

À la recherche de L'Île perdue

by

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ABSTRACT

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Raul Ruiz famously referred to his 1985 adaptation of Robert Louis-Stevenson's *Treasure Island* as a "trailer or user's manual" for his entire cinema. Given that the film involved two years of pre-production, a three-month shoot, and then a tortuous six year post-production process in which both major financiers—Paulo Branco's Les films du passage and 80s B-movie powerhouse Cannon Films—experienced bankruptcy, it would seem somewhat strange to the outsider, though not entirely uncharacteristic to the initiated that he would do so. This thesis addresses Ruiz's self-assessment by doing two things: firstly, it attends to the relationship between theory and practice in the director's cinema, using his writings as the foundation for a production history of the film (focusing, in particular, on Cannon's attempts to legitimize and "civilize" its cinematic output, and the manner in which Ruiz's emphasis upon the aleatory is reflected in the aesthetic scars of the film). Secondly, it uses this history—as well as the literary reading theory of Québec scholar Gilles Thérien—as a foundation for its central argument: *Treasure Island* is an allegory of the Ruizian reading process itself. Understanding the film in such a way opens the door for further academic work on the director's adaptation process, an under-theorized area within the field of Ruiz study.

Dedicated to:

Raul

'Cos Socrates is as much a cat as he is a ghost

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INTRODUCTION

An Unruly Guide

[D]u moins dans mon cas, la théorisation, la réflexion abstraite ne m'a pas perturbé dans la fabrication de mes films. Et cela sans que la fiction ne soit l'illustration ou la preuve de la théorie, ni que la théorie soit la généralisation des actions filmées. (Ruiz 2011, 90)

What if life is like a soup with all kinds of things floating in it, and from time to time some of them get stuck together by chance to make some kind of whole?
(Lem 204)

Most work dedicated to the cinema of Raul Ruiz must begin by explaining how challenging his work is to articulate, how it evades categorical assessment, and, as a consequence, how difficult it is to write a consistent and coherent account of the director's cinema. Given that, from the 1980s onwards, Ruiz would begin to work more consistently with multiple stories within the same fictions—and that contradiction is the rule rather than the exception of the cinematic worlds that he creates—it would seem, at times, equally hard to produce a coherent account of one film, let alone a whole series.¹ Appropriately, the relatively scant critical and theoretical work completed on the director's cinema—useful material largely written in the French language—has tended to view the director's work through the lens of the cinematic neo-baroque—as in Richard Béghin's *Baroque Cinématographique* (2008) or Christine Buci-

¹ In the words of Cyril Béghin: “Ruiz aimait la contradiction, au double sens où il était, dans la vie réelle, un grand artiste de la conversation et où il pouvait, dans un film, inventer la cohésion de deux états opposés : mort-vivant, adulte-enfant, rêve-réalité. Mais aussi bien : avant et arrière-plan dissociés, flous et nets combinés, effets baroques de mise en scène et moments de complète platitude—et pourquoi pas...” (Béghin 2011, 82).

Glucksmann and Fabrice Revault d'Allonnes' *Raul Ruiz* (1988)—and as such, has used the baroque as a theoretical prism with which to attend to the multiplicities and contradictions that characterize individual films. Other significant accounts—though not particularly large in number, the first English-language overview of the director's oeuvre having only been published in 2012—fall broadly into the categories of Surrealism and Post-Colonial studies, the former attempting to excavate a Surrealist impulse at the heart of Ruiz's process, and the latter focusing on the director's exilic status, and, consequently, the theme of exile within his films. Identified as both a director who disregards the trappings of conventional storytelling and characterization, and at the same time a quintessentially modernist auteur equipped with a number of formal tricks and thematic ticks—gaudy filters, split di-opter lenses, ghostly characters as corporeal and alive as the living—Ruiz's cinema is a peculiar admixture of intention and accident, of creative happenstance and recondite cultural reference.

Despite the difficulties that attend to any account of Ruiz's work, it is still possible to broadly demarcate the boundaries of each period of his filmmaking career. Michael Richardson usefully, if not definitively, does so, when he argues that the first four decades of the filmmaker's career fit into four rough chronological periods:

“[T]he Chilean era, when he devoted himself to the development of a film culture supporting a socialist agenda; the seventies films that deconstruct narrative and especially documentary traditions, those of the eighties... devoted to poetic exuberance and wild imaginings; and the films from the nineties, which try to apply what he has learned from his experiments to address a wider cinema audience.” (Richardson 156)

Most if not all Ruiz commentators would agree with this assessment—each, no doubt, with their own reservations and minor adjustments: the Chilean era categorized by the director’s first feature *Tres Tristes Tigres* (1968), an investigation of petty-bourgeois life in Chile, the seventies cinema by *L’Hypothèse du tableau volé* (1978) and *De grands événements et de gens ordinaires* (1978), the eighties by his “breakout” success *Les Trois couronnes du matelot* (1983),² and the nineties by *Trois Vies et une seule mort* (1995) and, latterly—and perhaps most famously—*Le Temps Retrouvé* (1999). In the last two working decades of Ruiz’s life, we witness the director’s cinematic return to Chile with his *Cofralandes* (2001) series, and his critically award winning *Mysteries of Lisbon* (2010), perhaps the most conventional cinematic adaptation that the director ever produced. Certain obsessions persist, of course, transcending the confines of individual periods—interest in the theological questions of free will and pre-destination, say, filtered through debates between Molinism and Thomism, or his distrust of the cinema as a “transparent” mode of representation—but the distinctions made here allow us to usefully chart the significant movements of what was an extended and prolific career not only within the cinematic arts, but also within television, gallery installation and video art.

It is within his most extravagant formal period in the eighties—a decade which brought together for the first time Ruiz with his long-time friend and producer Paulo Branco—that we find the focus of our analysis: the director’s 1985 film *Treasure Island*. Given that the film involved two years of pre-production, a three-month shoot, and then a tortuous six year post-production process in which both major financiers—Paulo Branco’s Les Films du Passage and the short-lived 80s powerhouse Cannon Films—experienced bankruptcy, it would seem somewhat strange to the outsider, though not entirely uncharacteristic to the initiated, that the director would describe the film as “something of a synopsis, a trailer, or a ‘user’s manual’ for

² A film which, in fact, he doesn’t particularly like.

my entire cinema” and Robert Louis-Stevenson as one of the writers that had “an important, formative influence on him” (Martin 16).³ The film appeared in the midst of a short cycle of films Ruiz made with Paulo Branco’s Les Films du Passage that concerned or involved the figure of the child and the pirate, including *La Ville des Pirates* (1984), a film which dealt but did not necessarily abide by the central tenets of Surrealism, *Manuel on the Island of Wonders* (1984), a three-part television series made in Portugal concerning a young boy and his adventures with time, and *L’éveillé du pont de l’Alma* (1985), a film depicting two lay-philosophers and their encounters with a young family and their strange son. The child in two of these films is played by Melvil Poupaud, an actor who would continue to work with Ruiz until the director’s death in 2011, and whose fetishistic relationship to the director can only recall François Truffaut’s to Jean-Pierre L aud (Goddard 85).⁴ Indeed, in a short cameo in *Les Trois couronnes du matelot*, it is young Poupaud who appears to tell the narrator that all of the latter’s stories are in fact merely variations and repetitions of Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*.

The cultural ubiquity of Stevenson’s tale—particularly in the West—is no better exemplified than by the fact that there have been at least 50 televisual and cinematic adaptations of the novel, as well as various radio adaptations and unofficial literary sequels (“Film Versions of *Treasure Island*”). It is a novel that was widely featured in the English curriculum for many years, and its mixture of romance and adventure is considered a blueprint for a particular—and conventional—form of fictional literary construction. Within this context, then, Ruiz’s version is not anomalous in its desire to rethink the terms of Stevenson’s original story: not only was it one

³ Ruiz’s interest in “low” culture, of course, goes far beyond the literary world. The director on numerous occasions—during interview, in his theoretical work as well as his films—betrays a significant investment in B-movie cinema, a fact he ascribes to his childhood relationship to the genre. See the first chapter of *Poetics I* (2005) for a personal account of his relationship to the genre, and how it shaped his creative desires.

⁴ Poupaud in a recent interview veers between the disturbing and the amusing in his recollection of his relationship with the director: “Il  tait tr s adorable, tr s protecteur, pr venant... il m’a racont  que j’avais  chapp    la mort des dizaines de fois pendant ses tournages, que tel assistant avait essay  de me kidnapper et tel autre, de me droguer...” (Bax & B ghin 35).

of a number of literary adaptations Ruiz completed during his fifty year career, but it also shared with many subsequent developments on the story a wish to extend and to embellish, to reanimate and relive the events and characters of its predecessor. The peculiarities of Ruiz's process, of course, lie in the fact that although a notable portion of his oeuvre could be labelled as "adaptation," it is only possible to do so if we take the word in its most exploratory and liberating sense. Several of his most famous works were "adapted" from well-known authors in the European canon—*Le Temps Retrouvé* (Marcel Proust), *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé* and *La Vocation suspendue* (Pierre Klossowski), *Les Mystères de Lisbonne* (Camilo Castelo Branco) to name a few examples—but it is only on the rarest of occasions that we could call an adaptation of his conventional, if we take "convention," here, to designate a clearly recognizable attempt to transpose intersemiotically the events of a particular literary work into cinematic form. What is a great deal more identifiable is the manner in which the director foregrounds the broader intertextual matrix within which he locates and identifies not only his adaptations of specific literary hypotexts but all of his work in general.

Although a number of small projects have focused on Ruiz's peculiar interest in theatrical adaptation, one suspects that his loose and anarchic attitude towards literary hypotexts has had the effect of limiting scholarly work on the subject. Indeed, there has been little investigation into either the peculiarities of the director's adaptation of *individual* texts or, more specifically, the adaptation of *Treasure Island*, representing as it does such an important moment in which the director's interests coincided, however briefly, with the whims of low-budget Hollywood action cinema (more precisely: the conflicting commercial and artistic demands of Cannon Films). The main reason, one suspects, that there has been so little written about *Treasure Island* is a result of its legal status: the film is almost impossible to acquire unless one possesses certain skills in the

location of cinematic material online, and, even then, finding the version closest to the final cut presented at the Cannes film festival in 1991 requires a certain cinephilic persistence. As a result of this difficulty, it has generated somewhat of an aura around its creation, many believing, for example, that Chris Marker was entirely responsible for the voiceover, or that an original four-hour “ur-text” exists.⁵ From research conducted in the Argos archives, it does not seem that either of these things are true, but the fact that such a commentary exists speaks to the persistent cinephilic impulses that surround directors like Ruiz. It would be a lie to suggest that this impulse did not also sit—comfortably and quite happily—at the foundation of this project.

