narrative films responding to a contemporary context, and considering a specific contemporary audience. Therefore, the thesis of this dissertation is the elaboration of a theory of appropriation realized in film responding to historical and cultural conditions.

The word appropriation that I am appropriating for this project, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means the “making of a thing private property, whether another's or (as now commonly) one's own; taking as one's own or to one's own use” (OED Online). It commonly denotes a sense of property. Understood within the capitalist system, the word assumes a pejorative character. This is especially true in its use in studies of the Frankfurt School with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in Dialectic of Enlightenment, and
Walter Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” as well. In the light of these analyses by Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin, the appropriation diminishes the value of art, as an appropriation for economic purposes, as a commodity. Nevertheless, the understanding of appropriation that I am making use of acknowledges an inherent capitalist condition in its theoretical delimitations and practice. It takes as a fundamental element the “taking as one's own or to one's own use” for the creation of a personal and original statement. This is a counterpoint argument to the Frankfurt School’s use of the word appropriation. In this project I work with a definition of the appropriation that rather implies a positive and desirable characteristic in any artistic manifestation.

The word realized, or the expression realized in film, that I employ here, stands for the final achievement of appropriation. When different disciplines and texts are, ultimately, unified in a particular expression they are realized. The idea of film that I am proposing is this definition of realization. It is the unity of the art medium within a historical and cultural reality. The realization is the production, the performance, the fulfillment of the social gathering that constitutes any artistic manifestation. When an artistic piece is created, when it comes to fruition, it means that it is realized.
In the application of my theoretical discussion I work on Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (from now on referred to simply as the *Merchant*) presenting a hypothetical path for an interdisciplinary and intertextual appropriation to be realized in film. It is an analysis of the creative material appropriated for the realization of the film. The project discusses the object of appropriation (a theatrical piece) assuming filmic dimensions. It elaborates on background information about the play and its previous sources, for an examination of the play’s genre, scene, mise-en-scène, and characters.

Appropriation figures as a methodology here in freeing the analysis and its further elaborations to pre-determined uses. The appropriation allows one’s own interpretations on the material worked, personal statements. This appropriation, at the same time, is interdisciplinary because it is always multifaceted. It is not the appropriation of a single piece, but rather many appropriations from different disciplines and texts. The focus of this research is the appropriation of a narrative, the *Merchant* to film. But, it is only the gathering of different disciplines that makes the film realization possible, bringing about the sense of newness necessary for its production. Intertextuality is employed with regard to the contextual negotiations inherent in the subject matter of the work: a Shakespeare play turned into a contemporary
narrative film musical. Intertextuality sustains the intersection of textual forms, historical and cultural intersections.

This theoretical elaboration is then essentially developed through the analysis of recurrent studies of film adaptations, especially Shakespeare film adaptations. Film is regarded as language, and the process of adaptation as a translation of languages. These terms do not aim to imply the use of linguistics to describe film, but rather to point out the specificities of the film medium.

Following the theoretical appropriation proposed, the methodology works towards an unfolding of the play in all its creative elements, explored separately in a range of possible interpretations.

This methodology traces a process establishing the realization of a film narrative contextually re-located. The challenge is to turn Shakespeare’s narrative into a contemporary discourse through a contemporary film musical aiming to engage a twenty-first century post-adolescent audience in a musical with a video-music clip aesthetic. The attributes of this theory regard the specificities of a filmic expression accomplished by interdisciplinarity and intertextuality that define the genre of the film manifestation (the theory’s last attribute). The aspects of these attributes are the particularities of film (the filmmaker, the film practice itself, and the film audience)
in a contemporary historical and cultural context that defines this realization as a film musical aiming self-reflexivity; the use of principles of video-music clips; and, the transformation of Shakespeare’s poetry into music.

The most supportive arguments for this realization of the Merchant as a film musical (in the hypothetical application of this theory) are found in the analyses of Thomas Elsaesser (1981), Richard Dyer (1981) and Jane Feuer (1982) on film musicals. Elsaesser takes the film musical as a dream spectacle achieved by the acting performance and the mise-en-scène (and its visual elements of identification), and points to its self-reflexive character, conquered in the identification established between the spectator and the character. Dyer raises the issue of a process of dual identification that the audience of the film musical engages, sometimes simultaneously, with the main performers and with the audience within the show. This unique experience offered by film musicals defines its entertaining and self-reflexive character that Jane Feuer stresses in stating that the myth of entertainment of Hollywood films is already incorporated into the aesthetic of the film musical discourse.

Christian Metz’s Film Language (1974) offers a distinguished approach to film as an artistic medium through its semiological analysis, a study developed through linguistics. Metz is not concerned about a language system
for cinema, but about language itself. He observes, what he
calls the syntagmatic relations of the film unities
(montage, camera movement, and scale of shots), as well as
relationships between the image and speech, and the
sequences. Metz’s film language is effective in defining the
technical uses in the making of film, and the
particularities of the medium, common to any filmmaking
process. He works on how messages are conveyed, the codes
through which the film text is constructed. According to
Metz, “the code triumphs and attains its perfection in the
transmission of the message. It is a great feast for the
syntagmatic mentality” (Metz 35). Metz’s film language gives
a definition for film as language on its own, essentially
different from any other art or medium.

The issue of adaptation is as old as the advent of
film. Discussions on this topic have focused on defending
either the fidelity or freedom from the source of the film.
One example of this approach to film and film adaptation in
terms of fidelity, widely employed in this field of study,
is the one offered by Dudley Andrew:

Well over half of all commercial films have come
from literary originals - though by no means all
of these originals are revered or respected. If we
confine ourselves to those cases where the
adaptation process is foregrounded- that is, where
the original is held up as a worthy source or goal
there are still several possible modes of relation between the film and the text. These modes can, for convenience, be reduced to three: borrowing, intersection, and fidelity of transformation. (Andrew 29)

Common concerns on film adaptations are also observed in the particularities of the film medium in this process as a collaborative work with commercial standards. Elucidative works on this matter are Morris Beja’s *Film and Literature: An Introduction*, and Timothy Corrigan’s *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*.

Discussions on Shakespeare adaptations as popular films, like other studies on film adaptations, develop in the realm of fidelity/freedom and particularities of film in relation to theater and literature (stage performances and literary texts). As Russell Jackson suggests in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, the success and effectiveness of a Shakespeare film depends on innovations achieved by the particularities of the medium, “some unusual angle on the material” (Jackson 5).

The work of Jackson, akin to the ones of Douglas Brode (2000) and Anthony Davies (1988), tends to consider film not only as an art on its own, but also as an artistic expression adapted under the distinctive reality of Shakespeare’s time: “the Elizabethan audience needed to first hear in order to then see in their mind’s eye. Such
passages [in film] now best serve as stage directions” (Brode 52). Context is a recurrent issue in these discussions, in regard to “the current concerns of the societies from which these productions spring” (Davies 3).

What I am proposing that is different from most of the literature and studies on film adaptation and Shakespeare adaptations is the theoretical re-naming and re-definition of the term and of the process. My research is developed with a distinct focus from most works in the field of film adaptations. It enlights the perspective from whom English is a second language, and Shakespeare’s English society is a historically and culturally distant reality. The artistic appropriation of Shakespeare tells us that his words were shaped under the peculiarities of the Elizabethan society. Studies on intertextuality point us to the necessity of a contextual re-shaping. As Marshall McLuhan observes in The Guttenberg Galaxie:

Blank verse was a means to make English roar and resonate in a way suited to the new extension and consolidation of the vernacular by typography. In our own century as the vernacular has met the non-verbal competition of photo, film, and television, a reverse effect has occurred. (McLuhan 198)

An appropriation is only realized when a different author gives a different response to his/her intended audience. The process of appropriation as Albert Lord points
to in terms of oral traditions in *The Singer of Tales* observes that: “the man who is sitting before us singing an epic song is not a mere carrier of the tradition but a creative artist making the tradition” (Lord 13).

Bakhtin’s ideas in *The Dialogic Imagination* support my belief that an appropriation can only be fully realized in the context of its production. I employ Bakhtin in terms of the social and cultural elements present in the realization of any appropriation:

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language. (Bakhtin 293)

The final part of my elaboration on a theoretical concept of artistic appropriation realized in film constitutes a theoretical application of these ideas. It presents a hypothetical appropriation realized in film of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant*. This unfolding of my theoretical work is an attempt to illustrate its effectiveness. This part of the examination is developed through the idea of the play as a fictional world inspired by many different sources to which I am calling attention.
The figure of a Jew in England (and Venice) in Shakespeare’s time is the most important aspect leading most of the analyses of this play. This, however, is not the focus of my project. I acknowledge the anti-Semitism of the play. But for the purpose of an appropriation realized in film, I look at this issue from a different perspective: the contemporary appropriation and realization of Shylock simply as the comic-villain of the film.

_Bonds: A Theory of Appropriation for Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice Realized in Film_ emerges from my thesis on film adaptations. It was based on a particular case-study, Shakespeare’s _Romeo and Juliet_. Drawing on the history of productions of the play on the screen, this earlier project attempted to identify aspects that made _Romeo and Juliet_ consistent, or not, as a film to the particular audiences it was then addressing. _Bonds_ develops again from an analysis of studies on film adaptation but not on the examination of a history of productions (as was the case of _Romeo and Juliet_). Rather this theoretical approach to the subject consists of a particular interpretation of the term, film adaptation. It aims to re-define it as a creative appropriation realized in a different art, medium, time and place in history.

This project is entitled _Bonds_ because it works interdisciplinary and intertextually with very distinct historical and cultural conditions. Also, the _Merchant_ is a
play about human relations, or bonds. The ring given to Bassanio by Portia, in the fulfillment of their love, physically symbolizes these bonds, the human connections established in the play. The Merchant is a story always updated in its universal contrasts in drama and life: comedy and tragedy, reality and fairy-tale, forgiveness and lack of forgiveness, love and money, Jews and non-Jews, the integrated man in society and the other, women and men, city and country. Written in early modern England, for the public of this specific time and place, the Merchant is about genre, human relations, and cultural, social and class issues. These themes ought to be discussed according to very particular historical and cultural conditions varying on the context where the appropriation is realized in film.

I begin my discussion identifying essential principles of the narrative film language. I first define film as an artistic medium, pointing to its specificities. Then, I look at recurrent issues in the field of film adaptation. One fundamental claim of my project, akin to many other studies on film adaptation, is that such a process and its result do not imply fidelity to the text appropriated. Whether the source is a novel, a romance, a historical fact, a poem, a play, or any other event or manifestation, one is re-telling it from a new perspective, according to a different context. The process of appropriation expresses a distinctive functioning and finality for the film realization. This
project is fundamentally centered in the formulation of a new theoretical approach, but also concerned with the effectiveness of the application of this theory in a hypothetical realization of the process of appropriation. The hypothetical realization is as original as the theory. To date there have been eighteen audiovisual productions of Shakespeare’s Merchant (Independent Movie Data Base, www.imdb.com). The earlier productions are silent-black-and-white films. The later productions are in great majority television productions. We have not seen yet a mainstream film production of this play (the release of the Merchant starring Al Pacino and directed by Michael Radford is expected in 2005).

In its interdisciplinarity and intertextuality, the process of appropriation realized in film that I advocate here can be understood as a translation of languages. It is a translation of languages in the specificities of the artistic media involved (in what is only common to narrative films). The appropriation realized in film manifests a personal and unique interpretation of a given reality. Film is not simply an extension of a dramatic work, a technological advancement from theater. Film is an art in itself. It has made considerable contributions in turning Shakespeare’s plays into popular pieces, but this should not be the only concern in producing a film based on a Shakespearean narrative.
Shakespeare’s plays, as theater, belong to the history of the Tudor-Stuart society. They relate to a point in time of the English society. The plays of this period embody cultural characteristics, values and conventions peculiar to that specific historical moment. Shakespeare’s plays were part of the growing London theatre of the Tudor-Stuart period. A contemporary appropriation of Shakespeare takes into account particularities of our time, the time of the current film production. It becomes effective only in bringing a distinctive agenda to the Shakespearean narrative. It must speak to its audience today as Shakespeare spoke to his audience before.

Shakespeare’s plays were written for a ritualistic and presentational stage. The dialogues of Shakespeare’s plays bring precise physical descriptions for the stories. The fictional world was complete on that stage through conventions that we no longer employ today, a geographical location was determined mainly by a speech. Shakespeare’s plays were written for this verbal presentation. An appropriation realized in film works on the filmic action, not on the presentational delivery of a line. The conflict between spoken word and shown image must be overcome.

Shakespeare’s work has given ground for a diverse number of appropriations, in their content, but also in their form. Shakespeare appropriated many materials to
realize his work for the Elizabethan stage, so must we today.

The first part of the dissertation presents the elaboration of the theory of appropriation realized in film. It examines particularities of the film artistic medium, and proceeds in a discussion of film adaptations, mainly on Shakespeare film adaptations. As a final step, these ideas, explored in terms of interdisciplinarity and intertextuality, are applied towards Shakespeare’s Merchant, in the idea of a hypothetical appropriation of the play realized in film. This second part of the dissertation consists of an examination of the play, the Merchant, looking at its genre, geographical (and fictional) locations, characters and scenes.
PART I: APPROPRIATION REALIZED IN FILM

1. Introduction to the Theory of Appropriation Realized in Film

Film is an artistic medium. It is the site of an interdisciplinary and intertextual confluence. The definition of this site is closely aligned to the ideas of Stephen Heath defining the process of cinema in The Cinematic Apparatus as "a process through which in particular economic situations a set of scattered technical devices becomes an applied technology then a fully social technology" (Heath 6).

In acknowledging not merely cinema, but a cinematic process, the understanding of the art medium becomes more coherent and complete. The film narrative (and any study deriving from it) only happens in the fulfillment of all the moments of the film process. Framing, turning on a camera and capturing images (or working on a filmstrip) do not configure a film as an artistic medium. These are only the technical means serving the art. The technique that allows the capturing of images in the film negative is, however, only one part of the process. The technological is inseparable from the human condition, and in its turn it belongs to a particular historical reality. From, through and to are in film culturally and socially determined. The from regards the perspective of the film, the personal
interpretations of the filmmaker; the through the technical means available for the production; and the to the audience addressed again re-interpreting the piece.

The film process responds to certain conditions. The moments of the cinematographic process are specific to a given reality and determine the character of its development. The access to the technology, the equipment available, the crew, the cast, the placement of the camera, the framing, the chasing of the action, the mise-en-scène, the editing, the distribution, the reception, work within historical and cultural constraints.

