

Institution: University of Westminster
Unit of Assessment: UoA 34; Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
Title of case study: Adapting stage productions for the screen
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>John Wyver's research on strategies for creative adaptation of theatre and opera to the screen has had an impact on cultural life, on the economic prosperity of UK cultural sector, and on education. His practice-based research on television adaptations of contemporary opera and Shakespeare plays has been central to British television's presentation of performance since 2008. This research has led to a spend of more than £3 million in British independent television production. His productions have been the focus for significant educational initiatives by the BBC and The Open University. From 2012 he has been engaged as Media Associate by the Royal Shakespeare Company in order to embed his research within their activities and develop a future strategy.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research of John Wyver (Senior Research Fellow, 2006-present) includes a practice-based strand encompassing television broadcasts, made collaboratively with Wyver as the lead creative producer heading teams of theatre and broadcast professionals. This practice-based work carried out while he has been a member of the CREAM research group has been complemented by documentation and analysis of his practice in conference papers and numerous blog posts. It has also been contextualised by his historical research on the arts on British television, including his 2007 monograph <i>Vision On: Film, Television and the Arts in Britain</i> (submitted to RAE 2008).</p> <p>In a series of ambitious, large-scale television productions, as creative producer or co-producer he has developed collaborative working methods and insights leading to a highly distinctive form of theatre-film hybrid for which there are few precedents in earlier adaptations. While his productions are filmed, variously, in combinations of real-world locations and theatrical environments, they have engaged a range of film languages to create dynamic screen versions while still retaining a creative 'core' or 'essence' of the original. The productions have demonstrated effective strategies for the use of spaces, technologies, filming styles and genre conventions in adaptations that extend the original's meanings and impact for new audiences.</p> <p>Prior to Wyver's productions most adaptations of theatre productions had involved either straightforward documentation shot in a theatre or the transfer of the production to a television studio for recording with multiple cameras. While effective at recording the original productions, these strategies largely failed to achieve a distinctive screen-based effect or to engage broad audiences. As a consequence, broadcast television had largely withdrawn from the adaptation of stage productions for the screen.</p> <p>Wyver's research pioneered transferring productions from the stage to real-world locations, working with the precision and focus afforded by a single camera, dedicated lighting for each shot and the control offered by post-production editing. His creative collaboration with the directors of the stage productions involved a complete rethinking of each scene and each actor's performance. This process enhanced the aesthetic effect of the original staging and created a new hybrid form of theatre-film (see Mark Lawson quote in section 4 below).</p> <p>Wyver's productions include <i>The Eternity Man</i> (C4, 2008); <i>Hamlet</i> (BBC Two, 2009); <i>Macbeth</i> (BBC Four, 2010); and <i>Julius Caesar</i> (BBC Four, 2012), all submitted as research outputs in REF 2. Since March 2013 he has been producing a live-to-cinema broadcast (scheduled for November 2013) of the RSC's new production of <i>Richard II</i>. Each production has built on the insights of the previous production to find new and unique solutions to the problems of adaptation. These insights include the ways in which the use of spaces beyond theatres creates and determines meanings; the forms of support necessary for performers to adapt theatre performances for the screen; the film grammar (including questions of shot length, editing rhythms and the like) most appropriate for adaptations of staged productions; and new creative possibilities of rapidly-evolving image and</p>

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sound production technologies.

Links to Wyver's blogs detailing the production of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* can be found here:

http://www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk/blog/index.cfm?start=1&news_id=371

http://www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk/blog/index.cfm?start=1&news_id=549

The research and production processes involved extensive collaboration with a broad range of partners, including the creative teams of each original production, theatre companies, funders and broadcasters, and large-scale film production units. For each production, John Wyver assembled the partners and the key creative talents, was the creative leader of each project, and collaborated closely on each stage of the adaptation process to make the original available in a new and effective creative form. See REF2 portfolios for further details of Wyver's roles within this process.

Since 2011 Wyver has been PI on an AHRC-funded project at University of Westminster, *Screen Plays: Theatre Plays on British Television*, which is documenting, for the first time, all adaptations of theatre plays made for British television, and developing historical and theoretical understanding of such adaptations. As this project runs until 2015, there are no published outputs yet, although work-in-progress is extensively documented in the blog at <https://screenplaystv.wordpress.com/>.

3. References to the research

The first four research outputs are included in the HEI's REF2 submission. DVDs and portfolios are available there for all four productions. Output 5 was included in the HEI's RAE 2008 submission.