This thesis, then, recognizing what seems to be a distillation of a number of Ruizian tropes—an emphasis upon aleatory filmmaking practice, a co-partnership with a B-movie powerhouse in the shape of Cannon films, a thematic investment in the figures of the pirate and the child, a well-known literary hypertext serving as source material—pays particular attention to two different kinds of process: in the first chapter, it attends more closely to the relationship between theory and practice in the production of the director’s cinema, illuminating, as a result, both the precarious circumstances in which *Treasure Island* was made, and the way in which this fact was reflected in the aesthetic of the film; and, in the second, it articulates how *Treasure Island* provides the audience with an allegory of the Ruizian reading process. This is, perhaps, why Ruiz described the film as a user’s manual for his cinema: *Treasure Island* is not merely an adaptation, but a cinematic investigation of how the director reads literary texts. To aid in the elaboration of this point, we will turn to the theory of Gilles Thérien, a scholar whose investigations into the literary reading process share a certain intellectual and theoretical

⁵ Jonathan Rosenbaum first mentions this four-hour cut in a brief *Chicago Reader* article in 1985, and the idea persists up until, say, Jonathan Romney’s review of the film in *Sight and Sound* in 1991.

genealogy with both Ruiz and scholars who have written on him.⁶ Indeed, Thérien's theory will provide us with the grounds with which to develop a conception of the reading subject that speaks to the particularities of Ruiz's film, and in subsequent chapters we will use his semiotization of the reading process as a way of grounding our analysis (Thérien 46).⁷ Let us now turn to a synthesis of Thérien's work before providing an outline of how the argument of the thesis will proceed.

Towards a Semiotization of the Reading Process

The central claim that forms the basis of Thérien's work is that we cannot view the literary text-reader relation as a form of communication: the author is not present in the text, and though the reader undergoes a transformation as a result of the reading process, the book—this immutable, dead object of the world—does not (coffee marks and page folds aside), and thus there cannot be any *exchange* between them (Thérien 51). Moreover, and with particular reference to the work of reception theorist Wolfgang Iser, Thérien argues that the literary text seen through the prism of communication ends up as an autonomous, anthropomorphised object which “speaks” to the reader, who is conceived as “un lecteur idéal dont le statut n'est ni évidemment social ni individuel” (Thérien 19). This, of course, posits a causal relation in which the reader is submitted to a series of “effects” produced through the act of reading, suggesting that they are merely the “destination” rather than the producer of meaning (Thérien 52). Although Thérien, then, wishes to construct a theory of particular reading subjects, he intends to do so in a manner that not only

⁶ See, for example, Richard Bégin's essay in *Baroque Cinématographique* on spectatorship in *La Vie est un songe* (37-50), and Marie-Hélène Mello, “Raoul Ruiz et la mnémotechnique : relations entre l'image défamiliarisante, l'art de la mémoire et les traces d'oralité dans *Trois vies et une seule mort*” (2006).

⁷ The page numbers found in parentheses, here, refer to three essays: *Lecture, Scalaires et Complexité* (13-47), *L'exercice de la lecture* (48-71) and *Le théôros et l'image* (95-125). Although all three essays were published collectively in *Les images et les mots* (1996), I was unable to find a copy of the book. I am therefore citing the author's manuscript—with page numbers corresponding to this document and not to *Les images et les mots*—which I obtained through Martin Lefebvre.

moves away from this “piège structuraliste”—one is also reminded, here, of Derrida’s critique of the tradition of logo-centrism within Western thought more generally—but also the notion that reading well means reading as a cultured—and by extension, civilized—subject. Theories of reception, he argues, though admittedly diverse in their methodologies, tend to fall back on the literary institution as the basis with which to construct their accounts of the reader: Thérien therefore argues that both Hans Robert Jauss and Iser—the former another important figure in the field of reception—provide only analyses of “grand” literary works, and as such take literature to be “un *en-soi* qu’il s’agit de reconnaître à travers les genres littéraires fixés par l’institution” (Thérien 16). As a consequence, distinctions are drawn in their work between “good” and “bad” readings of particular texts, such that the latter “sont condamnées à l’avance par leur déviation de la norme esthétique” (ibid. 19).

Broadly speaking, communication models of the reader thus posit a relation between the reader and the author in which “[l]e lecteur n’est pas celui qui lit mais celui à qui *s’adresse* le texte” (ibid. 19, emphasis mine). As such, there is no attendance to the particular affective or intellectual inclinations of the reading subject, and instead, we are left with an immanent account, in which everything can be explained in and through the text itself (and, as Thérien points out, structuralist accounts of the reader provided by the likes of Roland Barthes in *S/Z* and Iser in *The Act of Reading* create interpretive grids only to then give aberrant interpretations of the texts they choose as examples, invalidating, as a consequence, any claims to a universal validity). This structuralist trap ultimately always posits a singular, transcendental experience of reading, and as such disregards both the serial nature of any reader’s individual relation to the text and, most importantly, the unique or singular nature of this series.

In contrast to these restrictive models that fall prey to the totalizing desire to have a text speak both for itself and the reader, Thérien wishes to investigate “l’aspect ‘littéraire’ de la lecture” (ibid. 14). Indeed, he emphasizes that, in fact, “[l]’œuvre littéraire est un objet sémiotique dont le statut d’objet, l’essence ou la nature, comme on voudra, n’ont rien à voir avec le monde de la référence” (ibid. 18). What has often prevented this fact from becoming apparent, Thérien argues, is that literature’s privileged mode since the 19th century has been realist, and, as such, the words that constitute the literary text were often seen as simply an extension of an empirically-verifiable quotidian reality (ibid. 18). With Thérien, in contrast, we see the desire to both acknowledge the materiality of the literary text—that is, its inevitable position within this everyday reality—and also to ascribe to it a certain otherness that prevents it from becoming merely an appendage to this reality. It is his wish, therefore, to theorize a reading subject whose experience is individually—and, more crucially, *internally*—situated, and also to consider what kind of engagement one has with texts after the time of initial—or any subsequent—reading has passed. Not only is each reading a unique experience, but it is also subject to the modifications that the individual undergoes in between each encounter with the specific text in question. Indeed, reading a novel, no matter how many times one has done so before—and despite the necessarily linear nature of the process—is never about completion or finality: meaning is in perpetual flight, and as such “la lecture...[n’est]...jamais parfaite ou complète” (Thérien 49). This is, then, not necessarily a reversal of the stakes of the reception theories briefly outlined above, but at least a reorientation: no longer is it a question of understanding the process of reading exclusively through the text itself, but instead of situating and accounting for individual readers, whose tastes, desires and inclinations may coincide with those of the literary institution, but are crucially not defined by them.⁸

⁸ It is important to note, however, that Thérien is eager to separate himself from what he sees as the excesses of post-

Wishing to establish a basis, then, with which to understand the process of reading, but equally to avoid the hierarchies that he considers restrictive, Thérien first outlines a series of five processes that constitute the foundation of reading. The first, which he names “perceptual,” concerns the act of recognizing not only the rudimentary signs of the written word, but also what kind of text we are reading—journal, novel or newspaper, for example—as well as the ability to further situate this text within broad generic confines (ibid. 58). The second process is “cognitive,” and concerns the reader’s ability to recognize the need to define both words and particular fields of knowledge that will aid in the comprehension of the text in front of them (whilst reading a historical novel we may consult secondary material to learn more about Austrian royalty, for example [ibid. 58-9]). Thirdly, we have the argumentative process, which concerns the order of discourse more broadly: as the reader proceeds through a text, information is unveiled to them. They thus create and modify their hypotheses concerning the meaning of the text in relation to the changes and developments that constitute its unravelling (as Thérien writes: “Le lecteur procède par prédictions et déceptions” [ibid. 59]). This process can be most clearly articulated, Thérien suggests, in the detective novel, in which the text traditionally encourages the reader to pursue several “pistes” throughout their reading, concealing and revealing information so as to effect a series of modifications and revisions of meaning (ibid. 60). The fourth process is affective, and, as Thérien admits, is somewhat harder to define, in that it concerns the particular emotional constitution of the reading subject, and less the text they are in the process of reading. What is crucial, and what we will return to later in our discussion, is the suggestion that the reader’s affective relationship to the text is what constitutes the foundation of

structuralism—the notion that readers “rewrite” texts as they read them—and its corollary: “[l’]éclatement de l’objet textuel” (Thérien 49). Not only is there a fundamental structure that informs the reading experiences of all competent readers—see page 10—but, Thérien argues, we must also differentiate between the acts of reading and writing: the former is essentially a process, a movement towards the interior, whereas the latter necessarily entails the exteriorization, indeed materialization of meaning (ibid. 56).

their *memoria*: the interplay of memory and imagination in the creation of a personal imaginary. Lastly, and intimately related to the affective process, is the symbolic process, which concerns “la relation entre l’imaginaire personnel du lecteur et l’imaginaire de la société dans laquelle il vit” (ibid. 61). That is to say, each reading of a particular text necessarily entails the reader’s interaction with other “objects” and “figures,” ones that arise from the collective imaginary constituted in and through the wider discursive context that surrounds them (ibid. 62).