Perhaps, one of the most significant approaches in defining film (in the peculiarities of the artistic medium) is found in Christian Metz’s Film Language. Metz attempts to make a clear distinction of film from the other arts in terms of its practice that he addresses as a language:

The cinema is a language, above and beyond any particular effect of montage. It is not because the cinema is language that it can tell such fine stories, but rather it has become language because it has told such fine stories. (Metz 47)

Metz’s Film Language examines film through linguistics. He is not concerned about a language system for cinema, but about a language. His semiology for cinema is essentially described through syntagmatic relations. These relations establish the ordering and organization of all the smaller
film unities constituting ultimately the film practice itself, the final unity that specifically characterizes film. Observing montage, camera movement, scale of shots, relationships between the image and speech, sequences and other syntagmatic unities Metz unfolds the arrangement of the filmic images. He thinks of sequence, shots and its articulations in terms of “blocks of reality.” A film language is effective in defining the technical uses, the making, of the film craft, the particularities of the medium, and common aspects of the filmmaking process. This film language gives a view of what primarily differentiates film from any of the other arts as a language on its own. Yet, the delineation of film in such terms is mostly pointing to the technological apparatus.

Metz’s ideas refer to the characteristics of the medium, but not to the completeness of this art medium that unifies disciplines and texts. The film language is shaped in the reality of a historical and cultural context. Films change with the context. This is the approach taken further in this dissertation.

A recurrent topic in semiotics, the spectator becomes the moment of the film process, the decoder of the codes referred by Metz. Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis in New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics look at this decoding in terms of the identification of the spectator with the codes projected on the screen:
permanently losing and re-finding itself in a process of identification. However, it is certainly the citation of Heath in the same work that offers one of the clearest references to the dynamic of this moment of the process, a kinetic and organic relation: “what moves in film... is the spectator, immobile in front of the screen” (Heath in Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 155). The approach of many studies on film audiences (inheriting perspectives of the School of Frankfurt) is very problematic as it treats them as an alienated, undifferentiated, mass. Along with Heath and Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, I believe that an active and aware spectator must be acknowledged. The pleasure, entertainment, and satisfaction derived from the film experience are intellectual choices. To accept that even the spectator’s impressions and emotions are products of the culture industry is to deny any sense of subjectivity, social and cultural aspects, and even history. Everyone reading a film text does it from a particular perspective. It reflects one’s individual orientation to the reading, how one reads the film text. This individual process, though, belongs to a historical and cultural reality that is determining the reading and the accessibility to this reading. It is an individual reading of a determined society.

Interdisciplinarity and intertextuality sustain a reading that is at once individual and collective. Film is
interdisciplinary in constituting a new assembled form, a unity of a multiplicity of elements. As Joe Moran discusses it in *Interdisicplinarity*, interdisciplinarity is where disciplines re-organize into new relations. The discipline is a delimited kind of knowledge. It becomes interdisciplinary in requiring interactions to other disciplines to find results not possible within its own, singular, domain. Interdisciplinarity, “tends to be centered around problems and issues that cannot be addressed or solved within the existing disciplines, rather than the quest for an all-inclusive synthesis” (Moran 15). This synthesis is the individual perspective of a given historical and cultural reality. The response is always individual and communal. It is the individual knowledge of the world given by a member of an individual community. The realization of a film appropriating different material establishes new articulations and arrangements relating form, and content, in particular time and location.

The interdisciplinarity of this process of appropriation realized in film is not restricted to an idea of fellowship of the arts. The interdisciplinarity lies not merely in resemblances of other arts in film. What makes the realization in film truly consistent as an expression of the film art medium, of the film practice, is not only the artistic interdisciplinarity, but an interdisciplinarity in broader terms, beyond art disciplines. The film realization
reflects concepts and historical agendas, the specific public it is addressing and the intentions with which this public is addressed. The film has a purpose distinctive from the ones offered by the expressions appropriated.

A film represents the work of an author in a particular medium. His/her manifestation expresses a particular spoken language, a personality within a society, and tendencies of this society. These stylistic possibilities are blended together in the singularities of the film practice. They are all variants composing the plural character of the film unity, created through a process of becoming within a socially diverse environment, a spectrum of possibilities.

Intertextuality comes into play marking the contextual character of the realization of the film (who is making it) and of the reader of the realization (who is watching it). Intertextuality brings about a text constituted by the encounter of other texts. These texts manifest the historical and cultural specificities of the production and reception of the art media involved in the process of appropriation realized in film. As Hegel points out in his introduction to art: “Every work belongs to its age, to its nation, and to its environment, and depends upon particular historical and other ideas and aims” (Hegel 38).

Bakhtin observes that language is formed through the different media of manifestation and the social and class circumstances determining this manifestation. As he states,
In any given historical moment of verbal-ideological life, each generation at each social level has its own language; moreover, every age group has as a matter of fact its own language, its own vocabulary, its own particular accentual system that, in their turn, vary depending on social level, academic institution... or other stratifying factors. (Bakhtin 290)

The material appropriated and, ultimately its realization in a different medium, entails the collision not only of individualities, but the collision of individualities already in historical and cultural struggles. Any manifestation is a product of its time, of a particular society. The appropriation is realized, in form and content, as the product of one personality. This personality is formed in an organic social context. Therefore, for an appropriation of Shakespeare realized in film today, neither the form nor the content of Shakespeare’s work can be coherently maintained. As Bakhtin observes: “Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon.” (Bakhtin 259). The discourse on which Bakhtin elaborates his theory, as the realization in film explored here, is to be understood as having a “social life.” It is not that Shakespeare’s text disappeared. The present coexists with what remains from the past. But the work in the present has
to be “creatively transformed,” once it is “far distant from the day and hour of their original birth” (Bakhtin 422). This relation where past and present coexist is biased by the present, not the past. It is not the past itself anymore, but the past informed by the present. The film realization is always revealing a different way of appropriation. The re-arrangements of these appropriations reflect infinite possibilities of realization in form and content within a universe of contextual negotiations (of the art medium, its practice, its maker, and its public).

These ideas do not declare the death of the author (the authority of the director who unifies the composition of the realization in film), as it could imply. The camera inherently represents a subjective point of view. In planning the use of the film apparatus, the director is imposing his/her considerations, his/her expectations for an audience, and his/her own historical and cultural experiences. The filmmaker (the author of the work) is never absent of the viewing experience of the finished piece. What interdisciplinarity and intertextuality do in this sense for this process is to re-assure a space for subjectivity and variety in the watching experience of the films. This is the essential characteristic of an appropriation realized in film.

Studies and criticism on film adaptations are generally addressed in two basic approaches (always within a notion of
fidelity and a relationship with a source). One approach
defends the maintenance of the original work in its
integrity, the other allows the adaptation to be different
of its source. But terms as original, adaptation, integrity,
and freely usually involved in this matter are already
problematic. There is nothing fundamentally original,
everything is the result of something prior to it: “The
film’s originality, paradoxically, lies in the audacity of
its imitation, quotation and absorption of other texts”
(Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 206). Film becomes
interdisciplinary as a locus of appropriations from other
art media, and it becomes intertextual as a locus of
appropriations from historically and culturally determined
discourses. This discourse, the text, one observes in Roland
Barthes *Image, Music, Text,*

> Is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable
centers of culture.
The writer can only imitate a gesture that is
always anterior, never original. His only power is
to mix writings, to counter the ones with the
others, in such a way as never to rest on any of
them. (Barthes, *Image* 146)

There are no different types of appropriation realized
in film, whether they are legitimate or not. Every film is a
changed, transformed, material. The originality is in the
re-combination of the appropriation, not in the elements
appropriated per se. Once this becomes an accepted definition of appropriation realized in film, the words integrity and freely become completely obsolete, unnecessary. As Bela Balaz identifies in his theory of film:

The artist is true artist and not a botcher.
[He/she] may use the existing work of art merely as raw material, regard it from the specific angle of his own art form as if it were raw reality, and pay no attention to the form once already given to the material. (qtd. in Beja 82)

The process of adaptation that I am re-naming and re-defining here as appropriation realized in film is as far as possible from the idea of comparison, often expressed in the use of the term fidelity. It is an easily accepted approach, specially admitting a hierarchical status of the written word (literature) over other forms of expression of the word. Film is an organic process functioning according to certain conventions that make it essentially different from other arts. Therefore, in examining a process from theater or literature to film one ought to leave behind the rules of the art and the medium to be transcended (theater and literature). In a process of appropriation realized in film, the technical means (that reflect the artistic means) are explicit in the audio and visual possibilities exclusive to it.
The film narrative (assuming that anytime one is conveying some meaning to a piece there is a narrative) is always told through a technological apparatus. The art of filmmaking is limited to the reality of its practice. The commercial standards of each of the arts are part of their particularities, and they are different for literature, painting, sculpture, theater, etc. Today all art media are inserted within the idea of commodity, “their very existence on being able to appeal to a relatively large number of people” (Beja 60). A realization in film for instance, involves the matter of measuring: commercial standards require time limits. The moviegoer is used to a certain narrative pattern. The standard is a usual two-hour presentation, if the realization is to be experienced by moviegoers. Shakespeare plays, if merely shot in their entirety (with all their subplots), would be too long for the common film audience. The appropriation of the written word thus makes explicit the necessity of a change for its realization in film. This is the condition for the effectiveness and success of a film measured in the engagement of a specifically determined audience. If this is the intention of the appropriation realized in film, the process is then centered in the idea of re-placing, re-working, of the material appropriated according to the contemporary context of its realization. The process works on the history, culture and technology of the medium.
Film presents a performance of the written word. In film the word is shaped into audio and image. This representation brings a sense of material reality, an actuality, that one does not have in literature where the material reality is a matter of imagination.

The final product on the screen is never final until experienced by an audience. And within this audience there is an immense variety of interpretations that does not allow the product ever to be the same. The action on the screen is not live, but the experience of it is. Regardless of the actuality of the realization, of the product by the artist, film is, in all its instances, an inherently subjective experience only limited by the art itself and its contextual location.

The appropriation realized in film is informing a historical and cultural reality that does not necessarily correspond to the one of the material appropriated. This reality is the contemporary context in which the film is being realized, and what makes it authentic. It defines the subjectivity of the maker, of the process itself, and of the audience of the piece.
2. From Adaptation to Appropriation Realized in Film: Re-naming and Re-defining Terms

The process of film adaptation here re-named and re-defined as an interdisciplinary and intertextual appropriation realized in film is not applicable to all film adaptations. Substituting adaptation for appropriation realized in film, one is recognizing the unique way in which different disciplines (art media) and discourses (historical and cultural contexts) are cinematically synthesized. This theoretical formulation is specific for film realizations as collaborative works of art in a contemporary context. It becomes effective as a film realization in the particularities of the art, the medium, and the historical and cultural conditions in which the representation is set.

The use of the term appropriation realized in film, in place of film adaptation, attempts to avoid an idea implicit to the processes of adaptation: a sense of deviation, ending in a diminished and pejorative understanding of its final product. The re-naming and re-definition of the process aims to identify the final product of the realization as a new existence, an independent artistic entity.

The theory of appropriation realized in film here presented is defined by specific attributes. It is designed for film adaptations with particular concerns. This theory re-naming and re-defining film adaptation has three main
attributes. First, it is an interdisciplinary and intertextual manifestation. Second, the art medium for the realization of this manifestation is film, not video. Film, technically, follows a chemical process, while video follows a physical one. Once the image is registered in the filmstrip, this strip is developed in a laboratory for each of the single framed images to be revealed. The grains composing the image-field in each of these single frames can be manipulated bringing differences in color, contrast balance, saturation, etc. changing the overall texture of each single image frame. Such modifications can be made in video, but then these are manipulations developed on tape, a magnetic field, through video tools that insert the manipulations in the immediate touch of a button. The insertion of manipulations in film require a chemical return to the filmstrip. Technical principles aside, film, for the delineation of this project, is distinct from video mainly in terms of distribution. It is the moment of the process where the film faces a market and an audience. Film is here understood as a process that once worked on a filmstrip and finalized in reels for projection is distributed to different markets (movie theaters). This distribution is determined by economic demands mainly ruled by target-audiences. These audiences are considered since the initial conception of the filmic enterprise - according to the reality of the filmmaking business, the film industry. The
distribution supports the establishment of a third and last attribute: a genre for the film realization. The determination of a genre does not restrict the theory to definition, though. It varies according to the audience and the market intended by each realization. The genre employed in this dissertation has one particular audience I mind.

The aspects specifying the attributes of this theory determine, and at the same time are determined, by the particularities of the medium and the historical and cultural context of the realization. The theory is designed for contemporary productions. The contemporary aspect refers to the social environment of the realization. It is the context informing the establishment of the process and informed in the aesthetic characteristics of the realization itself. The theory of appropriation realized in film is contemporary in all its moments from, through, and to – filmmaker, film practice and film audience (and market constraints). Furthermore, it is the contemporary aspect of this theoretical formulation that defines its last attribute and aspect: the choice for a specific film genre, in this case, the film musical. The film musical serves well the hypothetical application of this theory for three reasons: film musicals are self-reflexive; they use the same principles of music clips (and the aesthetic of these gives clear audiovisual illustration to interdisciplinarity and intertextuality); and, particularly with Shakespeare, poetry
can be turned into music. As a self-reflexive piece: the realization accentuates the awareness of its audience, the importance of the idea of subjectivity in the process. It is achieved in the film presentation whenever one sees an audience within the film. In this experience the film audience is watching the audience within the film and questioning the role of audience as such (see section Analyses of Scenes: casket, trial and ring). The music-video clip is a widely consolidated filmmaking style these days (since the advent of MTV in the 1980s). It is an audiovisual expression familiar to the target audience of this theory, the twentieth-first century post-adolescent generation (see section Contemporary Examples of Popular Shakespeares on Film that Exemplify the Theory). It is a coherent and effective way for an intellectual and entertaining film-experience to be established. Finally, the concern with Shakespeare’s language is overcome in this project by turning Shakespeare’s poetry into music (whenever the words are to be kept in its integrity); for the language to be more easily understood regardless of one’s knowledge of the blank verse (see section Language Issues in Appropriating Shakespeare for a Contemporary Film Realization).

A supportive argument for the definitions this theory of appropriation of Shakespeare realized in film is found in discussions of oral and written traditions. In cultures where the oral tradition still prevails the issue of
fidelity is not characterized as a means of criticism in the process of re-telling stories. The appropriation of a tale and its new realization, by a new teller, in a different moment, is not limited by a pejorative notion of fidelity. Its lack of constraints is actually a requirement for this process. Wherever the written tradition prevails, though, the written material assumes an authority that suppresses the other traditions (as the oral). Particularly in Shakespeare, the written text, the published work of Shakespeare, has a questionable authority. What is assumed as Shakespeare’s text is actually a publisher/editor version of Shakespeare’s re-worked (perhaps, never finished) manuscripts, generally subjected to many modifications. As Stephen Orgel points out in *The Jonsonian Masque*:

Most literature in the [Tudor-Stuart] period, and virtually all theatrical literature, must be seen as basically collaborative in nature… Shakespeare can be distinguished from most other playwrights only because he was in on more parts of the collaboration.