[1] *The Eternity Man* (2008), a film version of a contemporary opera directed for television by Julien Temple; produced by John Wyver, Alex Fleetwood, Rosemary Blight. Budget: £800,000 from Channel 4 and ABC Australia, plus various Australian film funding sources. First broadcast in the UK on 28 December 2008, also broadcast on ABC Australia. Selected for screening at the Sydney and Locarno International Film Festivals. Winner of the Lucerne Rose d'Or Prize, 2009.

[2] *Hamlet* (2009). Film version of the RSC production with David Tennant, directed by Gregory Doran, produced by John Wyver and Sebastian Grant. An RSC/Illuminations production. 185 mins. Budget: £950,000, from BBC Television, WNET13, NHK and BBC Worldwide. First broadcast 26 December 2009, BBC Two; subsequent broadcasts as part of Great Performances on PBS, 28 April 2010, and then on television in Japan, Sweden and elsewhere. Made freely available for US audiences as a permanent free stream from PBS website. Released on DVD in the USA, and on Blu-ray and DVD in UK, and available internationally for download-to-own via iTunes and others.

[3] *Macbeth* (2010). Film version of the Chichester Festival Theatre production starring Sir Patrick Stewart, directed by Rupert Goold and produced by John Wyver and Sebastian Grant. 150 mins. An Illuminations/WNET13 production in association with BBC. Budget £1,050,000, funded by WNET13 and BBC Television. Premiered on WNET13 on 6 Oct 2010 and screened by public TV stations across USA. Later screened on BBC Four. Winner of a Peabody Award, USA, 2010. The production has been released on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK and the USA, and is freely available for users in North America, together with related resources including an 'Educator's Guide', at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/episodes/macbeth/watch-the-full-program/1030/>

[4] *Julius Caesar* (2012). Film version of RSC World Shakespeare Festival production, directed by Gregory Doran, and produced by John Wyver. Commissioned for BBC Four, broadcast 24 June 2012, 150 minutes; Budget £650,000 from BBC Television and the Open University. The production has been released on DVD in the UK.

[5] *Vision On: Film, Television and the Arts in Britain*, John Wyver, London: Wallflower Press, 2007; in *Prospect* magazine David Herman wrote: 'John Wyver's superb book, the best ever written about British television and one of the most illuminating accounts of British postwar culture.' Written in the context of the HEI's AHRC-funded 'Arts on Screen' project (£330,000: PI, ten Brink).

4. Details of the impact

Impact on cultural life

Audiences: The four productions detailed in the preceding section have been seen by significant audiences both in the UK and internationally. *Hamlet* was viewed by a television audience of 900,000 on its first UK broadcast, with a further 100,000 viewing on demand – it was also later repeated on BBC Four; *Macbeth* was viewed by 400,000 on its first UK broadcast, and was later repeated on BBC Four; and *Julius Caesar* was viewed by 150,000 with a further 100,000 viewing on BBC iPlayer streams in the week following its first broadcast. The productions have continued to enjoy a strong life after their television broadcasts. *Hamlet* has sold more than 40,000 copies on DVD and Blu-ray internationally, and in the UK *Macbeth* has sold more than 7,000 copies. In the first six months of its release *Julius Caesar* has sold more than 3,000 copies on DVD in the UK.

Critical and Audience Acclaim: The productions that resulted from the research have been extensively discussed in both non-specialist and academic contexts and have been central to the consideration of screen-based versions of performance across the past five years. They have been widely commented on in public blogs and via Twitter. Links to the extensive coverage and discussion of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* are found in Section 5 below. For example:

Hamlet received widespread media coverage in the *Guardian*. Mark Lawson wrote '[the production] ...should settle for some time the debate over whether it's possible to transfer theatre to TV: Gregory Doran's RSC production has been reimagined as an intimate, intense film.' Prime Minister Gordon Brown wrote of the production in *The Observer*, 'Like many people, I had my love of Shakespeare reawakened by David Tennant's TV portrayal of Hamlet over Christmas.'

The *Daily Telegraph* called *Macbeth* 'a dazzlingly inventive film.' The film was honoured with a George Foster Peabody Award in 2010.

Peter Kirwan, Lecturer in Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama at University of Nottingham, described *Julius Caesar* as 'a fantastic experiment and one I hope the RSC repeats in future years; to create something specifically geared to film that complements a theatrical production is a bold endeavour that respects the advantages and possibilities of the different media, and provided a fascinating platform for a worthwhile production.'