It is with particular relation to the affective and symbolic processes that Thérien identifies *le scalaire* and *la complexité* as two complimentary terms that will be of particular use in the demonstration of his theory—and also in our subsequent analysis of Ruiz’s film in chapter two—the former related to the reader’s memory, the latter to their imagination. Wishing to do away with the hierarchical implications of the term *scalaire*—either as a static reflection of social status, or as a dynamic and cumulative process that we find in traditional conceptions of *la scala naturae*—Thérien first turns his attention towards the act of learning to read, and its relationship to the literary institution. He argues that “la littérature apparaît souvent comme un complément ultime à l’acquisition de la langue” and that in Europe in particular learning to read is strongly connected with the literary canon, and thus with conventional—and crucially *linguistic*—notions of difficulty (Thérien 24). In contrast to this model, Thérien wishes to situate the reading subject more directly within their own *personal* experiences—literary or otherwise—and to shift this notion of difficulty from a linguistic-institutional model to a literary-personal one (which nonetheless entails a certain relation to the wider socio-symbolic context). That is to say, an experience is not more complex when it concerns the comprehension of a “difficult” novel situated within a particular genre, but rather when the connections drawn between different literary experiences are more profound. This is a question of measuring the affective relation the

individual reader has towards a particular text—and by extension, generic mode—which is itself determined by the place the latter occupies in the unique series that constitutes their individual (literary) experience.⁹ Indeed, as Thérien writes:

La lecture littéraire est l'exploration de mondes imaginaires plus ou moins complexes où le lecteur élargit son point de vue sur lui-même ou sur le monde non parce que le livre qu'il lit lui transmet un message mais parce que le livre qu'il lit fait partie d'une série et que cette série, qui est la sienne propre, contient différents sens qu'il peut tramer en une pensée personnelle, en un imaginaire qu'il apprend à reconnaître comme sien ou comme celui de la société qui l'entoure (ibid. 26)

Intertextuality within this conception of the reading process becomes, then, not an institutionally-sanctioned model of objective recognition of intertextual antecedents, but a subjective acknowledgement of the particularities of each reader's experience: “[l]e scalaire est une opération que le lecteur fait à partir de sa mémoire, de la mémoire des œuvres qu'il a aimées ou détestées” (ibid. 27)—in other words, it represents “le réseau personnel de sa mémoire littéraire” (ibid. 28).

For Thérien, this is a process which entails a shift from quantity to quality, and from a conception of the memory as a reservoir of static images, to a dynamic constellation of interpenetrating data: in other words, we must see each reader's literary and personal memory as fundamentally imbricated, and memory itself as an active—rather than passive—participant in meaning-making. In the words of Thérien: “[La mémoire]... est fondamentalement un réseau

⁹ As Thérien points out, the author must make a choice between the various objects and narrative decisions that populate the world that they create, whereas the reader can slot these “things” into their personal network of memories: this not a question of linearity, then, but of configuration, of taste severed from the constrictions of the institution (Thérien 30).

dynamique constitué au présent à partir non pas d'images toutes faites mais par l'imagination qui crée réseaux et lieux selon les besoins de chaque individu” (ibid. 27). Although we will return to Thérien’s conception of the imagination later, it is important to note, here, that he wishes to escape the understanding of the memory as simply a “store” or “container”—a model as much inherited from cognitive science as it is from unuseful parallels to computing. In the words of Martin Lefebvre, we might paraphrase the idea thus: “human memory can represent, that is it can *translate* data [from the imagination] into a semiotic system and, by the same token, transform it and render it more complex. It is able, in other words, to produce a *memoria*” (Lefebvre 479). This capacity to create a *memoria* is, of course, tied to memory’s conception within classical rhetoric—which saw it “comme le support, le gardien de tout le processus” (Thérien 91)—in which it was understood to possess a fundamentally organizational function.¹⁰ That is to say, if the ancient rhetoricians carefully constructed memorial loci using the “work done by the imagination” so as to aid in the reconstruction of their arguments—with images acting as “figure[s], mark[s], or portrait[s] of the object [they] wish[ed] to remember” (Lefebvre 479)—then memory has a more active and significant role to play within meaning-making than simply recalling information that has been stored away. In sum, the text in front of the reader, Thérien

¹⁰ In her wonderful book on the art of classical memory, Frances Yates, quoting from *Ad Herennium*—one of the few remaining sources which detail the art—explains that a memorial image consisted of two features: first, a locus, which is described as a “place easily grasped in the memory, such as a house, an intercolumnar space, a corner, an arch or the like” (Yates 6). Yates adds that “it is essential that the places should form a series and must be remembered in their order, so that we can start from any *locus* in the series and move either backwards or forwards from it” (ibid. 7). Further, it is crucially important that these *loci* are uninhabited and sufficiently dissimilar, and should be “of a moderate size,” not “too brightly lighted, for then the images placed on them will glitter and dazzle; nor must they be too dark or the shadows will obscure the images” (ibid. 8). On top of these *loci*, the student of the art of Classical Memory can place an image, which can relate to one of two things: *res* (things) or *verba* (words). The former, which is of importance for our discussion “makes *images* to remind of an argument, a notion, or a ‘thing’” and must have a very particular complexion. Indeed, the author of *Ad Herennium* argues that: “if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonourable, unusual, great, unbelievable, or ridiculous... we are likely to remember [it] for a long time” (ibid. 10). Crucial here, as we will see, is the question of affect, which corresponds to the likelihood that a particular image will endure within one’s memory.

argues, is a virtual *memoria*, which the reader themselves must “construire et féconder de son imagination” (Thérien 121).

If *le scalaire* dealt with the workings of the individual reading subject’s memory, then *la complexité* concerns this act of the imagination—Thérien arguing that it is the faculty “qui pose de la façon la plus sûre, le sujet (ibid. 95)—and the transformation of textual material into the mental images that will comprise the reading subject’s *memoria* (Thérien 35). This is a movement from the exterior to the interior of the reader, which, of course, necessarily entails a theoretical return to subjectivity, and to an inescapable element of the indescribable, given that there are limited means with which to reconstitute an account of the imagination itself (as Thérien points out: “c’est dans la mesure où l’imagination nous renvoie à la subjectivité qu’elle se disqualifie dans le domaine des études sérieuses” [ibid. 38]). However, wishing to avoid chaotic accounts of the imagination, but equally the various theoretical impasses that an understanding of it as absolute subjectivity has historically entailed, Thérien, for his part, avoids succumbing to temptations of post-structuralism, and to the idea of an infinite potential re-writing of the literary text: although this conjugation of personal memory and the imagination shifts our understanding of the reader from passive to active, what concerns us, here, is not an unbridled and chaotic subjectivity, but a sort of *travail* (ibid. 39).

Once again, Thérien wishes to think past any notion of complexity that resides in linguistic competence—and, by extension a hierarchical categorization of literature that equates complexity with “littérarité”—or in simple questions of intelligence and comprehension, that are themselves tied exclusively to the text (rather than the reader). He instead suggests that:

La complexité correspond au degré d'enrichissement que subit un texte dans le cadre de sa lecture... L'acte de lecture est complexe quand la série personnelle du lecteur est riche de contenus diversifiés et que le lecteur sait où il se situe par rapport à cette série, comment il en juge les contours et les nuances. C'est l'amalgame de l'intelligence et de la sensibilité qui permet au lecteur d'enrichir sa propre vie de lecteur. (ibid. 33)

This mixture of “intelligence” and “sensibility” suggests the dynamism of the model: the imagination functions as the faculty that enables memories to interact, the specific relationships between them determined by the strength of the affective response they generate: memory is thus “un véritable théâtre intérieur qui s'anime sous l'impulsion de l'imagination. Ce qu'on y joue est de l'ordre de la fantaisie et de la fiction ” (Thérien 115). The problem, historically, Thérien argues, has been the theoretical articulation of literature in relation to a empirically verifiable reality, as if it were merely a “sorte d'appendice de la realite” (Thérien 35). This movement, in which the world of fiction—populated with signifiers—moves in centrifugal fashion to the world of empirically verifiable signifieds needs to be reconstituted: literary fiction is instead a flood of images constituted within the interior of the subject, and as such has little to do with daily life or ordinary language (ibid. 37). Indeed, Thérien writes, “[s]ans imagination, il n'y a pas de fiction possible” (ibid. 36). That is to say: from the world of materiality, of objects, of a relation to the world that we can touch and grasp in its three-dimensionality, we move to the kaleidoscopy that characterizes the individual subject’s interiority: a veritable and dynamic interplay of imagination and memory, an interplay that cannot be reduced to any transparent notion of empirical reproduction, nor, as Thérien points out, to linear notions of space and time (ibid. 37).

Fiction in Thérien's words, "n'existe que parce que l'imagination du lecteur s'exprime à partir de ces dispositifs et de tout autre élément que l'imagination peut récupérer dans le dispositif scalaire de ses lectures antérieures" (ibid. 36). In fact, this interaction between the memory and the imagination has a great deal in common with what Victor Burgin calls, in relation to cinematic experience, a "sequence image," which can be described as a *series* of images that are conjured as a result of a particularly affective engagement with a single one. It would thus seem appropriate to end our discussion here:

[P]erceptions and recollections, emerge successively but not teleologically. The order in which they appear is insignificant... and they present a configuration... that is more 'object' than narrative... It might rather be compared to a rapidly arpeggiated musical chord, the individual notes of which, although sounded successively vibrate together simultaneously. (Burgin 21)

With these particular operations of the reader in mind—this interplay of the imagination and memory—let us now turn to an explanation of how the argument will proceed, before moving to chapter one.

Structure

The thesis is separated into two chapters: the first deals with the incredibly fraught production history of *Treasure Island*, whilst the second argues that the film is a cinematic investigation of the Ruizian process of reading literary texts. In the first chapter, I begin by looking closely at certain aspects of Ruiz's cinematic theory: in particular, the manner in which the director foregrounds the aleatory nature of his cinematic process, in which he adopts a ludic attitude towards the production of his films. By establishing this particular aspect of Ruiz's theory, I lay

the foundation for the rest of the chapter, in which I look carefully at the relationship between theory and practice in the production of *Treasure Island*. In the second section, I turn towards a brief history of Cannon Films, a significant financial investor in the film. My analysis of certain para-textual materials and industry journals allows me to do three things: firstly, historically contextualize the film's production within a particular low-budget Hollywood context; secondly, compare the treatment of Ruiz's film to other works produced by Cannon in the same period; thirdly, use this work as a way to claim that Ruiz's film came at a point in the company's history in which it was looking to "civilize" its output, turning from B-movie cinema to more explicitly auteurist work (but, crucially, without a real sense of how to produce this change effectively at the level of distribution and economic return). Next, I provide a thorough overview of the production of the film, using industry material, company correspondence between the French-language distributor (and, latterly, sale agent) Argos and Cannon, as well as interviews with Ruiz. In this section, I argue that the tension between the significant economic demands of the production and the increasing financial struggles of both Cannon and Les Films du passage meant that the film was scarred aesthetically. Lastly, I provide a brief overview of the reception of the film, noting that the critical consensus suggests that it was both unable to escape the chaos of its production context, and that it serves as an example of the central theoretical tensions that I outlined at the beginning of the chapter.