We know nothing about Shakespeare’s original text. We might know something about it if, say a set of Shakespeare’s working notes or roughs drafts ever turned up, or if we ever found the text that Shakespeare presented to the company as their working copy. (Orgel 87)
Today’s accessible work of Shakespeare is a printed text. But Shakespeare’s plays are not merely printed texts. They have to be considered as theatrical pieces. In its production, it is a collaborative effort (like film) involving patrons, a theater company, a playwright, actors, and audience.

Shakespeare wrote for the Tudor-Stuart theatre. His work has endured because it is still compelling for many different audiences. But, in practical terms, this is only possible because this work was registered and saved on paper. Shakespeare’s plays became everlasting in its physical, material, preservation. The published quartos and folios have allowed the plays to be adapted and appropriated for performances over and over again through out the centuries. All these productions derive from the original-printed versions of the plays (quartos and folios). The written form has greater authority than any other forms of manifestation. The authority of Shakespeare’s work relies on the printed text one may always return to. It is a theatrical work preserved by the written word.

The printed work of Shakespeare changed into a film realization tells a new story. The film is composed by a different author responding to a different audience, just as in any appropriation realized in a different medium. What needs to be taken into account are the particularities of
the time in which the production is being undertaken. Albert Lord points out in The Singer of Tales that:

The singer never stops in the process of accumulating, recombining, and remodeling formulas and themes, thus perfecting his singing and enriching his art... The story is all that he needs... he can tell the same story again in his own words.

(Lord 26)

An artwork only perpetuates as a compelling expression in manifesting a subjective interpretation, true to a specific time and place. This difference must imply a historical change, a change in disciplines and a change of medium as well.
3. Shakespeare and Film: Theater and Film Relations of Time and Space

When one wants to make a film of a Shakespeare play, one is appropriating a theatrical piece (along with other disciplines) to bring about a new artistic expression exclusive to the film art medium. A film merely attempting to mirror literary or theatrical works is not making a new statement, because it is not recombining elements. A film realization requires more than the fulfillment of the film practice. It also involves a filmmaker and an audience. And the process of a film realization is only complete in the understanding of the historical and cultural condition within which practice, filmmaker and audience exist.

In attempting to bring a Shakespeare play to the screen one is not simply making a film from the play but working through and for film. The written word serving the film then is no longer Shakespeare’s word. It is the screenwriter re-writing, and re-interpreting the material for the film.

The words written for a screenplay are conceived differently from the words written for a theater play. The film script works in the intrinsically fragmented dynamic of cinema. The cinematic experience of time and the structuring of a film are distinct from the theatrical experience of time and the structuring of a play. In film, the time
structure can create meaning through the editing process. The juxtaposition of images may, or may not, determine an impression of temporal simultaneity in the time-line sequence of the action. The working of the spatial structure can present many points of view, permanently interacting between inside and outside worlds (internal and external locations, and even the thoughts of the characters). Cinema gives a spatial mobility not possible in theater. The physical dimensions of the stage limit the theatrical performance. As Lorne Buchman states in *Still in Movement*, film offers a singular relation of intimacy presenting “Shakespeare’s world through a mise-en-scène that renders the vastness of intimate space as much as the intimacy of a vast exterior” (Buchman 33). Immersed in the camera flow, the film spectator experiences new definitions of inner and outer realities in the intimacy of closer shots. According to Buchman:

> The ‘secrets’ of Shakespeare’s plays find a new context for their realization. Covert acts find in the close-up an appropriate space for performance. It is the space where we observe, in isolation, the vial of poison poured in the goblet, the naked point of the rapier, the hands of a murder, or the stabbing of a king. (Buchman 68)

The filmmaker, like Shakespeare, is creating a space, a diagenic (fictional and narrative) reality. But working
under different conventions, the filmmaker cannot be limited to the written world of Shakespeare. He/she must create what is not in Shakespeare’s lines.

Action in Shakespeare’s drama is concentrated primarily in speeches and gestures. Film re-shapes speeches and gestures in multiple perspectives: light, color, texture, shapes and lines organized within frames and their juxtapositions that together compose a complex visual field in motion. In Shakespeare’s plays, dialogue makes transitions and manipulates the story. In film, as Anthony Davies points out in *Filming Shakespeare’s Plays*, the “spatial disjunctions and the consequent demand for visual re-orientation necessarily inhibit sophisticated complexity of dialogue” (Davies 3). The intrinsic characteristic of each medium must be observed in any kind of realization. The cinematic language speaks primarily through the movement of the camera in relation to its subject, and the movement of the subject within the camera framing. Many times Shakespeare’s words are not necessary because the audience already has visual representations of the words. In film, words can overlap the images. As Kenneth Rothwell states in *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*,

The unanswerable question will never stop... ‘What is the best available means for putting Shakespeare on screen?’ ‘How best to imagine his words in moving images?’ (Rothwell 259)
In the cinematic space the actor’s performance is a sequence of positional views, optical sets. This performance suits a different order from the one of the play. In theater, a line is delivered only at once, and watched from a fixed perspective. In film, a line may be shown from several perspectives, and the actor might perform the same lines many times, until the director feels satisfied. The work of the director, which in theater is almost entirely devoted to the actors, in film, is equally devoted to the camera.
4. Appropriations of Shakespeare Realized in Film

According to Rothwell the first attempt to translate a Shakespeare play to a motion picture was made in September 1899, by William Kennedy and Laurie Dickson. He filmed excerpts from King John, which was being performed at Her Majesty’s Theatre in London. Films of Shakespeare plays are almost as old as the film medium. The first films were attempts to reproduce Shakespeare plays on the screen as they were on the stage. Rothwell observes that, Vitagraph Company’s Brooklyn, New York studio was one of the main producers of Shakespeare’s silent films in the first two decades of the past century. Vitagraph was responsible for a series of short-length Shakespeare films (one-reel films). Shakespeare’s plays seemed then an effective way to unite high art and mass audience.

These productions present conceptual but not contemporary technical similarities with the linguistic aspect proposed for the theory of appropriation realized in film. Because of the technical limitations of the medium Shakespeare’s lines were not spoken then. The text was provided by title cards, merely indicating transitions for the scenes, not necessarily reproducing Shakespeare’s words. According to Michael Anderegg in Film Adaptation, these film adaptations were even more common during the silent era, and
at that time “Shakespeare without words... did not seem to be a contradiction” (Anderegg 155). Rothwell, though, points out that “even without sound-recording equipment, to stay in character old-time Shakespereans of the stature of Forbes-Robertson and Frederick Warde scrupulously spoke the lines” (Rothwell 8). It was not a rule; some actors could not speak the lines perfectly. But the fidelity to Shakespeare’s dialogues was a concern even in those technical conditions.

Warner Brothers’ Midsummer Night’s Dream signed by Max Dieterle and William Reinhardt in 1935, was the first major Shakespearean film of the sound era. According to Anderegg: “Shakespeare was still seen as somehow balanced between popularity and propriety” (Anderegg 156). The studio then believed that Shakespeare would give the film a high cultural status, and, at the same time, make it a popular success.

One year after Warner Bros. released A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Metro Golden Mayer released Romeo and Juliet. Nevertheless, their commercial failure halted the Hollywood production of Shakespearean films, at least for the next decade. The studios did not want to spend more money attempting to bring the work of Shakespeare to the screen failing in being faithful to the compelling characteristics of the theatrical work that was then at stake. Robert Shaughnessy in Shakespeare on Film observes that:
Most of the criticism was restricted to a good or bad concept based on fidelity, but if there is any valuable discussion on that it is not strictly in these terms but in how economic priorities of the film industry affected the integrity of Shakespeare’s art. (Shaughnessy 3)

Besides the issue of fidelity, film adaptations of Shakespeare have become a discussion narrowed to arguments of high or mass culture. Within these notions of artistic classification Shakespeare’s work has an aura, its artistic geniality defines it as high art. On the other hand, the appreciation of Shakespeare’s work commonly leads to attempts to explore his texts in different forms, and sharing them with different public. This exploring and sharing is often what most mass culture critics identify as the process displacing Shakespeare’s aura and turning the new/emerging interpretation of Shakespeare into a popular product, not high art anymore.

A different process for a different taste, film turns Shakespeare’s plays into an accessible art for popular audiences. The word popular, however, must not implicate by any chance some depreciation of a Shakespeare film. Accessible is not a synonym for low art (this definition relates to concepts of mass production of artworks). In talking about Shakespeare, the idea of popular demonstrates an effort for contextual understanding of his work.
A film is not necessarily diminished in its merits in attempting to bring Shakespeare’s plays closer to the contemporary reality. Shakespeare, himself, created his work popularizing, borrowing, and re-working different materials to respond to his own public. The merit in bringing Shakespeare to film dwells in the creative possibility of producing a contemporary response to what Shakespeare did more than four centuries ago. Shakespeare’s plays cannot exist on the screen today exactly as Shakespeare wrote them. Only in the Tudor-Stuart period, in a specific time and place in history, Shakespeare’s words achieved their complete significance.

The challenge of a contemporary film realization appropriating a Shakespeare text is to re-conceive a definitive story of the Tudor-Stuart theatre through interdisciplinarity and intertextuality. Shakespeare offers filmmakers all possible attractive elements for the making of a film. Shakespeare’s plays give filmmakers the possibility to attempt different interpretations of his texts.

One of the problems in appropriating a Shakespeare play is that the complexity of the process is not only in working with Shakespeare’s text itself. Shakespeare’s plays are theatrical pieces, and the physical abstraction of the Tudor-Stuart stage contrasts drastically with the realistic setting of films.
Many films made out of Shakespeare’s plays are only stage performances registered in a different medium, filmed. Faithful reproductions of Shakespeare’s work on the screen become film adaptations better serving educational purposes. The BBC versions of Shakespeare’s plays, for example, are in fact audiovisual productions that illustrate this trend (see section *The History of The Merchant of Venice on the Screen*). They do not share the idea of the theory of appropriation realized in film because the material appropriated is not interdisciplinary and intertextually explored for a film realization. The BBC versions are more likely to introduce Shakespeare’s work, or add some educational understanding to this work. But, they also serve as example that the history of Shakespeare’s films is marked mostly by commercial failure. Attempting to bring Shakespeare’s plays to the screen, often films only bring audiovisual reproductions of theatrical performances, rather than an actual audiovisual product. A film that appropriated a Shakespeare play (as any other film) depends on the innovations achieved by the particularities of its own medium, and not from the particularities of the medium of the appropriated material.
5. Contemporary Examples of Popular Shakespeares on Film that Exemplify the Theory

Kenneth Branagh, in the introduction to the screenplay of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (which he directed for the screen in 1993) calls attention to the particularities of the film medium in the creation of an original artistic expression: “Through the choices made by the camera, to bring to vivid life all the other characters. To take on the play as whole and realize fully-fleshed lives” (Branagh, *Much Ado* 1993). This approach to Shakespeare’s films can be observed in Branagh’s *Much Ado*, and *Henry V* as well. His aim, in making films out of Shakespeare’s plays, is to produce popular pieces, accessible to a varied public.

In *Much Ado*, in an attempt for a realistic production, Branagh chose to have a mixed cast: stage-Shakespearean-actors and screen-non-Shakespearean-actors. Branagh wanted to preserve Shakespeare’s language. His wish was to be understood by a contemporary audience, but without losing poetry. He needed his actors to be aware of the lines to be spoken, whether in prose or poetry: “realistic Shakespearean acting on film or on stage cannot be achieved fully without this understanding” (Branagh, *Much Ado* 1993). Settings and
costumes were chosen to avoid specific time or place, leaving the imaginary of the audience completely free.

Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* is a work not for the Tudor-Stuart stage, but for the screen, at specific historical moments. This film still tells the same everlasting tale of the star-crossed lovers. Nevertheless, the story is a film story. In Luhrmann’s film, *Romeo and Juliet* is fully realized in film, responding to a different public. The director offers the spectator his personal and contextual interpretation of the tale. Luhrmann is the author of a new reading for Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. He produced quite a popular film supported by casting choices: young and beautiful actors for young audiences. Luhrmann’s star-crossed lovers are as young as the audience he was addressing.

The film is as commercial as Shakespeare’s plays were, attempting to reach wide audiences. He changes traditions, as Shakespeare’s plays did. And in doing so he reflects the concerns of the society he belongs to.

Luhrmann’s achievements with his commercially successful production of *Romeo and Juliet* are not only in his choice for young, pretty actors/actress. He gave the film an MTV-video-music clip rhythm. The film perfectly integrates images and music. The way sound and images are put together characterizes the contemporary realization of this work, which talks specifically to the twenty-first
century post-adolescent generation. The film was engaging, at least for the intended audience, as Shakespeare was at his time, as Graham Holderness observes in *Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet*:

> Shakespeare’s theatre was directly or consciously concerned not with the production of literary masterpieces but rather with the production and staging of exciting, entertaining and thought-provoking plays that were thought of primarily as a form of cultural interaction between players and audiences in a theatre. The now revered canon of Shakespeare’s writings was in a sense a by-product of his main professional business. (Holderness, *Shakespeare* 52)

Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* takes place in a modern Verona Beach. Its settings, according to Luhrmann, were built from his encounter with very contemporary elements. Shakespeare’s language became street talking, non-stop rock music. Hand-held shots, zooms, pans, alternate film speeds, jump cuts and saturation of color are some of the technical devices that characterize video-music clips. This is the visual tone of this popular expression of *Romeo and Juliet* at the end of the twentieth-century.

Luhrmann’s realization in film of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* avoids changes from the text, aiming to keep Shakespeare’s poetry. Luhrmann believes, above all, in the
The accomplishment of Luhrmann lies in the interaction of elements of the contemporary world with Shakespeare’s world. William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet familiarizes its audience with the unfamiliar. In the Verona Beach of the end of the millennium, the young spectators can easily identify
themselves with the clothes of the young characters, with their habits and addictions, and with their violent response to the corrupt society they belong to. The young characters meet at the beach, they wear colored shirts, they smoke, they play pool, they are aggressive and depressed. The music works in the same way for spectators and characters. The Shakespeare story itself comes from a distant reality to the audience of this film. Therefore, although present in the film, Shakespeare’s lines in Luhrmann’s production do not have the poetic sound of the Tudor-Stuart stage. Shakespeare’s words spoken by Luhrmann’s characters become the dialect of the young generation. The Shakespearean poetry becomes the rap of the late twentieth century, the familiar way to communicate the apparently unfamiliar text.

The rhythm of William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet editing corresponds to the rhythm of the generation who grew up watching video-music clips. Therefore, for this audience, reading Shakespeare in a familiar pace makes it an enjoyable experience. Moreover, the film’s music, more than mood, helps to tell the story. A video-clip needs images and music, both working together to achieve an ultimate result. Perhaps, this could be a definition for this 1996 William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet: Shakespeare in motion picture and music.