Commissioning executives: The BBC confirms that the success of Wyver's *Hamlet* alerted the BBC to new creative possibilities of stage-to-screen transfers and to audience interest in these, which in turn contributed to the BBC's decisions to commission subsequent Shakespeare productions. Wyver's research and distinctive approach to production was a significant factor in these decisions. An Executive Producer of WNET 13, USA, confirms the value of Wyver's productions to American public television broadcast and its online audiences, and the importance of Wyver's approach and research in the decision by WNET 13 to co-commission *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* with the BBC.

Consultancy: The research has led directly to John Wyver being engaged by the RSC as Media Associate in December 2012 to develop and produce live-to-cinema broadcasts of the company's productions. Production of *Richard II* began in March 2013 (for transmission in autumn 2013). He has also started work on a strategic plan for the RSC for its broadcast and other screen plans across the next five years.

Impact on economic prosperity of UK cultural sector

Collectively, *The Eternity Man*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* attracted a total of £3.5 million of funding from public broadcasters in Britain, the United States, Japan and Australia. Of this funding, £3 million for the productions was spent with independent producers and within the UK creative industries, supporting actors, musicians, directors, designers and editors, as well as support services such as equipment hire companies and others.

Hamlet has generated total broadcast, DVD and other format sales in excess of £300,000 for the distributor BBC Worldwide, and the DVD and Blu-ray releases of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Julius*

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Caesar continue to generate sales for UK distributors and retailers.

Impact on education

The BBC and the RSC collaborated with Wyver on a major *Hamlet* educational website alongside the production, and this has been used in schools and colleges since 2009. The website includes extensive behind-the-scenes video and interviews with cast members and the creative team and is designed as a resource for understanding the adaptation of a Shakespeare play for the screen as well as for historical context and educational exercises. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/hamlet/archive.shtml>

Both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* have been made freely available to online users in North America with extensive accompanying educational materials. *Julius Caesar* is to be used as a key component of a forthcoming Open University course about early modern literature. Six short films about *Julius Caesar* were also produced for The Open University about the production and its adaptation for the screen. <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/whats-on/tv/ou-on-the-bbc-julius-caesar>. The use of the research outputs within education to date led, in spring 2013, to the RSC developing a project with Ravensbourne College of Art to stream without charge the cinema broadcast of *Richard II*, produced by John Wyver, to more than 1,000 schools in the UK.

Impact on public engagement

- Questions of adaptation and translation to the screen focussed on these research outputs have been the subject of public presentations by Wyver at BFI Southbank, USC and Caltech, Los Angeles, the University of Oxford, the Whitstable Biennale and the University of Reading.
 - The productions and their strategies for screen translations have been discussed in numerous public blog posts at both the Screen Plays site: <http://screenplaystv.wordpress.com/> as well as on the Illuminations blog: <http://www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk/news/>
- Topics discussed in both contexts have included the complementary screen translation strategies of Met Opera: Live in HD. NT Live and Digital Theatre as well as a wide range of other Shakespeare productions for television.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Corroboration of viewing figures for *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* can be found in the relevant weekly audience reports produced for BBC Television. Dossier of BBC correspondence on request.
2. Links to the extensive coverage and discussion of *Hamlet* can be found here: http://www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk/blog/index.cfm?start=1&news_id=548
3. Links to the extensive coverage and discussion of *Macbeth* can be found here: http://www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk/blog/index.cfm?start=1&news_id=906
4. Review by Lecturer in Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama, University of Nottingham, review of *Julius Caesar* DVD <http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/bardathon/2012/06/25/julius-caesar-rscilluminations-bbc4/>
5. Arts and Performance Commissioning Editor, BBC Television, supports claim that [research contributed to decisions to produce *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, and that the success of *Hamlet* alerted the BBC to new creative possibilities of stage-to-screen](#). Letter on request.
6. Executive Producer, *Great Performances*, WNET13, New York, details the impact of both productions for viewers and users of American public television. Letter on request.
7. Artistic Director, Royal Shakespeare Company details impact and benefit of *Hamlet* and of *Julius Caesar* for the audiences and educational campaigns created by the RSC, and that the underlying research led to the collaborations with John Wyver on *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*, and to John Wyver being engaged as Media Associate to produce live-to-cinema broadcasts for the company and to develop the company's strategic partnerships with broadcasting and other screen industries. Letter on request.
8. International sales to broadcast television, digital downloads, and DVD and Blu-ray copies of *Hamlet* are detailed in sales and royalty reports from BBC Worldwide. Dossier on request.
9. Managing Director, Illuminations, confirms budget figures for productions, UK creative industries spend in excess of £3 million and DVD and Blu-ray UK sales figures for *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*. Letter on request.