In the second chapter, I begin by outlining the significantly different plots of the novel and subsequent Ruiz adaptation, so as to define the nature of Ruiz's adaptation process more clearly. Then, exploring the narratological term "metalepsis," I briefly analyse a meta-fictional fable written by Stevenson after the publication of *Treasure Island*. Recognizing this formal device at work in Stevenson's text allows me to establish an intellectual genealogy connecting

the Scottish author to Ruiz. This, in turn, lays the foundation for the first section of the chapter, which argues that metalepsis in Ruiz's film acts as a fictional conduit through which Ruiz can construct a theory of reading. Lastly, and most importantly, using Gilles Thérien's theoretical work on the situated reading process—and contra both empirically-oriented studies as well as decontextualized post-structuralist accounts of reading—I argue that Ruiz's film acts as an allegory of the reading process itself. To do this, I formally analyse a number of scenes involving the young character Jonathan, arguing that Ruiz provides, through him, an account of reading as constituted in and through personal imagination and memory.

In my conclusion, I use Ruiz's follow-up novel *In Pursuit of Treasure Island* as a way of indicating what further work may be done in the study of *Treasure Island* itself, focusing, in particular, on the manner in which Ruiz's text reverses the stakes of his film, using the novella form as a way of thinking through certain questions of the cinematic process. I then suggest that this thesis has done two important things: lay the ground work for further investigation into the relationship between Ruiz's theory and working practice, and secondly, noting the significant lack of engagement with the particularities of Ruiz's adaptation process, opens the door to a more sustained and specific engagement with this process itself.

CHAPTER ONE

« De la sorte, Cannon aurait perdu la partie »

“Je ne voyais pas la nécessité de s’encombrer d’un trésor :
l’aventure, c’était l’aventure, non?” – Jonathan/Jim
Hawkins/Midas, Raul Ruiz’s *Treasure Island*

In a short review of *Treasure Island* published in the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Vincent Ostria asks: “Raul Ruiz fait-il de la série B d’avant-garde, ou de l’avant-garde de série B ?” (Ostria 32). Ruiz addressed this question on a number of occasions—through both his cinema and his theoretical writing—perhaps most notably acknowledging in the first volume of his *Poetics of Cinema* that he found it difficult to understand what exactly it is that distinguishes a “well-made” film from a poorly made one (Ruiz 2005, 11). Although as much a rhetorical gesture as it is a reflection of the director’s upbringing on B-Movie cinema, it directs us to an explicit aim of Ruiz’s cinema in the 1980s: to work in and through his memories of this genre, “poeticizing” its form, and combining it with a growing interest in telling multiple stories at the same time (Ruiz 2003, 4). This approach, which is evident in a number of projects Ruiz completed in the 1980s such as the 1981 Roger-Corman funded *Territory*, or 1985’s *La Vie est un songe*, was combined with an increasing interest in European literary and theatre classics. In 1983, Ruiz produced a version of *Bérenice* for the Avignon Festival, in 1984 *Richard III* and a loose adaptation of Louis de René Des forets’ *La Chambre des enfants*, and, most importantly for our purposes, *Treasure Island* in 1985. This intensification of interest in the more explicitly high-cultural and the act of adaptation

was accompanied by Ruiz's appointment as the co-director of the Maison de la Culture in Le Havre in late 1985 (Christie 96). The filmmaker, who for a long time existed on the periphery of the French cultural establishment—a reputation earned through his amusing and somewhat critical attitude towards “French orthodoxy in everything from cinematography to cooking” (ibid.)—would continue to find funding in the most varied and unexpected of places, and the precarious position his films had within the financial landscape of cinematic production suggested that he had not yet established a substantial international audience (Ruiz admits as much, in typically amusing fashion, in an interview conducted just before the filming of *Treasure Island* in 1985: “We don't have an audience at all” [Ehrenstein 5]).

It is no surprise, then, that in Ruiz's writing as well as his cinema, the director finds it crucial to foreground the unstable and complicated process of filmmaking: that is to say, he draws an important distinction between the conceptual framework that forms the basis of any cinematic creation, and the varied and often contradictory operations that leads to its eventual completion. He describes this relationship—using the terms of “structure” and “construction”—as antagonistic in nature, explaining in the second volume of his *Poetics*, that

structure relates to the creation of the work, taken as a singular entity; while construction concerns the film in relation to the many circumstances that interact with it, throughout its making; during the many processes that will allow it to surface. (Ruiz 2007, 42)

From this excerpt, we might infer that it is simply a question of the relation between the conceptual exercises of the mind and the practical concerns of the body, the former's inadequacies, insufficiencies and impossibilities only rendered so at the moment in which they become challenged. And indeed, given the varied funding sources and distribution channels

Ruiz's films received in the 1980s—from the Festival d'Avignon to the National Audiovisual Institute (INA)—it would seem that this theoretical approach was a natural development from what was a peculiar and precarious career in the cinematic arts.¹¹ Paulo Branco, whose short-lived production company Les films du Passage produced not only *Treasure Island* but also *La Ville des pirates* (1983), *Les Destins de Manoel* (1984) and *L'éveillé du pont de l'Alma* (1985), remarks in an interview before the company filed for bankruptcy in 1986 that although each film with Ruiz necessitated a different approach to funding, what stayed consistent was Ruiz's working method:

[Il est] quelqu'un qui adore [les] aléas, qui tient compte au moment du tournage d'éléments qui n'étaient pas prévus au départ... Ce qui facilite nos rapports : je peux prendre des risques avec lui, et commencer un film pratiquement sans moyens en sachant qu'il s'adaptera à toutes les situations (Toubiana 16)

Branco's emphasis upon "construction," here and its relationship to the material context in which Ruiz worked in the 1980s, suggests a certain comfort Ruiz had in what others might find alarming circumstances. And indeed, Ruiz's description of his experience shooting *Treasure Island* suggests that much had to be changed as a result of the conditions of the production:

¹¹ Ruiz was accused by many to have turned his back, somewhat, on this more experimental and precarious working method in the 1990s: beginning with *Trois vies et une seule mort* (1995), he worked more consistently with French stars such as Isabelle Huppert and Catherine Deneuve. In 2004, the director describes the change in the following terms: "Ce que je nomme ma «capitulation négociée» : je travaille avec des vedettes, qui me permettent de faire du cinéma selon quelques concessions acceptables. Je cesse de considérer le cinéma comme le maquis" (Ruiz 2004, 4).

Léaud, qui est très superstitieux, avait pris un Marabout comme conseiller technique, et certains jours le Marabout lui conseillait de ne pas tourner. Ça m’obligeait à changer le scénario... Aujourd’hui il pleut, on ne peut pas tourner à l’extérieur, donc on tourne à l’intérieur donc il faut changer le dialogue... J’intègre ça, les contraintes, la réponse immédiate aux variations de données.

(Le Roux & Scarpetta 49)

Although Ruiz, here, is only discussing what *had* to be changed, when the director offers two further terms to elaborate on his theory of structure/construction in his *Poetics of Cinema II*, he complicates any notion we may have of a straightforward relation between intention and result: although structure is, broadly speaking, characterised as a form of abstraction, construction is suggested to find its closest conceptual cousin in the term “distraction” (This is not the first instance in which Ruiz borrows a term from Walter Benjamin—he substantially revises the latter’s concept of the optical conscious to account for the phenomenon of one film haunting another in *Poetics I*). Ruiz explains that distraction is like a “vertiginous demon of making who calls for aimless creation and invokes the joy of losing oneself in creative peripeteias” (Ruiz 2005, 45). In other words, there is an excess of signification in any materialization of a plan, and it is the director’s job to follow what seems best to them at any given moment, not to be faithful to a structure whose reason for existence is as arbitrary as the current opportunity offered to them. This is essentially and quite typically a filmmaker’s position on the art of direction, which emphasizes the art of craft in an almost materialist sense.¹² To quote from the preface of the

¹² And indeed, Ruiz describes himself as a filmmaker whose approach shares certain similarities with craft: “[My cinema] has some elements of the old-fashioned crafts, for instance, a hands-on approach to celluloid or video, and a spirit of inventiveness. But the main principle has nothing to do with craftsmanship, because the purpose is to make poetic objects. The rules you need to understand these poetic objects are unique to each film and must be

director's *Poetics*: "it is the type of image produced that determines the narrative, not the reverse" (ibid. 8).

Though as much a rhetorical attempt to problematize the unitary vision of the director—in which all creativity can be traced back to its source—as it is a guide to his working practice, Ruiz's calls for a fluid, ludic movement between the two poles of structure and construction, which leads him to define a "double mosaic model...[a] film in which its second structure is born from the construction of the film based on its first structure":

The pieces of a puzzle that together form a predetermined figure,
which given that the pieces have mixed with another puzzle—let's
say, by virtue of an accident—now foster the emergence of figures
foreign to the original puzzle (Ruiz 2007, 45)

It is here that we can start to think through Ruiz's interest in the adaptation of classical literary texts: we will see that Stevenson's *Treasure Island* functions as the initial structure on which Ruiz's script was based, and this, in turn, was used as the structural foundation for the film that was eventually made. The presence of an originary text suggests that for Ruiz, it is not simply a matter of dismissal—there must be an original structure for construction to be possible—but it is in the relationship, this tension between what is intended and what is produced that the uncertain and contradictory nature of the creative process emerges. Indeed, *Treasure Island* is an allegory of this very process not only on the level of plot, but on the visible marks left by a tortured production history, one that saw the brief coming together of Cannon Films (whose owners shared with Ruiz an interest in quick turnarounds and low-budget productions), Paulo Branco's Les films du Passage (a short-lived French production company whose bankruptcy in the late

rediscovered by every viewer; they cannot be described *a priori*, nor *a posteriori* for that matter. In short, these are films that cannot respond to the question, "What is this movie about?" (Ruiz 2005, 77).

1980s would inaugurate the final period of Ruiz's loose and precarious career in the same decade), and Anatole Dauman's Argos Films (a company whose role in the production of the film changed from French-language distributor to editor, "commercializer" and sales agent).