The tale of the star-crossed lovers was already a popular story before Shakespeare adapted it. And it might
remain popular in its remarkable poetic-imaginary appeal to young audiences. In the words of Cedric Watts in *Twayne’s New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare’s work perpetuates in the “intelligence, eloquence, dramatic verve and linguistic complexity” (Watts xv) of his work, timeless in content and form. The play remains as valuable material for the society and for artists: “as Shakespeare diversely appropriated and exploited his sources, so he in turn becomes the subject of diverse cultural appropriation and exploitation” (Watts xv).
6. Language Issues in Appropriating Shakespeare for a Contemporary Film Realization

In film, or even in theater, when one appropriates Shakespeare for a contextually contemporary realization, one of the first (if not the first) problems faced regards the language. Shakespeare’s dialogues are the story itself. But, how can those words be translated into the context of a contemporary dialogue? In avoiding the use of Shakespeare’s dialogue one might lose the essence of his plays. As Victor Cahn points in *The Plays of Shakespeare: A Thematic Guide*:

No doubt Shakespeare’s plays contain the richest, most eloquent language to be found in any literature outside the Bible... concern for the very nature of language, how the words his characters use, as well as the structure of their sentences and verse, reflect their personality. (Cahn 161)

How to suit the word to the action, and the action to the word? There is an ongoing struggle to match word and action in productions taking place more than four hundred years after their conception by Shakespeare for the Tudor-Stuart theatre. Bertram Joseph in *Acting Shakespeare* defends the acting of Shakespeare plays based on the strict understanding of the verse. He argues that character and poetry are inseparable, and in failing to communicate
Shakespeare’s poetry one fails in penetrating “the living depths of the character.” (Joseph 2)

This inseparable condition between character and poetry implies a limited access to Shakespeare’s text. Speaking from a personal perspective of one for whom English is a second language, the poetic failure denies me the possibility of a full experience and understanding of Shakespeare. To accept Joseph’s affirmation, is to accept a personal historical and cultural impossibility of experiencing Shakespeare. I only fully comprehend Shakespeare’s text through Portuguese translations of his work. For the poetic sounds to be kept in Portuguese, the translations of the plays use different words than the ones once meant by Shakespeare. Or if the aim, on the other hand, is to preserve the meaning of the words, then it is the rhyme that is lost. In these linguistic struggles what remains is the idea, the content of the narrative, and its basic delineation, the form the narrative is presented. When appropriating a Shakespeare play to make a film of it, I am not concerned with the integrity of Shakespeare’s text. I look at what can be drawn from the piece to make it a realization of a different art medium within a different historical and cultural reality. Shakespeare’s work is not lost in this process. It is appropriated, along with other disciplines and texts, and realized in film. And this
realization, this final film unity is other than Shakespeare’s theater.

One can suit the word to the action: the theatrical word to the film action. The second part of this dissertation works with the idea of a hypothetical appropriation of the Merchant where Shakespeare’s language and story are realized in a different historical condition and medium. It is an idea based on different interpretations of the play, with different intentions, for a different audience. After exploring Shakespeare’s context for the Merchant, the aim of the project is to create different alternatives to the theatrical piece. On a contemporary realization, on any production of Shakespeare, one goes to the text to find out all the possible meanings and readings of it. And the acknowledgement of a contemporary and subjective bias is unavoidable. This hypothetical appropriation of the Merchant realized in film starts with a translation and an interpretation of the text, linguistically and historically. It does not try to repeat lines, or the sound of those lines, as they were spoken when Shakespeare put them on the stage. Shakespeare’s words still sound beautiful today, but it may be for most a formal and empty beauty. There is a great historical and cultural gap separating the sixteenth century English Shakespeare from this twenty-first century Brazilian reader of his work. Watching a production of a Shakespeare play today at the
Globe Reconstructed in London, for instance, is, for me, to experience a tourist attraction, not necessarily Shakespeare. The physical experience of the place itself, the Globe Reconstructed, is the attempt of a history lesson. The studies for the construction of this contemporary place of theatrical performance are on display, in an effort to show the fidelity of the contemporary building to the original Shakespeare’s Globe. To reach the actual Globe Reconstructed and its stage area one stops first at the box office, passes through a book and gift shop, a convenience area around the actual Globe Reconstructed, and then, finally, after perhaps buying a Globe Reconstructed pillow or hat, one enters the place of performance joining a mass of tourists holding still and video cameras. While watching the performance one finds him/herself more worried with the surroundings than with the theatrical piece itself. One is observing the particularities of the building, the set, the costumes and the acting style comparing them to what is previously taught and learned about Shakespeare. It is a Shakespeare-facts learning experience, an attempt of imitation of Shakespeare’s production in the Tudor-Stuart period, not the experience of a contemporary artistic interpretation of his work.

In appropriating Shakespeare’s narrative, one must work on a subjective interpretation of the play based on personal experiences: his/her historical and cultural background. The
process here suggested of an appropriation of the Merchant realized in film suggests as a first step a contextual study of the material appropriated (in this case the Merchant) and of all the elements present in the text. The next step is to make modifications that might turn this story into a contemporary and familiar expression for the specific audience for the film.

Shakespeare’s plays allow appropriations for different purposes, for different kinds of realizations. Shakespeare’s poetry fully preserved in a film today is mostly informing Shakespeare’s context, the kind of language spoken in his time. His lines, many times today, need translation, even for native English speakers. The words are used differently, with distinct intentions. A language is historically and culturally determined. Shakespeare’s text today, without some interpretations, becomes a mediated conversation. Shakespeare and the contemporary theatre audience do not speak the same language, even if English applies. A good illustration of this may be the considerable number of footnotes that one finds in the main editions of Shakespeare’s plays in English. The audience may relate to Shakespeare’s work today in different ways: because of his language or his stories, or because of both language and story. But to carry on Shakespeare’s narrative, one needs an engaged audience, not a distracted one. For that, the
performance is built up properly for a specific time and place, exactly as Shakespeare built up his work.
7. Introducing the Appropriation of The Merchant of Venice Realized in Film

The theory of appropriation realized in film leads us to the second part of the dissertation, where it is applied towards a hypothetical interdisciplinary and intertextual appropriation of Shakespeare’s Merchant realized in film. The critical formulation gives consistency to an appropriation of the Merchant realized in film providing the actual steps for the process. It brings a history of appropriations realized in film, and specificities of a textual analysis of the play (dramatic elements as genre, characters, locations, plots and scenes). The Merchant, the Shakespearean play of the Tudor-Stuart theatre, takes place in a fictional Venice. The appropriation is thus initially developed in considering the English and the Venetian society during Shakespeare’s time. The Merchant, however, is not portraying one thing or the other. It is not a historical re-construction. It is a fictional world inspired by many other appropriations realized on the London stage of an early modern England society. Only after accomplishing a historical understanding of the reality in which Shakespeare realized the play, it is possible for one to elaborate a contemporary and subjective reading of the play. The historical and cultural condition of the author of the
realization, the conditions of the film practice and the aimed-audience re-shape the appropriated Shakespeare material (in its form and content), bringing different interpretations to it. An illustration for the practical suggestions of the theory of this dissertation is Simon McBurney’s realization of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* in 2004 for the stage of the National Theater in London. The performance used contemporary technology to inform current issues through Shakespeare (George W. Bush’s image was part of the contemporary discourse). There were many projections on the floor, television sets spread at determined points of the stage, even a tragic soundtrack was used for the comedy. The play spoke to today’s audience, and made the realization complete in this fulfillment, giving a contemporary face to its interpretation of the text.

The idea of the application of the theory of appropriation realized in film regards only one art medium (film), a practice determined by its maker, its means conditions for technical production (and distribution, its market) and its audience. The application is also delineated by a particular genre (film musical). The theory is coherently manifested as a film musical for it brings, self-reflexivity, principles of video-music clips (and the aesthetic of these clips gives clear audiovisual illustration of interdisciplinarity and intertextuality in a
contemporary context), and, particularly, turns Shakespeare’s poetry into music.
1. An Appropriation Realized in Theater

"The Most Excellent Historie of the Merchant of Venice" is the title page for the earliest text of William Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice. It is a quarto dated 1600; following reprints are dated 1619 (second quarto), and 1623 (folio). Yet, Shakespeare probably wrote the play in 1596 or 1597.

The history of Shakespeare’s Merchant is one of the greatest examples of an appropriation realized in theater. The art medium for the realization in this case is theatre, not film. But the process followed by Shakespeare for the creation of this piece has much in common with the theory of appropriation realized in film elaborated in this dissertation. For the Merchant Shakespeare makes interdisciplinary and intertextual appropriations to realize his own text in the theater. An overview of the history of the play supports the validation of the theory of appropriation realized in film. It illustrates the process of elaboration of a creative and unique piece.
One of the most recognized origins or sources for Shakespeare’s *Merchant* is the Italian story *Il Pecorone*, by Ser Giovanni of Florence, published in Milan in 1558. *Il Pecorone* was never found in an English version. The *Merchant* can be understood as a collage. John Russell Brown in his introduction to the *Merchant* identifies origins of this play in religious tales from Persia and India and in *Il Pecorone*. Roma Gill, introducing the *Oxford School of Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice* sees at least three references, or sources, as plots of the *Merchant*. He identifies the pound of flesh and the ring as adaptations of *Il Pecorone*; the casket test coming from *Gesta Romanorum*, translated by R. Robinson in 1595; and the Jew and his daughter are from *The Jew of Malta*, by Christopher Marlowe, 1589. For Wells and Taylor the pound of flesh plot derived from Alexander Silvayn’s *The Orator*, and the casket plot “was readily available in versions by John Gower, in his *Confessio Amantis*, and Giovanni Boccaccio, in his *Decameron*, and in an anonymous anthology, the *Gesta Romanorum*” (Wells and Taylor 1998, 425). The Jessica-Lorenzo sub-plot, according to Jay Halio, in his introduction to a 1993 edition of *The Merchant of Venice*, actually derives from *Il novellino* by Massuccio, *The Jew of Malta* by Christopher Marlowe, and Book III of Anthony Munday’s *Zelauto or the Fountaine of Fame*. In Marlowe’s *The Jew*, Abigail, daughter of Barabas, falls in love with a Christian man. Murray J. Levith, in *The Merchant*
of Venice: New Critical Essays, believes that Shylock was inspired by Marlowe. Such interpretation is drawn not only from *The Jew of Malta*, as it is usually mentioned, but from *Doctor Faustus*, as this was the play by Marlowe probably being performed when Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant*. 
2. The Context for the Realization of Shakespeare

Today’s performances of the Merchant carry its legacy. The Venice of the Renaissance, the England of the Renaissance and the idea the England of the Renaissance had of the Venice of the Renaissance all belong to the past. It means that today’s historical and cultural conditions are different. Contemporary conventions, or what is accepted as common sense, are the reflex of the demands of our particular social reality. A performance of the Merchant, attempting to reproduce it exactly as it was once performed on the Tudor-Stuart stage is only significant as a historical reconstruction of Shakespeare’s period, not necessarily as a contemporary theatrical achievement. As Andrew Gurr observes in The Shakespearean Stage: 1574-1642: “Shakespeare seen in performance today is significantly different from the performances he participated in on the stage of his own time” (Gurr, The Shakespearean 14). The theatres have changed their shapes, and the acting and producing styles are different. The analysis on specificities of Shakespeare’s time gives today the opportunity of new interpretations, that, surely, are not Shakespeare anymore, but contemporary readings of his work. As Gurr states, “there is absolutely nothing wrong with
modernized Shakespeare, of course. What it cannot give us is original Shakespeare” (Gurr, The Shakespearean 14).

The comment Shakespeare made on his time was meant to speak to the audience of his time. In form and content this comment works according to understandable conventions of that society in that period. Therefore, we are missing many aspects of his stories. Shakespeare’s dialogue (in the English then spoken on the Tudor-Stuart stage) might lose their poetic sound if they were to be spoken in a contemporary way. Losing the poetry one is always concerned about losing the depth of Shakespeare’s characters.

To appropriate Shakespeare today, one has to follow what, to a certain extent, was required of the early modern England audience: one needs to choose focus, and set a contemporary context for the performance. The blank verse does not have to be spoken anymore, because it is not commonly or conventionally spoken anymore. One needs to act the verses according to contemporary uses of the language, to the current speaking that characterizes the setting of the production. How is the story going to be represented? Which tone is going to be given? Shakespeare’s plays allow different interpretations and analytical perspectives.
3. The History of The Merchant of Venice on the Screen

To date there are eighteen audiovisual productions of Shakespeare’s the Merchant (Independent Movie Data Base). The earlier productions are silent-black-and-white films, while the later are in great majority television productions. None of these works, however, belong to the Hollywood film industry. The first commercial film realization of the Merchant (financed by the film industry, and with a Hollywood cast) will be released in 2005; this film is directed by Michael Radford, and stars Al Pacino, as Shylock.

The history of productions of the Merchant on the screen shows that not many attempts were made to adapt the play in languages other than English. The majority of these eighteen film/television versions are English spoken adaptations. There is an Indian, an Italian/French, and a New Zealand production. The remaining works are from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

The first screen version of the Merchant is a U.S. production dated 1908: a silent film directed by J. Stuart Blackton. The second one was again a U.S. production dated 1912, and directed by Barry O’Neil. Next was a film directed in the U.S. by Phillips Smalley and Lois Weber in 1914. The year of 1916 brought the first U.K. film production of the
Merchant, directed by Walter West. The next film was again an U.K. production of 1922 directed by Challis Sanderson. According to Kenneth Rothwell in *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, in 1927, there was the first attempt to coordinate sound and image in a Shakespeare movie. It was a ten minutes extract of the trial scene in an experimental De Forest Phonofilus’ production (therefore, it is not counted as a feature length, a complete production of the play). The first full-length film with sound, dated 1941, is a Hindu adaptation directed by Zalim Saudagar. The seventh production of the Merchant is not a film, but the first television presentation of the play, directed by George More O’Ferrall in 1947 in the U.K. In 1953, *Le Marchand de Venise*, an Italian-French co-production is directed in French for the big screen. The second television production of the Merchant is again from the U.K., and Hal Burton directed it in 1955. The first color screen version of the Merchant was the 1969 television adaptation directed by Orson Welles (who played the role of Shylock). The U.K. television production of 1972 was directed by Cedric Messina, as part of the television series *Play of the Month*. The following production was also for television; this U.K. version dated 1973 and signed by director John Sichel, brought in its cast, as Shylock, Laurence Olivier. John Sichel directed again, three years later, 1976, a Canadian television version of the play. The television production of
the Merchant directed by Jack Gold as part of the BBC series of The Complete Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare was produced in 1980. The next adaptation of the play came in 1996; it was another television version directed then by Alan Horrox. In 2001 Trevor Nunn directed a U.K. production that was shown in the U.S. by PBS in the same year. The next production of the Merchant was a New Zealand film directed in Maori by Don Selwyn in 2002 (originally entitled Te Tangata Whai Rawa o Weniti). The last audiovisual production to mention in this history is Michael Radford’s 2005 release.

With the exception of this latest film realization of the play (about which one can only speculate right now), most of the versions mentioned were never accessible to a large audience. They were rarely distributed to large world markets, mostly restricted to television broadcasts. Most of these adaptations were made and once exhibited forgotten. Jack Gold’s 1980 television production for the BBC might be the most watched adaptation. This production, however, does not follow under the attributes and aspects determining the theory of appropriation realized in film here proposed. The unsuitability is less in regard to the medium than to the contemporary aims of the enterprise. A video can bring the realization of an appropriation of a Shakespeare play. The theory of this dissertation is, though, concerned with films and the aspects defining this particular art.
This dissertation presents the re-naming and re-definition of the process of adaptation. As discussed earlier in the presentation of the theory of appropriation realized in film, this re-conceptualized process does not apply to all film adaptations, and certainly does not apply to video adaptations. It is important to observe that aside of the specificities of the medium, the process proposed in the theory of appropriation realized in film is exclusive to contemporary film realizations developed through interdisciplinary and intertextual approaches. A film adaptation that does not appropriate material from other media willing to make a contemporary interpretation of it (addressing a contemporary audience) cannot be regarded as an appropriation realized in film.

The BBC’s version of the Merchant in the context of the theory of appropriation realized in film is more of an educational piece. This educational character does not necessarily makes an audiovisual production less artistic. In the case of the BBC production, however, the piece merely illustrates Shakespeare’s play. It surely brings Gold’s interpretation of the story, but it is a realistic adaptation of Shakespeare’s play. It is set in the end of sixteenth century, as the costumes tell. All the lines of Shakespeare’s text are maintained. The acting is satisfactory but the locations for this video (all in interior settings) are flat, giving almost no life or sense
of actuality to the actions they are serving. This BBC version is very helpful for a reader trying to understand Shakespeare’s text better. The BBC series on Shakespeare (that the Merchant is part of) remains a series of adaptations and not appropriations realized in video, because their intention is not to create contemporary interpretations of any of Shakespeare plays. The adaptations produced are visual correspondents for Shakespeare’s lines (in their integrity).

Trevor Nunn’s 2001 production of the Merchant is closer to the idea of an appropriation of the play. This video realization is a very different version from the one intended by the BBC. Nunn is one of the most important names in recent British theater these days. He is responsible for big musical hits like Cats and Les Miserables, and many Shakespeare plays. He served as director of the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1968 until 1986. In 1997, he became artistic director of the Royal National Theatre. Nunn is what could be called a Shakespeare expert on the stage. He originally worked on the Merchant for the theater in 1999. It was as a 1920s-30s-Venice version of the play (for which Nunn received the Olivier Award as best director). Although creative in his interpretation and conception of the play, Nunn offers his spectator a video not a film.

Nunn presents a very insightful subjective idea of the play. In an interview for the PBS website on this production
of the Merchant, he declared to believe in the existence of "something fundamentally problematic and distasteful about the play." Regarding the surely most controversial theme of the play, Christians and Jew, Nunn comments that:

Before Shakespeare wrote The Merchant of Venice
Christopher Marlowe had written a barbaric, anti-Semitic play called The Jew of Malta. It appealed to savagery and cruelty in a kind of bear-baiting way. I think Shakespeare wrote his play as a reply, as a cautionary tale for everybody involved in that sort of crowd-pleasing endeavor. I don’t think Shakespeare was contributing to it; I think he was saying ‘here is an alternative view.’ (Nunn for PBS)

The truth is that any idea Shakespeare had about Jews today is mere supposition; many factors (historical, social and theatrical) might have influenced the composition of the Jewish character, Shylock. Any contemporary interpretation of the Merchant and its villain, Shylock, must be an original composition contextually influenced. According to Jani Rogers and the same website, that watching a performance of the play today, "Shylock can be seen as both an Elizabethan stereotype and a fully drawn human being" (Rogers for PBS). He identifies Shylock as a character with stereotypical elements, though, not a one-dimensional villain, "but a complex character who defies explanation and
who will probably never be fully understood” (Rogers for PBS).

Nunn shares this same view about Shylock. He approached the Christian-Jewish issue of the play with a historical setting for his adaptation. His production is set between the Great Wars of the twentieth century, at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s. Nunn made this choice because this period was one when anti-Semitic thought and anti-Semitic behavior become current, in the reality of the Holocaust.

The story is partly set in a decadent Venetian café and in the city’s Jewish quarter. Nunn’s production in this particular setting is certainly clear for a specific audience watching the presentation. The decadent café brings a strong indication of the tone of the story. It is the stage for an exaggerated fool-type, Graziano and for a homosexual relationship between Antonio and Bassanio.

Antonio is a homosexual; Bassanio seems like an attorney (especially during his speech in the casket scene); and Portia is probably a sophisticated woman. Nunn gives us more chance to develop some sympathy for the character of Shylock (played by Henry Goodman, who was also awarded with an Olivier Award for playing this role in Nunn’s stage adaptation). The Jew of this production is not the villain; Shylock is the one the spectator develops some pity for. Antonio seems to be the actual villain of this story.
The settings that Nunn has for this production (the café and Portia’s art-gallery-like-home), despite indicating clear ideas, are still too artificial for a camera production experience that inherently brings a sense of reality to the spectator. The scenes taking place at Portia’s limits bring the most interesting conceptions. Nunn works on an idea of presenting physically (in physical appearance, in music and dance) the ethnic characteristics of Portia’s suitors. The first suitors are presented through a film projection (a film within the video presentation). This short film exhibition brings a retrospective of each of Portia’s suitors. Although inhabiting a sophisticated environment, Portia plays the part of a weeping lady while waiting for the arrival of her husband-to-be. It is interesting that there seems to exist a much stronger sexual tension between Portia and the Prince of Morocco than between Portia and Bassanio.
4. Realizing *The Merchant of Venice* in Film

In appropriating a Shakespeare play, the film realization is also aiming to reflect a process of creation akin to the one McPherson describes for Shakespeare as giving at once fairy tale, Biblical story, and melodrama, through the feel of the contemporary. In his time, for his audience, the story of the *Merchant* was perfectly located in Venice (considering all that the mythical city stood for then). In this project, the action is re-located to a different time and place and to a difference audience. It is historically and culturally re-arranged for the film medium within a contemporary context, addressing a contemporary audience. The appropriation of the *Merchant* realized in film attempts to establish the same kind of credibility that Shakespeare’s play established in his time commenting on his own society, addressing his contemporary audience.

What follows the presentation of the theory of appropriation realized in film proposed in this dissertation is an application/illustration of its conceptual elaborations. It is the proposition, or the suggestion, of a hypothetical appropriation of the *Merchant* realized in film. It is envisioned as a contemporary musical piece able to carry on Shakespeare’s narrative in different medium, with very distinct historical and cultural conditions. There is a
space for gestures and movements, however, not as in the Tudor-Stuart theatre. The necessity of space here is for the bodily expression of a contemporary musical, the ensemble of contemporary bodies. Video-clips are a common aesthetic experience, a common language, a familiar convention, for the public intended for this realization in film (the twenty-first century post-adolescent generation). The video-music clip aesthetic is generally achieved in the use of hand-held shots, zooms, pans, and other continuous camera movements. It also relies on the variation of film speeds, fast and numerous cuts in the editing of the clip, and manipulation of color. A video-music clip is visual music piece for most of the time highly fragmented. It is within this aesthetic, turning Shakespeare’s poetry into visual music, that the realization of this appropriation is envisioned.

A contemporary production of the Merchant is not just a matter of historical analysis. In appropriating this play for a film realization, one also needs to develop a dramatic analysis of the play’s shifts of genre, its varied characters, and their inconsistent behaviors, just to mention a few essential elements. It is in the mastering presentation of genres, composition of characters and their actions and lines that the many issues of the play can be effectively delivered in film. Characters and plots (or sub-plots) bring to the play important issues for discussion. In
the following sections of this dissertation, analyzing particular elements of the play, most of these issues are considered. Shylock, as a Jew, raises questions on religion and ethnicity. Portia (and Nerissa), by cross-dressing, opens a space for questions on gender. Portia, obeying her father’s instructions (even after his death) and Jessica, fleeing from her father (Shylock) incite discussions on paternalism. All these elements determine the sense of the nation on which Shakespeare is commenting on. These are the themes manifested in the construction of his characters inhabiting an idealized Venice. They are the same themes that, in greater or lesser degree, are also contemporarily envisioned for the screen.

The idea of making a contemporary realization of the Merchant goes along with the richness of the text for the attributes and aspects defining appropriations realized in film in this dissertation. As a musical, this film realization extends its interdisciplinarity not only to the visual arts (in its mise-en-scène and framing composition) but to music and dance. Moreover, a musical structure supports the video-music-clip-aesthetic intentions of this film proposal. The idea of a musical is also stressed in the character of the play itself. It is a narrative offering a variety of interpretations. According to John Lyon in the Twayne’s New Critical Introduction to Shakespeare The Merchant of Venice, this play “like all of Shakespeare’s
plays, easily admits of diverging theatrical interpretations” (Lyon xiv) that make it “both an unsettling experience and an entertainment” (Lyon xiv).

The play allows different settings, context, and emphasis. As Lyon observes, The Merchant is a play of “extraordinarily fine moments, rather than the larger coherence of a well-made play – a collage rather than a painting” (Lyon 95). Distinct elements are artistically gathered in the constitution of a unique piece. The play is interdisciplinary and intertextual not only in its process of realization, but also in itself.
5. Genre: Tragedy and/or Comedy

The Merchant is a play of shifting genres. As in other Shakespeare plays such as Romeo and Juliet, there is a definite change in tone in Romeo and Juliet. In Romeo and Juliet, when Tybalt takes Mercutio’s life, and shortly after Romeo kills Tybalt revenging Mercutio’s death, comedy is turned into tragedy. In the Merchant, however, the play’s genre is continuously shifting between comedy and tragedy. There is not a definite change. There is a last change though, when the story ends (as a comedy). The genre of this play is for most a personal interpretation.

The Merchant is classified, or recognized, as a comedy, and that is more clearly identified in its ending. As a very generic theatrical convention, a play ending with a wedding and music is said to be a comedy. In its ending, this play can be said to be a comedy. Yet, depending on how one reads the Merchant, this comic distinction may not be so evident. A film adaptation of the Merchant might assume different tones depending on what is taken in greater or lesser consideration.

When set in Belmont, the Merchant is most likely to be seen as a romantic comedy. When set in Venice, a tragic atmosphere tends to prevail. In basic terms, in Shakespeare’s text, Belmont and Venice stand respectively
for comedy and tragedy. They contrast in the kind of bonds that the characters establish within their surroundings. These differences are expressed in the dialogue and action of the characters in these environments. It is because of these determinations that to be a comedy, or have a comic resolution, the play has to end in Belmont and not Venice. Finishing the story in Venice would make the story a tragedy. The law reigning in Belmont is different from the one in Venice. It is not that a play must be either a comedy or a tragedy, much the opposite. Precisely, one of Shakespeare’s virtues is that his plays are not entirely comedies, nor tragedies, but sometimes both, or a special blending of both. Structures are one of Shakespeare’s most remarkable trademarks - and this makes the Merchant particularly interesting.

The focus on certain scenes and characters also determine genre in an adaptation of this play. To make this play a comic production, the story must have its attention centered on the casket scene and Portia. To make it a tragic story the stress is put on the trial scene and Shylock. As has happened in many contemporary stage adaptations of the play, an emphasis on the money bond between Antonio and Shylock, the trial scene (and the scenes that lead to the Venetian trial), make this play much more of a tragedy.

The play assumes different directions and tones depending on the interpretations (and importance) given to
Portia and Shylock, especially Shylock. According to John Mahon in *The Merchant of Venice: New Critical Essays*, the versions of the play that stress the villainy of the Jew can be identified as morality productions. In twentieth-century versions, however, Mahon observed more “sympathetic portrayals of Shylock” (Mahon 34). Shylock is then constructed more as a victim, a marginalized, not socially integrated man. As Gayle Gaskil, observes, it is common to U.S. productions of the play to present Shylock “as a tragic hero, the victim of casual racism” (Gaskil in Mahon 384); and he uses as an example Michael Kahn’s theater production of 1999. For Jay Halio in *Understanding ‘The Merchant of Venice’*, the story of the play is determined by Shylock, whom he calls a “comic villain” (Halio, *Understanding* 166), making Portia a less complex character. Linda Rozmovits in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Culture* observes that the Victorian age and the early-twentieth-century diminish the importance of Portia in the story of the play, marginalizing her presence.

Making the *Merchant* a comedy implies a choice for Portia as its leading character. She is the character, the woman, leading the action. The *Merchant* is recognized as one of Shakespeare’s comedies. Being a comedy, this play is about Portia and not about Shylock, otherwise it would be a tragedy. As Randall Martin points out in his introduction to *The Merchant of Venice*:
Thematically and structurally *The Merchant* remains a romantic comedy, and in this context the strong emphasis of recent productions on human self-deception and universal moral culpability in the play may seem distorting. (Martin xxxiv-v)

Another reason to interpret the *Merchant* as a comedy is that it is a fairy-tale, and fairy-tales are commonly identified as comedies. It is the same case of *Midsummer’s Night Dream* (a correspondent world to the *Merchant*’s Belmont). The world of *Midsummer’s*, for most of the play, is a fantastic one, with no direct reference to a real location, as *Hamlet*’s Denmark, for example. Fairy-tales are romantic-comedies, stories of people who are bound to live happily ever after. And all this takes place not necessarily in ordinary or realistic places, but rather in exotic and fantastic ones.

Defining a genre for the *Merchant* is, at the end, a matter of interpretation. This is an essential aspect for the development of this project: it requires a subjective reading. The genre of this play acquires definition on the screen according to the context of the appropriation and its realization. Such definition relies on which elements and perspectives are going to be mirrored on the screen. For this contemporary film musical realization of the *Merchant*, this dissertation proposes the maintenance of the genre of the play, a romantic-comedy (showing what it takes for
Bassanio and Portia to be together). Why a comedy? In his time, with his comedies, Shakespeare was making a critique of his society. This is the same motivation for appropriating this play and realizing it in film today.
6. Locations: Venice and Belmont

Venice is a real, historical place and a former modern center of world trade, intense commercial and financial activity. On the other hand, Belmont, Portia’s citadel, is a site for fantasy and romance.

In the re-shaping of this appropriation of the Merchant, Belmont is a place where money bonds are not an issue. It is a wealthy society, unworried about financial problems. Belmont is a land for love bonds only. In order to get to Belmont, Bassanio negotiates: he goes because of love, but he needs money. In Venice, his attempt to make the trip to Belmont involves a market negotiation. As he arrives in Belmont, it becomes a matter of emotions rather than rationality. Bassanio affirms love with an option for simplicity in the casket test. Bassanio chooses the most simple of the caskets. The gold and silver caskets are interpreted here as standing for superficiality, material values, while the correct casket to be chosen is to be the simplest one.