Like no other film in the director's repertoire, *Treasure Island* wears the scars of its fraught production history: it is a film that not only reflects Ruiz's growing preoccupation with multiple overlapping stories *within* the filmic text, but its existence as a fractured and fragmentary text across a number of different versions, formats and languages—not to mention the fact that it is still stuck in a legal limbo in which distribution outside of educational screenings seems legally perilous if not impossible—speaks to a production context in which interpretation, imposition and a desperate scramble to recoup costs complicate an already difficult text. By first turning to a brief history of Cannon films, and then proceeding through a history of the film's production, we encounter an important moment in recent film history, in which the "buccaneering" Cannon films,¹³ in search of high-cultural prestige, encountered a filmmaker in the midst of a cycle of films that not only dealt with piracy on the level of plot, but plundered literary classics for their subversive potential. Uncovering this relationship, and contextualising this film within the most prolific and precarious period of Ruiz's career, will help us to recover some of the "grandiose completeness" to which the film aspired. This will, in turn, lay the ground for an analysis of the film in the second chapter.

¹³ It is interesting to note that language like this abounds in criticism of Cannon, from "buccaneering" to "vulgar bandidos." They were, in a sense, described as pirates themselves.

Cannon's Gentlemen of Fortune: "Chasing Kudos and Getting No Cash"

The truth is that movie-makers cannot survive without the applause Yoram likes from the banks, but we now also want to do better films—more challenging, higher quality... I walk the razor's edge between artistic value and commercial flops (Golan 62)

Founded in 1966 by Dennis Friedland and Chris Dewey, Cannon was a company that, according to Andrew Yule, "sought to produce low-budget movies aimed at a teenage audience" (Yule 13). Its first foray into commercial filmmaking was *The Love Rebellion* (1967), an exploitation film conceived and produced the same year. Skipping forward to 1970, we read in *Variety* that the average budget of a Cannon production was a mere \$300,000—around \$5 million less than the average Hollywood production at the time. From its inception the company was praised for its "pared-down" production style, and its "modest budgets with savings above the line and an emphasis on young talent, story content and production values over names" (Verill 4). That being said, after a string of commercial failures, the company ran into severe financial problems in the mid-1970s: having gone public in 1973, it was increasingly unable to exploit the tax loopholes that had initially enabled its cheap productions (Stanbrook 234). It was only with the arrival of Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus in 1979, two cousins whose Noah Films had come to define the Israeli film industry in the late-1960s, that bankruptcy was avoided. Between 1967 and 1978, the cousins had produced "forty micro-budget movies" in their native Israel, and had particular success with what one commentator describes as "an unapologetic Israeli version of *American Graffiti*" entitled *Lemon Popsicle* (Walker 43). This was not, however, as heroic a

narrative as it sounds: the cousins did not possess sufficient capital to help the flagging Cannon Group, so instead bargained with the “by then willing vendors” of the company, and agreed to market the Group’s current library, so as to raise the funds necessary to buy the company and inherit its \$3 million dollar debt (Stanbrook 234). This would still not prove to be enough, so Golan and Globus then turned to the French Credit Lyonnais for the first of many loans they would need in order to establish a controlling share.

The cousins marketed themselves as foreigners who “wanted in”: Golan, for example, describes arriving in America in 1979 as “coming to Mecca”—an odd and somewhat ambivalent comment in itself—and his relationship to Hollywood as initially one of alienation: “We were outsiders for years and that’s how they looked at us” (Golan 51). Indeed, it wouldn’t be unreasonable to claim that he turned his very arrival in America into a rags-to-riches story, expressing in his account of Cannon’s subsequent financial woes that he and Globus were helped out by “friends” at Warner “[because] they knew we were true filmmakers, not phonies like so many in our business” (ibid). It is in this way that, in the following years, Golan and Globus would establish themselves as “big personalities,” in the American film industry—seen as much as a “breath of fresh air” as they were despised for bringing a “dark cloud of pollution” to Hollywood (Ansen 55)—and they developed a worldwide reputation for producing low-budget cinema in a swift and sloppy manner.¹⁴ A full-page advertisement ran in *Variety* in 1986—months before the first of several company collapses—hints both at the naivety of the first seven years of their tenure and some of the reasons for their initial success: “Cannon has revolutionized

¹⁴ A *Time* article rather amusingly refers to their Sunset Boulevard premises in 1984 as a “discount electronics warehouse” (Clarke, Riley and Slate 72). To see this wonderfully shoddy space, and for an amusing and contemporary account of Cannon, see the BBC’s 1986 film *The Last Moguls*. Also see Andrew Yule’s *Hollywood A-Go-Go* (1986) for a more aggressively critical—and altogether more academic—account of the Cannon phenomenon. More recently, see Mark Hartley’s excellent documentary *Electric Boogaloo: The Wild, Untold Story of Cannon Films* (2014) or Hilla Medalia’s *The Go-Go Boys: The Inside Story of Cannon Films* (2014) for a somewhat less critical view.

the film business through its unique approach to movie marketing... In the next year, Cannon will produce, distribute and market more than *three dozen films*” (“Cannon Films: The Company of the Future,” 97; emphasis in original). This “unique” approach to marketing—which relied heavily on “pre-sales of television video and foreign distribution rights” (Cieply 1984, 29)—was successful in part because of the films the company sold: schlock B-movie fare and cheap teen-sex films, starring, amongst others, those beacons of American justice Chuck Norris and Charles Bronson. The company’s ability to make more films than any other studio was (initially) possible for several reasons: first, because the company set a “top limit” on their productions—\$5 million—roughly half of a major studio budget at the time, and, secondly, because they tended to forego completion bonds, a dangerous practice that major studios tended to avoid (Stanbrook 235). This pre-sale-incumbent strategy was combined with an aggressive pursuit of flagging cinema-chains across Europe—a move that temporarily provided Cannon with a vertically integrated structure, reminiscent of some of the golden-era Hollywood studios—and distribution deals with majors such as MGM (Cieply 1984, 29).

Cannon’s financial practice, however, came under increasing scrutiny as the decade progressed: on the one hand, its purchase of Thorn EMI screen entertainment in 1985—which was for Alexander Walker a significant turning point in the history of the British film industry (Walker 25)—necessitated the acquisition of further debt; on the other, its internal accounting was the subject of a Securities and Exchange Commission investigation in the same year, an enquiry that would prevent any further acquisition from a line of credit Cannon had used consistently throughout the 1980s (“Cannon Group: A Job for Superman?”, 65).¹⁵ This

¹⁵ For more information on how Cannon’s aggressive pursuit of cinema chains in Europe led to, in Alexander Walker’s rather anglophilic terms, the decline of the British film industry in the mid-80s, see Alexander Walker, *Icons in the Fire: The Decline and Fall of Almost Everyone in the British Film Industry* (2004).

investigation concerned primarily the “substantial misrepresentation of earnings.” As *The Economist* explains:

At the heart of the matter was the way Cannon accounted for Amortisation... the company ‘materially overestimated the anticipated revenues Cannon would receive from its films.’ So they were under-amortised and profits overstated.” (“Cannon Group: Going Boys?”, 72)

As Yule notes, this dangerous accounting method enabled Cannon “to make itself look more profitable,” as the illusion of “the company’s rapid growth (the making of more and more films each year) could mask the effect of poor box-office results” (Yule 201). This rather hopeful corporate practice—in which overconfidence and blind hope are dangerously intertwined—was combined with an increasing interest in producing “upmarket” films, and it was this awkward interplay between the crudely commercial and the more explicitly high-



Figure 1 - A Newsweek Article in 1986 pictorially conveys Cannon’s shift from “Shlock to Art.”

cultural that, for many commentators, led to the company’s demise in the second half of the 1980s. Indeed, Cannon’s increasing turn towards “respectable” cinema was part of a larger attempt to legitimize the company, and this struggle is epitomized in their theatrical and highly

publicized performances at the Cannes film festival. Although in the early part of the 1980s the company was more interested in pre-selling their upcoming productions, attention slowly turned away from the economic and towards “star power”—from Katharine Hepburn in *Grace Quigley* (1984) to John Cassavetes’ *Love Streams* (1984)—and the “cultural” in the mid-80s, and to what many commentators rather crudely termed “respectability” (Cohn 13). As Andrew Yule notes, it was always Golan’s dream to win nominations and awards at the Oscars and Cannes with films like Altman’s *Fool for Love* (1985) (Yule 85). Cannon’s high visibility, too, in the 1986 festival attests to this fact: Gilles Jacob, the festival programmer, invited 3 films the company had made to compete for the Golden Palm—*Runaway Train* (1985), *Fool For Love*, and *Otello* (1986)—and the company also had an acquisition as the opening night selection, as well as 14 features screening in the market (ibid. 117).

Along with *Treasure Island*, the company invested significant time and money into a number of European co-productions, perhaps most notably Jean-Luc Godard’s adaptation of *King Lear* (1987) and Franco Zeffirelli’s *Otello*. Cannon’s agenda seems clear: through the adaptation of literary classics, and the production of European “art-house” cinema, it could expand, developing a “maturing international audience,” using their international distribution network as a means through which to guarantee financial success (“Pictures: Arty Helmers Set For Seven Planned Pics from Cannon”, 6).¹⁶ Indeed, we can trace in Cannon’s approach to advertising the films a progressive turn towards both a more respectable, canonical literary heritage, and a valorization of the auteur. In a *Screen International* advert for Godard’s *King Lear* in 1985—created soon after the original deal between Globus and Godard had been struck, apparently on a hotel napkin (Feliciano 6)—the poster uses a large, embossed and somewhat

¹⁶ Though, as Yule points out, Cannon were aware that they were likely to lose money whilst gaining prestige (Yule 79).