Venice is somewhat an immoral and sinful place whereas Belmont is a place for love (beautiful, respectful, dreamed love) under the moon and by the sound of music. The place where the weddings take place is the closest to a religious
definition Belmont gets. There is not a priest, or any official, religious or civil, marital ceremony ever seen.

Another possible interpretation for Venice and Belmont is suggested by Murray J. Levith in *Shakespeare’s Italian Settings and Plays*. He argues that Venice and Belmont stand respectively for Italy and England, or newer and older England.

In the play, Belmont contrasts with the real-commercial-cold Venetian environment. Belmont is a counter-location to Venice. In both places anything is possible, but in Belmont this regards love, while in Venice it regards money. For the realization in film, the narrative is set in the United States. The action would move between Venice and Belmont, two California beach cities; the first a large commercial center; the second its neighboring beach town. California figures as a state apart in the United States, as Italy was in Europe then, a cosmopolitan center, a proper site for the unraveling of socio-political, religious, and ethnical issues. On the other hand, Belmont is a place of permanent sunshine and pleasant weather. It must reflect a feeling of comfort, well-being and fantastic pleasure. It is a dream-like location. This is Portia’s territory. She is the owner of this site. Belmont is an admired community to which everyone wants to belong.

Venice in the play represents the real to balance the fantastic of Belmont. The same is thought for the
realization in film. Venice stands in contrast to Portia’s fairy-tale citadel, Belmont. It is commerce to love, cold to warm. Venice is an older version of Belmont: a perverted and corrupted Belmont.

In Shakespeare’s time, Venice was a fantastic place, just like Belmont. The difference is that the fantastic of Venice embodied vices, whereas the fantastic of Belmont was protected against corrupting elements. Venice in the film realization is a corrupted and perverted place, though a thrilling territory for a young person to eventually expose him/herself to new experiences. As in the play, in the contemporary realization proposed, Venice is a place of commercial gathering. Skyscrapers fill the skyline of a polluted environment of noisy and non-stop action.

Venice is the setting for intense and flowing action. Celebration is all over town, but in much more promiscuous manifestations. It is a large and strong commercial center: ships, trains, trucks, and planes circulate all the time through the dirty and polluted sea, streets and air of Venice. This is a metropolitan center with high buildings, many lights, lighted façades, neon signs creating a New York Times Square atmosphere. The Venice of the film stands for urban wildness, violent emotions and invites young people for adventures. Venice is a necessary evil-contrast for Belmont to be good.
7. Characters: What They Represent

The process of appropriation opens space for new interpretations. It establishes new relations and meanings. It is determined by a distinguished context, through very different perspectives. Regarding characters, the realization of this appropriation of the Merchant works mainly on the construction of three characters of the play, Portia, Bassanio and Shylock (and to some extent on Jessica and Antonio). As contemporary film characters they embody meaning not only in a personal sphere (within the story), but also carry, unavoidably, a historical legacy. In this realization in film, they are thought at once as Shakespeare’s characters (in meanings that transcended their own time), and contemporary characters as well.

Before proceeding to analyses on Bassanio, Portia and Shylock, it is necessary to look at some aspects regarding two other characters of the play important to the idea of this realization: Jessica and Antonio. Jessica is often seen as the strong and revolutionary woman of the play. She is the one to actually rebel against her father, what Portia does not do. Jessica, however, just leaves one order to conform to another. From Jew to Christian, she substitutes Shylock for Lorenzo. Jessica is also important in the play as her love-story subplot with Lorenzo works as a
materialization, or a metaphor, for the love relation between Portia and Bassanio. Involved in other conflicts of the story, Portia and Bassanio are not seen in romantic scenes. But what is seen between Jessica and Lorenzo is what is expected from the main romantic couple of the story. In the idea of this contemporary realization Portia and Bassanio have their romantic scenes, and so Jessica and Lorenzo are not needed.

Antonio, the merchant of Venice, for some critics is the homosexual partner of Bassanio. For others, he may be only Bassanio’s very good and generous friend. Contemporary productions and analyses on the Merchant have identified Antonio and Bassanio’s relationship as a homosexual relationship. The noble friendship between men, though, is a recurrent theme in Renaissance literature, regarded as a sublime bond. The idea of this film realization is to have Antonio as Bassanio’s uncle, and also incorporating the role of Lorenzo, Jessica’s love-partner. The re-arrangement of these characters and their actions establishes a clear relationship between Bassanio and Antonio, and gives Shylock stronger reasons to revenge against Antonio. The analysis of Antonio here is essentially developed in terms of his relation with Bassanio and Shylock. With Bassanio, the friendship of the play is turned into family ties in film. With Shylock, the religious-money relation between them in the play becomes a money-patriarchal relation in film.
Antonio works more in association/opposition to other characters (Portia, Bassanio and Shylock) than as a main figure of the film realization.

Each character is a carefully constructed representation. This creative agent of meaning carries an agenda of complex relations. It manifests ideas not only of its own self, but of the story it is part of. Each character, and the environment he/she inhabits, encapsulates particular aspects. The character is the artistic shape of Shakespeare’s commentary. And this shape stands for very particular conditions, as Lyon observes:

Throughout the play we are never allowed to see individual identity as something apart from the highly particularized social, political and economic conditions of its Venetian and Belmont worlds. But nor are we allowed to explain individual behavior as merely the consequence of such conditions. The play’s great challenge lies in the moments when it asks its audiences to sustain a kind of double vision – to see the inner lives of the individuals and to see the social political conditions, which shape and are shaped by such inner lives. (Lyon 141)

The choice for three particular characters (Portia, Bassanio and Shylock) is already a determinant definition in this process of appropriation and realization in film. These
characters are being differentiated from the remaining characters of the play, whose importance is consequently diminished. Unlike in the play, in the film realization the focus is directed to a specific plot, centering attention on the developments of these three specific characters, serving a romantic-comedy genre-style. It has Portia and Bassanio as its main romantic leading-couple, and Shylock, naturally, as the villain who complicates the fulfillment of their love, bringing dramatic conflicts for the story.

In a personal interpretation the play, I identify that in one way or another, all conflicts (or at least the conflicts from Portia’s, Bassanio’s and Shylock’s lives) challenge love, but are also deeply involved with money. The intention of this appropriation is to realize Shakespeare’s Merchant as a film stressing the idea of bonds, love and money bonds. A brief outline of the three main characters allows a delineation of themes of the story.

Portia is not only a woman looking for love. She is, even if not by her choice, a rich lady waiting for a husband. Portia’s story is what is about to come. It is about her fate, directly related to love and money. Shylock’s story, as an alien in the Venetian society, represents a choice for money (though having love as an ultimate goal). Bassanio, as the portrait of a young man, is the one who cannot truly decide between love and friendship. Money gives him the opportunity for the first step. And
Portia takes the final decision for him towards love, freeing him from financial worries.

7.1 Masks and Identities

The characters of the *Merchant* are here determined by the meaning of the location they inhabit. Venice is taken as the city of Carnival, and defined in the feeling of a collective celebration. People, independently of class, race, gender, religion, etc. (or what might commonly segregate them), get together to celebrate on the streets of this city. In Carnival, there is a sense of community, an elimination of boundaries. Hiding its face and body under masks and costumes, one’s personality is lost in the formation of a collective festive-ensemble.

The cross-dressing of the women characters of the play also follows the spirit of the Venetian Carnival. Under masks people can be someone else or assume different identities. In this sense, Portia and Nerissa are just following a practice of the world they are about to enter. In such a communal setting in which the *Merchant* is set, how can we interpret its dualities and contrasts? Is Shylock truly the Jew, or only the villain with a Jew mask? Are the characters real in the role they perform, or make-believe representations of a fictional world?
The Venetian-carnival-setting makes the characters’ identities ambiguous in hiding them behind masks. Behind the masks (these identities) are important subjects of interpretations in this play. The masks make each and every character of this story fictional in essence, fairy-tale figures: they are make-believe representations of a fictional world. This condition supports the argument that Shylock is the mask (the stereotype) of a villain in this street-fest. The real in this story relies in the collectivity. It is in the relations established between the masked characters that the story acquires real dimensions. Yet, this can only happen when the masked characters are re-located to a different context. This is where one finds Shakespeare’s personal comment, and the kind of comment intended for this appropriation of Shakespeare’s Merchant realized in film.

7.2 Bassanio

In appropriating the character of Bassanio, I interpret him as composed by a structural pattern that oscillates in a different manner from the patterns observed in Portia and Shylock’s journeys. He is not the one actually bringing solutions and problems to the story. He is essential for their developments, but he is not the one leading the action. Bassanio’s is the story of a young man without-and-
with-Portia. When he becomes aware of Portia he leaves his bachelor life to pursue a married life. He leaves behind what could almost be regarded as a college-fraternity life, in which Antonio and Graziano are his best friends. This change is only possible with Antonio’s support (his older friend in the play). After that there is the Bassanio-with-Portia moment, the casket scene. Then, bending again towards his bachelor life, Bassanio has to go to court to help Antonio. Reaffirming loyalty to his friendship to Antonio, Bassanio apparently loses love. At this point, he appears to be an insecure, undecided, young man who does not know whether he wants to commit to love with Portia (actually becoming an adult man) or if he still considers the fraternity life more important to him (remaining a young man). Portia decides for Bassanio in the end, for a good closure for all of them. She does that because the Merchant is a romantic-comedy. The casket scene reveals true love. And this emotion cannot be torn apart by anything. As Rozmovits points out: “here was a woman [Portia] who had it all and was, nevertheless, willing to give it up once she had found the right man” (Rozmovits 51).

For the realization in film the relationship of Antonio and Bassanio is thought akin to the one written in Il Pecorone (one of Shakespeare’s sources appropriated for his Merchant). Antonio and Bassanio are again united by family ties, with Antonio being a young uncle to Bassanio.
Bassanio, in the film idea, carries the image of a sex object, who is a seducer as well, needing to attract Portia’s attention. He must appear to be as powerful as she is.

Bassanio represents a choice between love, friendship and money. He is the symbolic construction of the needed-male-partner-for-the-female-character, conqueror and the conquest at once. Bassanio’s move from Venice to Belmont supports the choice for the fairytale world, that Belmont is a better place than Venice.

7.3 Portia

Portia carries the most important and also oscillating character structure of this Shakespeare play. According to Rozmovits, She embodies a political struggle “between private and public spheres” (Rozmovits 57). She is woman and man, Belmont and Venice, fairy-tale and reality. As Penny Gay states:

Portia is one of the most sociologically complex of Shakespeare’s women. We meet her in a specifically defined and constraining social class and financial milieu, subject to her father’s disposal of her (even from beyond the grave). We also watch her venture into autonomous action in the real world outside Belmont’s gilded cage; but
she can only act effectively in this world by disguising herself as a clever boy... She is only one of Shakespeare’s comic heroines... not to be silenced by male resumption of power at the end of the play. (Gay 431)

Victor Cahn in *The Plays of Shakespeare: A Thematic Guide* presents a contrary opinion. He does not see in the play a powerful and interesting Portia. Cahn identifies her as an unhappy woman, waiting for love,

All Portia’s actions reflect her need to stand on her own by liberating herself from society’s male influence, particularly that of the father who condemned her to years of inactivity. (Cahn 74)

Because Portia is a woman, supposedly, desirable and pretty she is often identified as a castrating woman. She is seen as an object rather than a subject, switching from her father’s to her husband’s authority. For Scott Wilson in “Heterology,” her act of cross-dressing is only “exploiting the signifying potential of a bawdy joke in which woman, or a woman’s body, is the degraded comic and fatal object” (Wilson 145). This idea is also explored by John Drakakis, The sexual symbolism of transvestism, the transgression of traditional gender roles and the figural transgression of heterosexual relations, the multivalence of linguistic meanings in women’s and clowns’ speech, all interrogate and reveal
contradictions in the Elizabethan sex/gender system in which women were commodities whose exchange both produced and reproduced hierarchical gender relations. (Drakakis 119)

In the interpretation of this dissertation Portia is a character subverting power. It is true for both Portia and Jessica the idea of transgressing powers, and the representation of unruly women. Portia is one of the great strong female roles of Shakespeare’s plays. Her romantic and, at the same time, strong essence can be related to Shakespeare’s Viola of Twelfth Night in their cross-dressing. Disguised they both enter the real world to stand for what they believe. Portia leaves fairytale land, Belmont, for the real world, Venice. Through a fantasy-like act (the cross-dressing), Portia steps into a new territory, Venice. By cross-dressing, Portia turns herself into an imaginary male version of herself performing a man and an attorney. The lady from fairy-tale is an actress in the real world. Portia is real in fiction, as the lady from the fairy-tale-Belmont, and fiction in real, as the male-attorney of the real-Venice.

Portia embodies romantic love, paternal structure, class segmentation, Italian-mask traditions and gender transitions. The Portia envisioned for the realization in film is an empowered character. She is the one who conducts the story. Bassanio goes to Belmont because of her.
Antonio’s debt to Shylock is made because of her. The action in the story happens because of her, all the conflicts and the resolutions center on her. Therefore, it is essentially through her character development that the narrative is constructed. The film songs are her songs, or because-of-her songs.

Portia represents the love-interest-woman and the heroine of the story. And in the film musical realization proposed she also synthesizes the power and revolutionary figure of Jessica. Portia is the symbolic construction for the solution of the problems, and the paradoxically strong-but-fragile-woman representation. Like Shylock, Portia is a wealthy an alien in the real world of Venice. He is Jew; she is Christian but a woman. As Drakakis suggests,

What draws Portia and Shylock together as particular foci of resistance is that they are both possessed of material wealth which Venice needs. What distinguishes them from each other in structural terms is that, while in Portia’s case the institution already exists for making the wealth available, and constitutes a legitimate form of acquisition articulated through the discourses of romance and marriage, the stark necessity of Shylock’s role in Venetian economic life can only be expressed negatively. (Drakakis 41-42)
Portia and Shylock are the two points of balance in the story. The realization of an appropriation of Shakespeare’s *Merchant* will always strongly rely on subjective interpretations of these two characters (more than interpretations on any other creative elements of the play).

7.4 Shylock

Shylock is commonly analyzed exclusively under a Jewish-Christian perspective. For the idea of this film realization, Shylock, the Jew, and Portia, the Christian, are meant to represent the two sides of wealth in the Venetian society. She the Christian-wealth-woman is accepted. He, the Jew-wealth-man, is not. Her discourse is acceptable, once she declares as her ruling essence love (foregrounding material motivations).

In the play, according to Drakakis, Shylock “represents that part of Venice’s experience that it habitually repressed” (Drakakis 47). He openly proclaims his material choice, money. But Venice wants Shylock to embrace the common values of its society, a cynical love. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of Venice would suggest an egalitarian society, but this not true for Portia or for Shylock. Portia is only heard by the Venetian citizens because she is disguised as a man.
The Merchant shows that the law in Venice, at the end, is not equal for everyone. Shylock is right according the law, but he is the one punished. The punishment in the play is not only a matter of class, because both Shylock and Portia can be considered rich Italian citizens. In this story of money-love bonds, complications and resolutions are strongly elaborated or supported according to religious, racial, ethnic and cultural aspects. Shylock is punished in his outside condition, as a non-integrated Venetian citizen, a Jew.

Shylock is almost always the main character of productions of Shakespeare’s Merchant. As a segregated and discriminated Jew, the character has opened space for numerous ethnic discussions. In this appropriation of the play realized in film Shylock is the in-between narrative element. He is the one bridging important moments and conflicts. He becomes part of the plot as the villain, complicating Bassanio’s desire to be with Portia. Shylock follows the money-love bonds pattern of the story. It is from money to love that Shylock oscillates. Lending money as a profession, he negotiates with Antonio (who is helping Bassanio). Not receiving the money back at the time stated in a contract signed by Antonio, Shylock takes him to court claiming his pound of flesh (as predicated in the contract). In doing so Shylock is only exercising his right. He made his choice in life. Different from Portia, Shylock chose
money instead of love. He has no mercy in doing business. In the capitalist reality, this explains why he has money to lend, and why his fortune increases.

In Shakespeare’s Merchant love triumphs. Even Shylock’s daughter believes that, and runs away from home to Portia’s citadel. But, for love to triumph completely, the society expects Shylock to choose again between love and money. He is persuaded by the common sense to accept the circumstances, even when not truly changing.

Shylock cannot be criticized for his strong materialistic behavior, his choice for money; in all love relationships of the play money is somehow involved. Bassanio needs money to find love. Portia’s wealth becomes a problem for her to find true love. What the character of Shylock does is to actually externalize the internal conflicts of all the other characters of the play and the society they represent. They sustain a cynical love. Shylock is the only character true in his choice. He makes money, and, at the end, people might love him because he has money.

Shylock and the Jewish issue are the most common and ongoing discussions about Shakespeare’s Merchant. In the idea of this realization, though, Shylock is solely a villain. The ethnic element is still present. But the importance of Shylock relies in his villainy not his ethnicity.
7.5 Shylock: from Jew to Villain

A contemporary representation of Shylock depends upon the cultural perspective from which he is approached (ranging from ethnical stereotypes from Bin Laden to Uncle Sam). Shylock here is taken as a villain, and only as that. He can be represented based on very different interpretations, character types reflecting personal experiences, and differences in culture, territory, class, gender, etc.

Even in Shakespeare’s play an ethnic and religious definition for Shylock is a loose one. Shylock is only another example of Shakespeare’s alien inhabiting the mythical Venice, like Othello, the Moor of Venice, for example. As Murray Levith observes in Shakespeare’s Italian Settings and Plays: “the Jew and the Moor are aliens, ‘strangers’ to Venice and Venetian manners” (Levith 17). Othello is another of Shakespeare’s hero-villains. Shylock and Othello represent determinant roles in their plays. And it is in Venice, and only in Venice, that they can fully assume their dramatic configuration - in a place for the realization of promiscuous fantasies.

In the play, Shylock is the Jew, the anti-Christian man. In a contemporary realization in film, if ethnical and religious issues were to be kept, Shylock would probably be a Muslim. Such orientation would turn the film realization
into a highly political and arguable piece, dealing with the most important world matter these days. The idea of this film realization carries a contemporary social agenda, but it does not aim to accentuate already complicated political and religious matters. I acknowledge the Muslim ethnicity and religious orientation as an adequate representation for the Jew and anti-Christian figure of Shylock, if he is to portray a contemporary metaphor of Shakespeare’s Shylock. The Shylock that I choose to represent, though, is the alien whose pre-supposed Jewish ethnicity (in his daily habits and environment) serves as critic of many ethnicities. This critic is achieved in a comic essence for villain behavior. Woody Allen’s films approach to Jewish issues (being Allen a Jew himself) is the kind of tone of criticism to be stated in the idea of this film realization. It is extremely humorous and ironic, and, at the same time, reflexive in its excessive and ridiculous stereotypical representations of the Jews and Jewish traditions. Allen’s films make concise criticisms and question important Jewish issues, through comedy. The problem is not avoided, it is treated in a different way; it is not the center of the action, but rather the element permeating this action.

Shylock, sustaining the overall genre of the story, ought not to be played tragically, as a victim or a martyr. He ought to be played comically, as the complicating factor of a romantic-comedy. What can facilitate the accomplishment
of this representation is to have the role of Shylock played by an actor easily recognized as a comedian. For instance, instead of Al Pacino (Shylock in the coming version of the Merchant by Michael Radford), the realization of this film would be better suited with an actor like Nathan Lane.

In the idea of the application of the theory of appropriation realized in film, Shylock is a middle-age wealthy businessman who owns a bank, Trial, in Venice. As the villain of the story his repugnancy is shown physically, in his looks and vices. Shylock ought to portray a feeling of unhappiness, despite his social, political and economical power. His image suggests an older version of Bassanio, if he were to never leave Venice to go to Belmont.

7.6 Christians versus Jews: Antonio-Shylock

Operating in oppositional roles to each other, Antonio and Shylock, responsible for the main dramatic conflict, the tragedy, of the story, are similar in many aspects. Shylock and Antonio are businessmen in Venice. And both of them end alone in the story. Shylock is excluded and Antonio is tolerated. According to Graham Holderness, Shylock, as a Jew, and Antonio, as a homosexual merchant, do not have “the benefit of full participation in the social life of the community” (qtd. in Wood, 95).
Antonio is a merchant, an urbanite, a Christian and a socially accepted man. Shylock is a money-lender. He is a man of the city too, but Jewish. He is the other. He is the one to be socially isolated according to Venetian social-preconceptions. For Lindsay Kaplan in her introduction to The Merchant of Venice, the Antonio-Shylock relationship, their economic disagreement, is elaborated on interpretations of the Bible. It reflects the conflicts between Christian and Jews that are part of the history of Christianity: a conflict “in terms of absolute good and evil, suggesting that no common ground exists between Christians and Jews” (Kaplan 9). Their relationship represents a conflict between Old and New Testament. The Christian-Jew conflict indicates winners. The Christian father (Portia’s father) is shown to be influential and powerful over his daughter even after his death, while the Jewish father (Shylock) cannot prevent his daughter (Jessica) running away from him. Kaplan states that:

Shylock’s character suggests an amalgam of beliefs about Jews, rather than a psychologically consistent persona, and his interactions with Venetian Christian evoke a variety of perspectives on Jewish-Christian relations. (Kaplan 11)

The interpretation of the Bible in understanding Shylock could also clarify the issue of how much Shakespeare knew about Jews. Shakespeare’s contemporaries, especially
the educated early modern English citizens, were accustomed to reading in church the Old and New Testament. According to M. M. Mahood in an introduction to the Merchant “to endow Shylock with his race pride, Shakespeare naturally went to the stories of the patriarchs told in the Book of Genesis” (Mahood, The Merchant 185).

Shakespeare’s Jew in the Merchant is a particular English notion of Jews placed within an Italian context. What did Shakespeare actually know about the Jews, or Hebraic traditions, to construct Shylock? McPherson affirms that “Shakespeare knew little about actual Venetian Jews, he was nevertheless able to imagine a situation remarkably like the real thing – an amazing feat” (McPherson 67). According to this author, the English might know that “there were rich Jews in Venice who were allowed to practice their religion openly” (McPherson 62). He even observes that it was in Venice that the word ghetto was originated. It designated the place the Jews were obligated to live wearing specific clothes, the gabardine. But in the play there is a lack of actual detail in on the life of the Jews in Venice. It is likely that neither Shakespeare nor his contemporary English society knew much about Jews, especially about Jews living in Venice. As Halio states in Understanding The Merchant of Venice:

Whether Shakespeare knew any Jews... is not known for certain. What he did know or could hardly
avoid knowing was the literary tradition in which Jews were represented. This tradition did not portray Jews simply as either heroes or villains; it portrayed them as both. (Halio, Understanding 48)

Edward I in 1290 expelled the Jews from England, and few of them remained in the country. Therefore, the conflict set by Shakespeare in Venice between Jews and Christians, when observed within the English context then, actually corresponds to a conflict between Protestants and Catholics. The Christians Shakespeare defends in the Merchant, might actually be the English Protestants. The Jews accused in the same story might actually be Catholics. The religious experience that Shakespeare had was the one of an England independent of the Roman Catholic Church (in contrast to a Catholic Italy). In this sense, Shylock is constructed less as a Jew than as a general other, an English alien, an outsider, a villain. Shylock has received distinctive interpretations. Being Jew might heighten but not determine his villainy. He is a human being moved by material aspirations and a will of revenge against a traitor, his own daughter.

James Shapiro, one of the contemporary and most respected critics of Shakespeare (specially on Shylock and Jewish issue), observes that “any discussion of the presence of Jews in Shakespeare’s England depends upon what one means
by Jew” (Shapiro 13). He is suspicious of the fact that there were not many Jews in England during Shakespeare’s time because of the recurrence of this figure in plays of the period. Yet, one of his central arguments only comes to support the thesis that Shylock is essentially and solely a villain. He sees Shylock as translation of an anti-alien sentiment, a cultural practice that acquired form in the face of a Jew:

The Merchant of Venice is a play, a work of fiction, not a diary [...] since no one knows what Shakespeare personally thought about Jews, readers will continue to make up their own minds about this question. (Shapiro 121)

Shapiro concludes that the play is not just a play dealing with anti-Semitic issues, as many argue. Rather, it is a site for equal discussions of differences on race, nationality, sexuality and religion. The context in which an appropriation and realization of the Merchant is produced, and the focus given on the play, re-determines its meaning, and what it is about. As Shapiro suggests:

As long as anxieties about racial, national, sexual, and religious difference continue to haunt the way we imagine ourselves and respond to others, Shakespeare’s words will remain ‘not of an age, but for all time.’(Shapiro 229)
In the interpretation proposed here for Shakespeare’s *Merchant* Shylock represents a comic villain. He is the one who makes the love between the main couple of the play harder to be accomplished. He is a symbolic construction, a narrative device, as a problem to be solved.
8. Analyses of Scenes: casket, trial and ring

The casket, trial and ring scenes are the center of this appropriation of the Merchant. They are the main moments of appropriation constructing the film narrative. It is through these three scenes that the film realization is structured. Determinant events of Shakespeare’s Merchant, these events in this project are described to illustrate the theory of appropriation realized in film. Moreover, these three main scenes constitute moments whose actions are proper to the definition of this film realization as a musical.

The realization in film as a musical is set forth through a medley of popular tunes with different lyrics. Such an approach suggests a similar one to what John Gay first used in his play The Beggar’s Opera (1728), and later Bertold Brecht appropriated in his play Three Penny Opera (1928) and Baz Luhrmann appropriated in his film Moulin Rouge (2001). In the idea of the musical proposed here, the lyrics sung by the actors-singers-dancers communicate Shakespeare’s narrative with a contemporary understanding. Shakespeare’s text and rhyme are replaced with language constituted of music and dance in film.

The visual inspiration for this scene comes from segments of Le Dortoir, a performance by Gilles Maheu and
Carbone 14, directed in film by Françoise Girard. It is a performance with the action based on the setting: a school dormitory with beds, blackboard and various props. The environment is used to generate movement. The performance is also a remarkable film. Its floating camera following the floating bodies of the performers, its lighting, and its spoken and written texts create a coherent interdisciplinary and intertextual narrative. Film, music, and dance compose a unique and contemporary text.

8.1 The casket

In act three, scene two of The Merchant, Portia waits for her betrothal to the suitor who successfully chooses the correct casket from a choice of three: gold, silver, and lead. The casket test was made up by Portia’s father, who, before dying, believed that this test would guarantee his daughter a suitable husband. And the gentleman able to do so is Bassanio. His lines while approaching the caskets are:

The seeming truth which cunning times put on
To entrap the wisest. Therefore, thou gaudy gold,
Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee;
Nor none of thee, thou pale and common drudge
‘Tween man and man: but thou, thou, meager lead.
Which rather threatenest than dost promise aught,
Thy paleness moves me more than eloquence;
And here choose I; joy be the consequence.
(The Merchant of Venice 3.2)
Different interpretations can be drawn from this casket scene. I suggest here that it can be a dramatic device to show Portia’s father cared for her, which also demonstrates Portia’s submission to the patriarchal structure of the English society in Shakespeare’s time. The father’s authority remains powerful in Portia’s life even after his death. The resolution of the casket scene in the play can be recognized as a moral lesson of the simple and poor. It might be the only actual true-Christian message of the play. The right choice of the casket consists in the recognition of its simplicity. It leads to love and to a promising future. The events preceding the casket scene, and the essence of the casket-choice scene re-emphasizes the money-bond theme of the narrative as a determinant aspect of the early modern England society. Marriage then was a money-bond. Shakespeare, with Belmont, attempted to insert some love into a common economic practice. Belmont is a fairy-tale, an enchanted, place, an imaginary land. It is not real, and thus it is the only possible location for the casket test and Portia’s love-bonding environment to exist.

For the casket scene, contemporary bodies inscribe a postmodern performance based on single male performances (the suitors), ensemble dance, and a final pas-de-deux to emphasize the romantic couple (Portia and Bassanio). The collective ensemble also serves as observer of the couple,
constituting the show within a show of this scene. The goal of the collective ensemble is not only the audience’s self-awareness, but also to display the variety of candidates facing the casket test. It also supports the visual nature of the film building a dynamic composition within a meaningful context for the contemporary spectators of the performance.

The use of popular tunes with different lyrics aims to offer today’s young generation the same sensations that Shakespeare’s rhymes once offered. The ensemble dance is an attempt to reconstruct the environment of a nightclub dance floor, also visually fulfilling the space. Each one of Portia’s suitors ought to be accompanied by a different kind of music. The variety of musical rhythms, sung in different languages, represent distinct cultures and ethnicities. These characteristics are also evident in the movement of each particular body, in their responses to each particular musical rhythm.

8.2 The trial

The trial is the tragic moment of Shakespeare’s Merchant. It is the main stage for Shylock’s performance. But, it is also an important site for Portia’s act. Portia comes to Venice to prove her power. Only in a situation when Venetian and Belmont worlds are confronted, Portia’s
strength can be recognized. This is the scene where she imposes her will. In cross-dressing and going to Venice Portia is actually bringing some romance and fantasy to Venice. Fairy-tale does not transform reality. It gives a special taste to reality, reminding it what is missing.

In productions of the play where Shylock, and not Portia, is the main character, this tragic moment is certainly the most important passage of the story. According to Lyon, “of itself, the trial scene more than justifies the greatness of The Merchant of Venice” (Lyon 98).