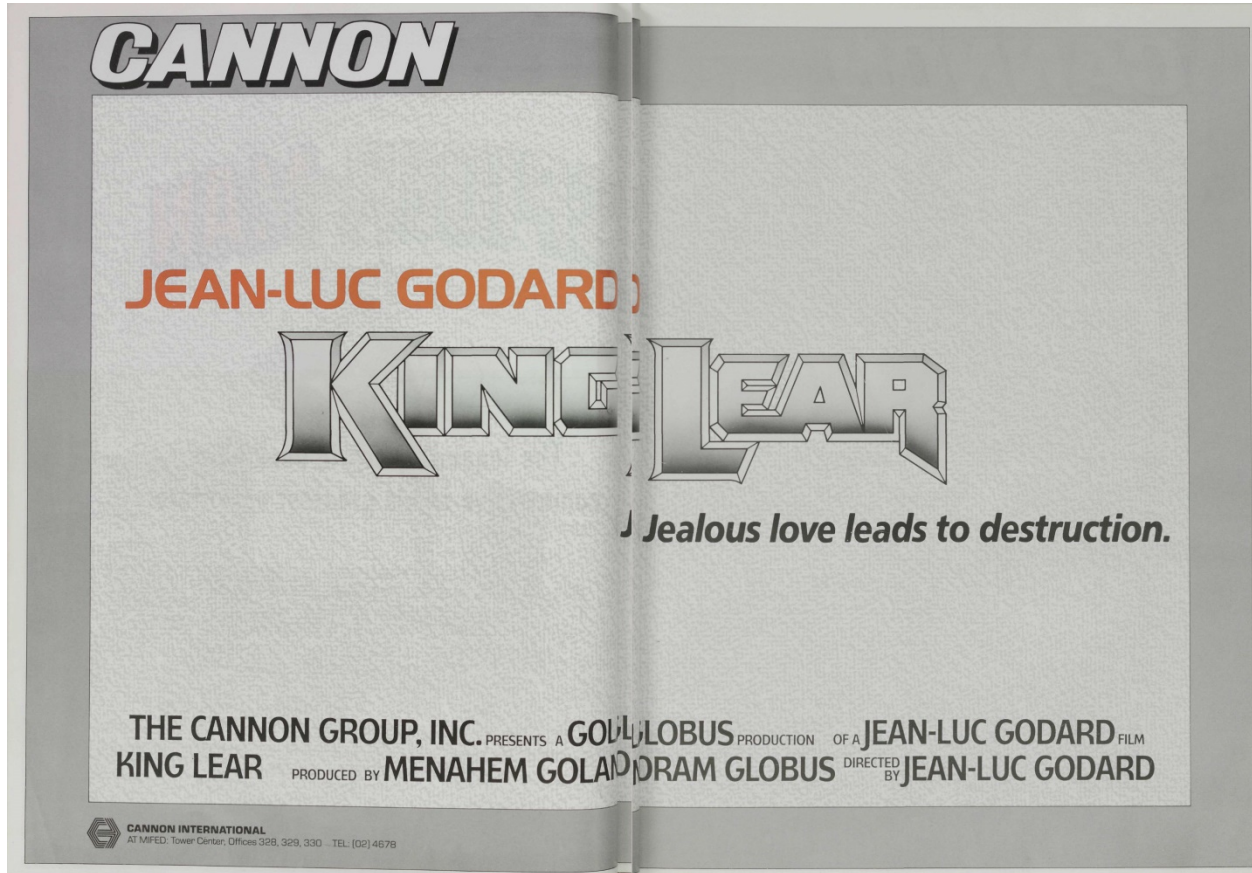


Figure 2 - Cannon's first poster for Godard's ill-fated *King Lear* adaptation.

”futuristic” looking font, which is accompanied by the tagline: “Jealous love leads to destruction” (“Cannon: *King Lear*”, 38-9). There is no sense, here of Shakespeare’s presence, only of Godard’s—his name emblazoned above the title—and one is reminded more of another Cannon failure, *Masters of the Universe* (1987), than of two revered figures in the history of contemporary art (see figure 2). It is not until the following year in which production gets underway that a shift occurs: in a second advert, the title of the film is now represented through printed “handwriting”—an obvious nod to literary heritage—and Shakespeare’s name is spelt using an archaic script, in which the “s” appears as an “f.” This is only the first section of the poster: in the remaining two, the signatures of Normal Mailer—who wrote the initial script before abandoning the project—and Jean-Luc Godard accompany photos of the men, and it is as

if the metonymic presence of their script is somehow meant to guarantee the success of the product (“Cannon: King Lear”, 37).

Although Golan and Globus expected much from these films, few were to see significant—and more importantly, economically fruitful—exposure: many of them were only to receive extremely limited releases on the festival circuit, and even for films which succeeded critically—such as Zeffirelli’s aforementioned *Othello*

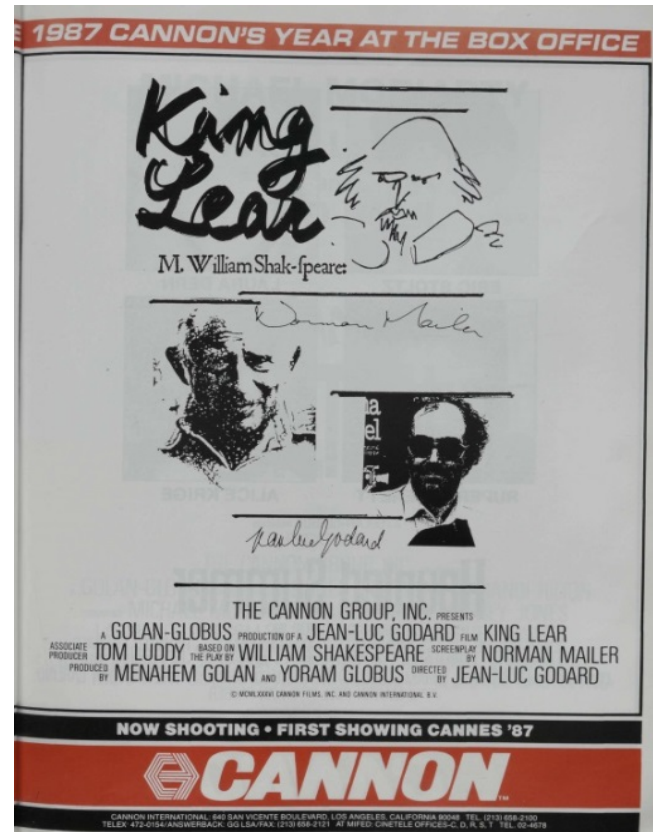


Figure 3 - Cannon's second and more “literary” poster for *King Lear*

adaptation—Cannon could not find the market to recoup their uncharacteristically high productions costs. Indeed, Jean-Luc Godard, in a brief interview conducted following the disaster that was *King Lear*’s international release, remarks that the failure of the film was a result of the fact that “Cannon [did not] know how to market [it]... A pity they didn’t remain just gangsters. They wanted to become noblemen. It’s like Al Capone decided to wear tuxedos”¹⁷ (Feliciano 6). Godard’s remarks, characteristically inflammatory though they are, speak to the repetitious nature of much of the press coverage concerning Cannon: Golan and Globus were merely low-rent impostors, scrambling for cultural prestige with little to no understanding of how to get it. As Susan Bennett notes, critical reaction

¹⁷ In an explicitly post-modern move, Godard’s “film opens with a recorded phone conversation wherein a Cannon representative [Menahem Golan, in fact] demands delivery of the finished film” (Maerz 108). For more information on Godard’s relationship to Cannon, and to see the parallels with Ruiz’s experience, see Susan Bennett, “Godard and Lear: Trashing the Can(n)on” (1998), and Jessica M. Maerz, “Godard’s ‘King Lear’: Referents Provided Upon Request” (2004). It of course became apparent to me—as it would to anyone—that the homonymous relation between “Cannon” and the literary “Canon” would make for amusing world play. Unfortunately, Bennett—and no doubt many others—beat me to it.

to *King Lear* was focused “not so much on the film itself but the exigencies of that commercial context of postmodernity,” in which an iconoclast such as Godard could be given free reign over a canonical author. Globus’ reaction to Godard is nearly as predictable: “[I]t’s just a bad film. Godard made a bad improvisation of Shakespeare. He took Cannon for a ride” (Feliciano, 6). This brief commentary is instructive, in that it invokes the age-old debate in adaptation studies concerning fidelity: for Cannon there are *good* and *bad* adaptations, ones that are faithful and ones that are not.

The Allure of the Island

It is within this context of number-fiddling, corporate over-expansion that Raul Ruiz’s *Treasure Island* makes its appearance, a film which, like *Otello* and *King Lear*, was “designed to swell Cannon’s ‘art’ branch” (Ehrenstein, 4). The director, who had also written an adaptation of Robert Louis-Stevenson’s *The Beach of Falesa* sometime in 1984—a script that betrays a surprisingly straightforward interest in the Scottish author’s incipient post-colonial politics—first approached the process of adaptation as one of literary transference: instead of writing a script, he wrote a short novel in the style of a *roman de gare*, or pulp novel (Le Roux & Scarpetta 49). The script—the first move away from the original structure of the source novel—was written because it had to be: Cannon offered a small pre-production payment that would follow the receipt of a treatment detailing all scenes to be shot (Golan 1985, 1).¹⁸ The document—which

¹⁸ The production contract is the first of a number of documents cited in this chapter that were obtained from the Argos Films archive in Paris. The documents are as follows, and will be listed by author (where possible), page number and date (if necessary) with more extended information available in the bibliography: a production contract between Cannon Films and Les Films du Passage (1985) cited on pages 32, 33 and 35; an addendum to *Treasure Island’s* distribution mandate signed by Branco and Dauman (1985), and a telex from Dauman to Ruiz (1985) on page 36; a letter from Dauman to Les Films du Passage (July 1986) on page 40; a telex from Dauman to Ruiz (August 1986), a letter from Didier Villatte—the lawyer representing Argos in their fight to win back the rights for the film following Les Films du Passage’s bankruptcy—to Denis Facques, the *maître judiciaire* responsible for overseeing legal questions concerning *Treasure Island* (1987), and a letter from Ruiz to Branco (1987) on page 42; a

combines rather typical script-writerly declaratives with a more florid literary description—is a mere 60 pages in length, and it is only in the last ten pages that we encounter any sustained mention of Stevenson’s text. Even then, however, it is clear that Ruiz’s intention is already towards “construction” and its corollary: a more aleatory form of artistic creation. From scene 37 onwards, the script simply enumerates, in sequence, the chapters of the book, with Ruiz adding a detail here or there so as to “clarify” his intention. The 37th scene of the film, for example, is described in the following terms: “Scène du tonneau de pommes... Une petite variante : les mercenaires ne sont pas des marins, et le fait qu’ils ont le mal de mer est la seule cause de leur incapacité à prendre le bateau,” or in the 38th scene, entitled “un conseil de guerre” : “Rien ne change, sauf certaines allusion à des armes modernes” (Ruiz 1985, 40). Not only does the script confirm that Ruiz’s intention was originally to transplant *Treasure Island* into a more contemporary setting, replacing pirates with mercenaries—thus maintaining in his own peculiar way the conceits of the source novel—but also that the script is only a “jumping off” point, and not the terminus of his creative journey. Of equally fascinating note is that, paying close attention to the final version of the film, we can also see that certain scenes, images and characters that did not make it into the final cut have remained, and that their presence and the original plot they suggest is one of the ways in which the film is distinctively marked. So, for example, this manifests most obviously in the opening scene, in which a number of incoherent images of the mercenaries at war have been edited together, so as to suggest to the spectator that the film’s main character, Jonathan, is watching a television show *about* mercenaries.