In the idea of this appropriation realized in film, the trial scene is no less important. It works as a moment for Portia’s empowerment, not for Shylock’s humiliation. In the trial Portia enters the Venetian limits (the real world in contrast to the fantastic Belmont). It is a male environment. And it is as a man that she has to prove her femininity.

The trial scene is, one more time, a stage for Portia, not Shylock. This is Portia’s strongest moment in this story, when she transgresses social hierarchies. She needs to show how powerful she is. She takes to Venice the purity of Belmont, and not at any moment she is corrupted by the wilderness of commercial-Venice. She defends herself disguised as a man. She is somebody else in Venice, not the real her. She is a male attorney. Portia brings fantasy to the brutal atmosphere of Venice.
In the film realization, cross-dressed, Portia saves Antonio, defeating Shylock in business. The atmosphere of the Venetian trial is one of a dangerous-gangster-like-cabaret: dirty and thrilling. The trial is a negotiation among the ones in controlling positions in society.

In Shakespeare’s Merchant the trial reflects the money-bond nature of the play. The religious issue is the one mostly put on display. But the true and simple reason for Shylock and Antonio to be standing in court is money rather than religion. The trial realized in film is envisioned as a financial contract to be discussed, a problem to be resolved at a business table. Money is the essential law. Money is the explicit law ruling this passage. It is business, and as business it is discussed.

This interpretation of the trial is not approached through religious issues. The religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants was one of the most important current topics in Shakespeare’s England. If the religious tone were to be kept, as a contemporary production, this realization would reflect the conflict between Christians and Muslims. Religion, though, is not the central issue here. The idea of this contemporary realization is focused on the alien as villain.

For its scenic composition as a film musical, the trial scene, in the realization, follows the same formal aspects thought for the casket scene. It is envisioned as a
performance that is physically energetic evolving from its environment. The songs are again popular tunes with adapted lyrics. The sequence includes mostly ensemble choreographies for Portia, Nerissa, Bassanio, Graziano, Antonio and Shylock, and solos for Shylock and Portia.

8.3 The ring

After marrying Bassanio Portia gives him a ring that is not to be given away under any circumstance. Yet, by the end of Antonio’s trial, Bassanio is asked by the attorney-Portia, as a reward, to give her the ring, a request he honors. Going back to Belmont, Portia questions her husband on the whereabouts of the ring. Bassanio has no excuse. He cannot be forgiven. He had not kept his promise to Portia about the ring. But surprisingly she forgives him. The explanation for Portia’s forgiveness could be simply the one that makes this play a comedy. The story needs a clear-typical comic ending. The situation is very easily (dis)solved to music. One can observe, however, that there is not fidelity between the lovers. Honesty, wedding vows and promises in this love bonding are tested and fail. As John Russell Brown suggests in an introduction of the play:

The contract of love is not so simple as that. The game of the rings is needed to remind Bassanio (and the audience) that Portia freed his friend.
Bassanio is still indebted and will always be indebted and Portia has still more to give. Love is not like merchandise; it is not simply a question of possessor and possessed... Like all venturers, those who deal in love have to be watchful. (Brown lviii)

The ring symbolizes bonds (the title of this dissertation). More than a symbol of union, the performance involving this circular object-device embodies the essence of this film realization. Whereas the casket passage of the play defines the genre of the story, the ring passage informs what this romantic-comedy is about: bonds.

The ring passage happens in three parts: sealing Portia’s and Bassanio wedding right after the casket scene, as a monetary award after the trial, and leading to the romantic-comedy resolution of the story. The ring is a common symbol of alliance (particularly wedding alliances). In the Merchant, though, the ring puts the alliance (wedding) at stake, when Bassanio gives it away. But, at the very end, it re-establishes the bond, and makes this a happy-ending-story. The ring was to bring a tragedy, but it makes the Merchant a comedy. It bonds love and money. The ring first appears in Belmont, as a proof of love. It is negotiated in Venice. There the symbol of love acquires an economic value; it becomes a reward, a payment. Back in
Belmont, the ring turns into a representation of love again, defining the essence of the play.

In delivering the ring to Bassanio, Portia stresses the importance of such an act. With the ring she is not only giving Bassanio a wedding gift, an award for having chosen the leaden casket. Portia tells Bassanio that with the ring she is delivering herself to him, sharing her legacy with him. Failing in seeing all meanings and values she places in the ring may bring the ruin of her engagement to Bassanio. The ring is the highest proof of love, but a chance for great tragedy as well. Portia’s lines to Bassanio in giving him the ring are:

   Myself and what is mine to you and yours
   Is now converted. But now I was the lord
   Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
   Queen o’er myself; and even now, but now,
   This house, these servants, and this same myself
   Are yours, my lord’s. I give them with this ring,
   Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
   Let it presage the ruin of your love,
   And be my vantage to exclaim you. (The Merchant of Venice 3.2)

Nevertheless, Bassanio seems not to understand Portia when receiving her ring. Cross-dressed in Venice as the young attorney, Portia asks Bassanio for the ring, testing his faithfulness to the promise he was committed. Bassanio
fails this test of fidelity by giving the ring away. The
giving away of the ring in Venice (together with Antonio’s
trial) almost turns the story into tragedy. Bassanio comes
back to Belmont and is questioned about the ring.
Recognizing his fault to Portia, the marriage seems to be
over. Bassanio tries to excuse himself to Portia:

By heaven, I will ne’er come in your bed
Until I see the ring.

If you had known the virtue of the ring,
Or half her worthiness that gave the ring,
Or your own honour to contain the ring,
You would not then have parted with the ring.
What man is there so much unreasonable,
If you had pleased to have defended it
With any terms of zeal, wanted the modesty
To urge the ring held as a ceremony?
(The Merchant of Venice 5.1)

The possibility of the story to become a tragedy,
though, vanishes away, as Portia reveals to Bassanio her
passage through Venice. There is no resolution for the play
other than a comic one. Portia’s unfaithful, weak and sinful
husband is forgiven. To be a romantic-comedy, in this story
love triumphs under the moon, as Portia reveals to Bassanio
her secret passage through Venice:

Pardon me, Bassanio,
For by this ring, the doctor lay with me.

[...] You shall find that Portia was the doctor,
Nerissa there her clerk. (The Merchant of Venice 5.1)

The formal aspects for the visual composition of the ring passages in the film musical realization remain the same as described for the casket and trial scenes. It is a stylistic and structural characteristic for the unity of the film piece, a visual identity to be perceived throughout the presentation. The ring plot ought to mix ensemble and pas-de-deux performances whose intense and highly-excited movements evolve from the environment of the action. The choreographies are envisioned to be accompanied again with popular tunes with different lyrics specifically written for each of the three parts of the ring plot: first romantic in the delivering of the ring, sad in the giving away of the ring as a payment, and at the end for the beach environment, sealing Portia’s and Bassanio wedding.
9. What Is the Appropriation Realized in Film Responding To?

The names of characters, plots and places thought for this appropriation realized in film are the same as the ones of the play, in order to keep clear reference to its source. Yet, the creative constructions that the names refer to (characters, plots and places) are completely displaced from Shakespeare’s context. The elements for the film realization are all drawn from an analysis of the play and re-elaborated to fit a distinct context. Some plots, scenes and characters are suppressed, or diminished, some are added. The appropriation re-arranges elements to coherently realize a contemporary film, no longer the Shakespearean play. The screenplay attempts to compose a sustainable film-story-structure for a romantic-comedy.

The motivation in making this realization a film musical lies on the interdisciplinary and intertextual character of the theory proposed. The realization is also thought in this format not only aiming to be a self-reflexive and entertaining art piece but also to maintain the fairytale tone of the play. The idea of a film musical is equally sustained in the nature of Shakespeare’s Merchant, as a romantic-comedy. The soundtrack is built upon popular tunes, though, used with lyrics written specifically to tell the ongoing situations they are narrating. The
choreographies are physical manifestations impelled by these sounds, stressing the tone of the story to be constructed on the screen. The musical displays more physically (in the bodies and their movements) a visual composition for the romantic intentions leading the main characters. It also intensifies the dramatic developments of the characters, giving a particular mood to each of the segments of the story. The music, lyrics and movements tend toward tragedy during Antonio’s trial, while the very same elements come to emphasize comic and romantic tones to make this a fairytale story.

The fragmented experience of time and space, typical of video-music clips, is a familiar audiovisual construction for the public addressed. A film musical like the one envisioned here for the application of the theory of appropriation realized in film seeks to speak to its audience in a familiar way of expression. The twenty-first century post-adolescent generation is one searching for dynamic and kinetic experiences. Composing lyrics proper to the story written upon existent pop hit songs, brings to film an alternative kind of dialogue with its audience. It allows this public to observe the creative textual-musical construction of the film story, and its differentiated narrative structure.

Another important aspect justifying this project as a musical is an aimed self-reflexivity. It is achieved in the
experience of the audience of seeing an audience also experiencing a performance within the film. The show within a show of the film realization happens in fairytale, in the world of the fantastic. The contrast of real and unreal in film conventions, represented by off and on the stage, in the idea of this film realization is a condition naturally implied in the locations the story is set: Venice and Belmont. Each of these places carries a different essence: reality and fairy-tale, respectively. As a rule, show musicals are identified by having a film audience watching the film show. Such a viewing experience is also attempted in this realization. But it happens through characters of the film who take part in the action. Whenever standing still, they unavoidably constitute the internal audience of the performance in the film. They are not seated in front of a stage, but they watch the world in front of them.

Shakespeare’s language in the Merchant for a contemporary film realization is to be a contemporary spoken language. Such a choice is for the lines of the film that are not sung, but spoken. When the lines are to be sung, more liberties can be taken. In this case more of Shakespeare’s text is appropriated. Music is a poetic language. Shakespeare’s poetry is then more easily suitable to a contemporary understanding when employed as musical lyrics; nothing that might seem awkward to a contemporary English-speaking young audience is kept in the film.
In this interpretation of the *Merchant*, it is a comedy. A primary issue for this idea of a realization in film is to clearly define this genre. Having Portia and Bassanio’s story as the main single plot of the film is the strongest argument to assume this as a romantic-comedy film. The narrative is constructed with the couple, Portia and Bassanio, and the consolidation of their loving interests overcoming adversities toward a happy ending. Different from the play, for the film, the story ends with only the wedding of Portia and Bassanio. They are the only couple to truly marry in the film, concentrating the focus of the story.

The realization in film envisions the love story of Portia and Bassanio in Belmont. It is a love relation complicated by events taking place in Venice, which are undertaken by the villain of the story, Shylock. All other characters and motivations are minor to this narrative. The film realization concentrates stories, eliminating many subplots and characters of the play. The characters to be kept in film are Portia, Bassanio, Nerissa, Graziano, Antonio, Jessica and Shylock. The characters of Shakespeare’s *Merchant*, Salerio, Solanio, Tubal, Lancelot, Gobbo, Balthasar, Stefano, the Duke of Venice, Leonardo and Lorenzo are not characters of the film. Portia is still Shakespeare’s heroine, and Bassanio her love-partner. Nerissa is Portia’s best friend who engages in a love relation with Graziano, Bassanio’s best friend then. Shylock
is still the villain, the stereotype of a villain. He is Jessica’s father. Jessica runs away from her home, but not to be with Lorenzo anymore. This is one of the most important changes of this film musical realization. Jessica leaves her father to be with Antonio, who is then her love partner. In the idea of the realization in film, Antonio is not Bassanio’s dear friend, but Bassanio’s young uncle (as in Il Pecorone) who finances his living expenses. These changes involving Antonio (having him younger, as Jessica’s love-partner and as Bassanio’s uncle) have specific implications in organizing the story of the film in a more coherent manner. The relation between Bassanio and Antonio becomes more easily understood, and, at the same time, Shylock has much stronger and comprehensible reasons for his revenge against Antonio.

The historical and cultural conditions determining the film is to be evident in every single aspect of this production. This is how the appropriation realizes itself, as a contemporary film. It is mostly recognizable in the musical choices, meant to be recent pop-hits immediately identified by the audience. The same applies to the architecture, automobiles and airplanes, clothes and objects (props) of the film, examples of last-generation and fashionable devices. The story is set in a contemporary environment. It evolves from contemporary manifestations and expressions that in turn motivate the contemporary movements
and performances of this production. This idea of an appropriation of Shakespeare’s *Merchant* realized in film seeks an audiovisual composition of frames in a certain rhythmic sequence responding to music and choreography familiar to a twenty-first century post-adolescent public.

Fairy-tale suits the music for Portia and Bassanio to fall in love and marry at the end. The wedding only happens at the end, so they have time to learn about each other, and that makes destiny’s choice more easily accepted. Shakespeare’s fairytale is kept in this film idea as the essential storyline, and the source of the poetry for the music lyrics. The casket scene of the *Merchant* gives the love relation of Portia and Bassanio a poetic and symbolic nature. The pound of flesh can still be cut from Antonio; but only as a private talking (music) to be sung between Shylock and Antonio in a fairytale-like-moment of the performance within the show.

As film, this is an artistically constructed reality, framed and articulated (with editing and post-production film manipulations) in the principles of a video-clip piece. It is to speak loud, and to truly speak with its spectators today. It attempts to show how one can still experience a Shakespeare text in a sense of fullness. This contemporary appropriation of the *Merchant* realized in film aims to present in familiar ways an apparently unfamiliar text. The complete scene is a portrait of its time: in its setting,
music, body and movement. In film this environment is technically accomplished with fast cut editing of non-stop traveling shots of non-stop moving bodies.

We manifest ourselves in a world of dynamic relations. Our bodies respond to a demand for total experiences of the senses. The main issue in validating a contemporary and subjective interpretation, suggested through out this dissertation, is that the one who distracts and entertains him/herself with films is the same one who is creating the entertainment.
Conclusion

The fundamental premise of this dissertation is to set the framework for a specific kind of film adaptation. Renamed and re-defined as a process of appropriation realized in film, this theoretical elaboration is based on the belief in a contemporary synthesis of interdisciplinary and intertextual efforts in the realization of a film. Interdisciplinary and intertextuality determine the particularities of the film medium and the historical and cultural conditions determining the idea of a contemporary process of appropriation and realization in film. The theory here developed focused on appropriations of Shakespeare’s plays realized in film, in particular The Merchant of Venice. The analytical appropriation of this play in this project served as a hypothetical application of the theory proposed.

A contextual analysis of Shakespeare’s work enables a coherent realization of his work for contemporary societies. The common conventions of a given world preset and define a specific social environment, and respond to a determined context – the historical and cultural conditions of the manifestation. The film realization is no longer Shakespeare’s play, it cannot be. The medium and the historical and cultural conditions are different. The renaming and re-definition of the term film adaptation aims
not only to avoid a history of prejudice and pre-determined concepts toward this kind of film productions. This re-naming and re-definition finds in the word *appropriation* an emphasis on the interdisciplinary and intertextual character expected of artistic expressions. This re-elaborated process is understood in the establishment of a subjective creation reflecting the peculiarities of its creator, its process of creation and its intended audience.
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