letter from Dauman to Cannon France (1987), a letter from B. Gaudreuil—a representative of the UFCA—to Dauman (1987), a letter from B. Gaudreuil to Cannon International (1987), and a letter from Ian Christie to Didier Villatte (1989) on page 43; a letter from Yves Grosset to Jacques Rerat and Mireille Mirowski (1991), a letter from Gilles Jacob to Dauman (1991) and an unauthored production note (1987) on page 44. My research would not have been possible without the kind assistance of Florence Dauman, the current president of Argos. Please contact Dauman directly before citing *any* material or passage in which a citation from the Argos archive features.

Turning towards the initial pre-production process, then, it seems that Ruiz's long-time collaborator, producer and friend Paulo Branco was responsible for Cannon's involvement at the level of co-production: first meeting Golan and Globus in 1984 at MIFED (The Milan Film Market) and selling them the international distribution rights to the then-unfinished Manoel de Oliveira theatrical epic *The Satin Slipper* (1985), a working relationship was established (Head 74). Branco would then sell the film to Cannon at Cannes in 1985 on

the basis of Ruiz's status as an auteur, and the fact that art cinema names with international popularity such as Anna Karina and Jean-Pierre Léaud were attached to it (Azalbert & Delorme 88). From Ruiz, on the other hand, we hear that Cannon, having heard about the project but seemingly knowing little about the director's cinema or his working method—he told them from the beginning that it was not a “straight adaptation” of Stevenson's novel—was initially attracted to the film because it was something it could sell to a younger market, a target-group it had yet to focus on (although Ruiz does not explicitly mention the series in interviews, it seems likely that he was discussing the *Cannon Movie Tales*, of which 16 productions were scheduled but only nine released, a fact confirmed by a *Screen International* report in May 1987 that described *Treasure Island* as a “children's film” currently in post-production [“Cannes: Cannon's film year



Figure 4 - A Cinétélé revue special on Sheila's “moving return to cinema.” Nothing could seem further from the kind of film Ruiz was going to make.

begins”, 41]). Even before production had begun, one has the sense of a certain chaos surrounding it: was this a film to be marketed at children or adults? Was it *for* children or *about* children?

What is equally fascinating—and perhaps characteristic of Cannon’s slapdash method of contractual negotiation—is that the official co-production contract signed by the company and Les Films du Passage is rife with, at best, ambiguity, and at worst basic spelling mistakes: the latter’s company name is incorrectly written as “Les filmes due passage”—ironic enough in itself—and, more importantly, Robert Louis-Stevenson is referred to as “John-Lewis Stevenson,” whilst the story of *Treasure Island* is vaguely described as being “adapted to modern times” (Golan 1985, 1). This suggests two things: firstly, that Cannon had once again turned towards prestige without an understanding of what or who that meant, and secondly, that, for them, much like their description and subsequent abandonment of Godard’s *King Lear* cited above, there was nothing equivocal about adaptation: it was simply a case of turning, quite faithfully, a 19th century story—which in fact looks back to stories more commonly associated with the 18th century—into a modern-day tale. More importantly, perhaps, is a passage we find a little later in the contract: “The Film will be of a professional quality and will not divert from the Stevenson story or its characters” (ibid). Again, we are left wondering what exactly “diversion” means. Indeed, the concept of fidelity that has haunted discussions of the relationship between literature and cinema in film studies is the larger question that looms over the faux-legalism of sections such as this in the contract, the suggestion being that each story has an essence that transcends any medium, and that it is simply a case of translating it intersemiotically into visual form. This was an assumption no doubt encouraged by the number of (financially) successful adaptations of *Treasure Island* that preceded Ruiz’s film.

For Branco, the production of *Treasure Island* was undertaken in a manner dissimilar to his previous collaborations with Ruiz: not only did the film possess what Ruiz termed “un vrai casting”—something quite unprecedented, and a move that only seemed to interest Branco and Cannon—but it also involved over a year of pre-production, a level of preparation rare for the director’s cinema in the 1980s (Toubiana 16). Moreover, two versions would be produced: an English version, which Cannon would distribute in English-speaking territories, and a French version, which Argos films would distribute across France and former French colonies, and which would latterly be sold to Canal + and other television networks so that Argos Films could recoup its significant investment in the film (Branco & Dauman 1). With a budget of just over 11 million francs—roughly \$1.5 million, of which a third was budgeted from Cannon, and the rest from a mixture of development aid, state-supported advance on receipts and an entirely inexplicable investment from the French resort company Club Méditerranée—the film was originally scheduled for a September 1984 start, but was postponed until the following year after political unrest in the original shooting location of Guadeloupe forced the shoot to move to Senegal (“Ruiz Now Lensing Treasure Island”, 38). With the *roman* he had written in mind, Ruiz began production in July 1985. *Cinétélé revue*—a popular French film magazine whose reasons for covering the film extended only as far as pop star Sheila’s accidental involvement—confirms that the plot, like the script, concerned, at least initially: “[un] coup d’état en Afrique, trafic d’armes... Les pirates sont devenus mercenaires, ils rejoindront en mer leurs ancêtres, et sur l’île se dérouleront les événements décrits par le roman”¹⁹ (Deriez 13). In a move that would come to define the problems that would follow the film’s production, Anatole Dauman sent a short telegram to Ruiz during the shoot, in which he writes, rather hopefully: “Dans la persuasion que

¹⁹ Here is Ruiz on the casting of Sheila: “J’avais dit à la fille qui s’occupait du casting que je voulais une ‘sportive,’ quelqu’un un peu comme Sheila. Elle a mal compris, elle a cru que je voulais Sheila. Et Sheila a accepté.” (Le Roux & Scarpetta 49).

ce nouveau film rompra avec l'insularité de votre œuvre, je vous adresse mon salut" (Dauman 1985, 1).

It is clear from correspondence like the one above, and the varied and substantial investment in the film that much was expected of it—this was an opportunity for Ruiz to finally gain the audience that had been so lacking throughout his career.²⁰ However, after spending time working with the original scenario—which, according to Poupaud, nonetheless involved the re-writing of the following day's scenes the night before they were to be shot (Bax & Béghin 77)—Ruiz sent the first rushes to Cannon. Furious, it would appear, at what was most likely the most bizarre adaptation of *Treasure Island* they could have ever anticipated—and despite Golan's claims in the mid-80s that there was comparatively more freedom at Cannon for leftfield projects—the company cut all funding, which in turn forced Paulo Branco to request a further loan from the Centre National de la Cinematographie to cover the remaining \$350,000 of Cannon's \$500,000 promise (Maslet 8). For Ruiz:

It was funny working with Cannon and Menahem Golan. He was really warm at the beginning, then he was furious, but then he proposed another film. He said, 'You stop making those crazy movies—the camera is there, the action is there, the audience is there, everybody get lost! Please make one story at a time. I need only one' (Smith & McElhatten 27)

²⁰ In a rather amusing interview with Ruiz conducted just prior to the shooting of *Treasure Island*, the director remarks, following a question concerning his target audience and the (perpetually) unstable landscape of non-commercial film distribution: "*La Ville des pirates* for example was rejected by all the European TV networks. At the same time it was accepted as the official representative of France at the Venice Film Festival. After that it got distribution. Another film we made in four days, *Point de fuite*, was just a joke. But it was sold to German television and the Netherlands and ended up paying for *La Ville des pirates*. In each case it's something like that" (Ehrenstein 5). In another interview from around the same time, he hits at something altogether more alarming: "I have a small public but it's always the same public, and half of them are professors of film" (Blume 11).

Very much echoing the monologue we hear Golan perform at the beginning of Godard's *King Lear*—"we have to think of our reputation, Jean-Luc!"—it seems clear that Cannon's interest had shifted back from the cultural to the commercial, and from Ruiz-as-auteur to Ruiz as employee. In other words, we might say: from art-house to B-Movie. Forced to make a different film, and to relegate some of what he had shot to the periphery of the final product, Ruiz and the production team were abandoned in Africa, with Ruiz suffering from malaria—after

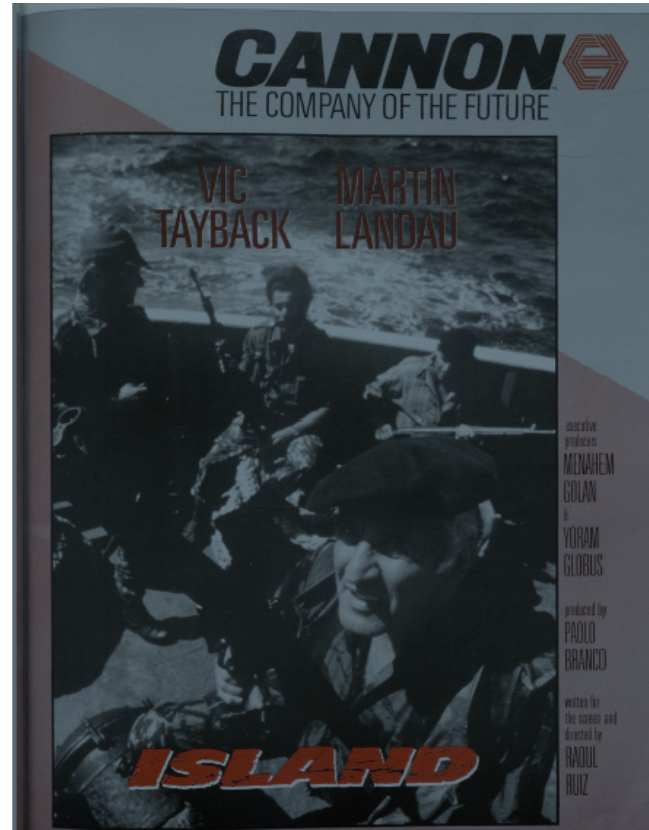


Figure 5 - Cannon's *Island*: no longer the auteur project it once was.

spending a few days in prison for not possessing the correct visa documents (Azalbert & Delorme 4)—and Léaud refusing to leave his room on certain days to participate in the shoot (Le Roux & Scarpetta 49). Indeed, in an interview with Jonathan Rosenbaum, Ruiz makes it clear that “*Treasure Island* was a *complete* misunderstanding... I had to reduce the budget, and to do it kind of like a B-movie... [B]ecause [the film] was shot in continuity... you can see the point at which the money starts to vanish” (Rosenbaum, “Trying to Catch up with Raul Ruiz”). The film began its initial editing process in October 1985, but it is not until the following May that any mention of it appears in the press: a Cannon full-page advert in *Screen International* produced for Cannon's *huge* showing at the Cannes Film Festival (renamed by some that year the “Cannon Film Festival”) in 1986—apparently using a production still from the film only so as to promote

the company—now refers to the film simply as “Island” (Yule 148; “Treasure Island—Cannon: the Company of the Future”, 75). Only two cast names are mentioned: Vic Tayback and Martin Landau, the former a bit-part television actor, and the latter a staple of American television since his appearance in *Mission Impossible* in the 1960s and *Space 1999* in the 1970s. The rather bizarre omission of “Treasure,” the lack of any mention of the original source material, suggests that Cannon were, so to speak, abandoning ship. The fact, also, that the image chosen depicts Tayback—grimacing at the camera—on board a ship with three other modern-day mercenaries reinforces Cannon’s renewed intent: if the film was to be released under their label, it was no longer a work for the art-house market, a product of their intent to raise the cultural prestige of their outfit, but, rather, another B-movie with “American heroes for today and tomorrow.” In other words: something they could sell to foreign buyers used to the company’s particular brand of schlock.²¹ This is only further validated by the opening credits of the film in which, as if in some ironic nod towards Ruiz’s theory of one text haunting another, the two actor’s names—the only two, incidentally, who were provided by Cannon—are mentioned before any others. It would seem that a move like this was part of Cannon’s desperate attempts to rescue the company from what was fast becoming an impossible economic mire.

Around the same time in Paris, the relationship between Argos’ Anatole Dauman—aware that the original deadline of 31 December 1985 to produce the final cut had passed—and Paulo Branco was becoming increasingly difficult: the former was clearly worried that the film was not fit for commercial purposes. Indeed, Dauman mentions in production notes that the film would

²¹ In retrospect, it also seems somewhat ironic that the slogan “Cannon: The Company of the Future”—which, for industry workers in the ‘80s, suggested lightning-fast turnarounds on cheaply shot films— should appear on a poster for a film that, up to the point of the advertisement’s release, had already taken 7 months to edit, and would take a further 5 years to reach public screens. What is also ironic is that in many respects the company’s pre-sale strategy and crudely nationalistic films were, viewed through the lens of liberal democratic “progress,” explicitly regressive. Cannon’s future is certainly not one I want to know or live in.

only make sense—and here he is referring to the footage shot before and the footage shot *after* it became clear that Cannon had refused to pay its remaining part—if it contained a “Voix-off formidable” and in an even more candid note to Branco, he outlines in more explicit terms his frustration:

Sur la foi que Raoul Ruiz réaliserait un film de grand talent d’après l’œuvre de Robert-Louis Stevenson, nous avons investi des sommes conséquentes dans cette production. Il faut admettre—après vision de la version anglaise—que le résultat n’est pas à la hauteur de nos espoirs. Cependant, on peut imaginer que la version française pourra s’offrir de grands progrès grâce à l’intervention de Chris Marker qui accepte de mettre en forme la narration.

(Dauman July 1986, 1)

Once again, we are witness to the power of the literary canon, and it is as if Dauman believes that simply through the combination of two “grand talents”—no matter how different Marker and Ruiz were as filmmakers—a successful adaptation can be made. This “English” version which ran for 130 minutes, was the first version presented to Dauman, and it is unlikely that any 4-hour edit—despite Jonathan Rosenbaum’s claims that Ruiz was originally contracted to make a 4-hour version for Cannon—ever existed. This myth, which has continued to circulate in the few screenings there have been of the film, is of the kind that develops around such a filmmaker as Ruiz, a figure who attracts the kind of cinephilic fantasies that conjure what Jonathan Romney refers to in his review of the film as a golden “ur-text” (Romney 47).²²

²² See JW McCormack’s “The Black Spot” (2011) for an account of locating Ruiz’s *Treasure Island* that intentionally parallels the treasure hunt element of the original source text.

With the initial final cut deadline having passed, and the new financial and cinematic year of 1986 beginning, it became increasingly clear that Cannon were running into significant financial trouble. In simple terms, it was obvious that their films were not making any money at the box office (Yule 106). Further, box office-returns in 1985 were so low as to cause a \$69 million deficit—though this was before foreign presales—(ibid. 113), and, as Alexander Walker points out, it was their commitment to big budget action fare such as the \$30 million Sylvester Stallone film *Over the Top* (1987) and *Superman 4* (1987) that would cause them to miss a loan repayment, a mistake that would force them into further debt (Walker 84). With their stock falling to \$12 by December 1986, the company was forced to accept a \$75 million cash investment from Warner, with the latter also obtaining the video rights to a number of films in the company's catalogue, including *Treasure Island* (Cieply 1986, 4). It was not until further borrowing from a company partly owned by Golan and Globus themselves, Intercorporation, that an immediate financial crisis would be averted (“Group to Lend Cannon \$10 Million”, D6). As many articles point out, the company only ever had two “smash hits”—*Breakin’* (1984) and *Death Wish II* (1985)—and it was clear that they had expanded too quickly: their interest in prestige, combined with a failure to find consistent and significant returns at the box office meant that their high volume of film productions was simply not sustainable. By this point, too, it seems Dauman had given up any hope of Cannon paying their promised investment in the film, and so his attention would turn an exclusively French-language, “international” version.

The fate of *Treasure Island* was then to be dealt a further blow when, shortly after Branco's exasperated claims and Cannon's continuing financial troubles, Paulo Branco's Les Films du Passage declared bankruptcy, and the film would be forced to enter commercial court. Branco, who rose to international prominence in the mid-1980s as a result of his collaborations

with Ruiz, explains that it was the somewhat chaotic and disorganized nature of his first production company that was responsible: “[À] l’époque on ne connaissait rien à la production...on travaillait comme une sorte d’happening perpetual... [On n’a pas] de stratégie, pas de plans de carrière, rien” (Blondeau, “Interview de Paulo Branco”).²³ Dauman, for his part, whose significant investment in the film meant that it was financially imprudent to renege on his distribution deal, was thus forced to take control of post-production. Notes from Dauman to Ruiz suggest that there was a significant push initiated by the former to continue to render the film “commercially viable” now that there was, at least financially, a great deal more at stake: in one production note, Dauman wonders whether the presence of a new narrator and a swift montage could cover the “tedium” of the last section of the film—the one most explicitly damaged by the disappearance of production funds—so as to produce an emotional conclusion. With clear frustration, he ends: “De la sorte, Cannon aurait perdu la partie” (Dauman August 1986, 1).

This tension between what Dauman saw as the quality of *Argos* and the quantity of Cannon would be further played out in the correspondence the president shared with legal parties during his attempts to reclaim the intellectual property of the film. Not only does he emphasise the “serious quality” of Ruiz’s oeuvre, but he makes note of the changes already carried out by Marker and Ruiz (Villatte 1). These changes, however, would be undertaken on the French version of the film—the only one Dauman believed was commercially exploitable—and so the English version intended originally for Cannon was to remain at its first cut length of two hours and ten minutes. In February 1987, the final changes were made to the film, with additional voice-over added to clarify the second section (by Ruiz and Marker), its length cut down to one hour and fifty seven minutes, and the voice-over language changed from English to French (Ruiz

²³ It is rather fitting that the title of this interview is “Le Dernier pirate du cinéma français.” Branco, of course, would continue to work with Ruiz up until the latter’s death in 2011, first with his company Gemini Films, and latterly with Alfama films.

1987, 1). The French voiceover, performed by Jean-Pierre Léaud, is much more of an “oral” narrative than its English counterpart—Léaud’s voice rising and falling at appropriately dramatic moments in his recollection—which has a bizarrely ironic and distanced attitude towards the events of the film. As well as changing the actor responsible for the voiceover, the longer version of the film also has a notably different sound mix, and retains some of the funnier—if inconsequential and technically “unnecessary”—moments and Ruizian jokes. These two versions, however, are certainly not different enough to merit too close an analysis, particularly with regard to the manner in which I interpret the film as an allegory of the reading process in the second chapter: the 130-minute cut is similar in tone, but simply longer and scrappier.

With the voiceover modified and the English cut abandoned, Dauman would then invite Golan to watch the final version of the film during a sojourn in Paris in the Summer of 1987, with the hope, one assumes, of provoking the latter into a payment of the remaining \$350,000 that Cannon owed (since Les Films du Passage’s bankruptcy the company had been almost entirely out of the loop [Dauman 1987, 1]).²⁴ He then sent this definitive version to Cannon after a meeting that concerned “des problèmes soulevés par la commercialisation du film *L’Île au trésor*” held between the Centre National de la Cinématographie, Argos and the UFCA (*L’Union pour le Financement du Cinéma et de l’Audiovisuel*) in March 1988 (Gaudreuil 1988, 1). Later that same year, Dauman sent a videotape of the final cut—along with a translation of the modifications to the French voice-over, itself an adaptation of the English original—to Cannon. All of these endeavours would ultimately prove fruitless, and Dauman took Cannon’s lack of payment as a sign that the company was officially backing out of its contractual agreement (Gaudreuil 1989, 1). Consequently, the British Film Institute agreed with the UFCA and Argos

²⁴ Cannon International sent Dauman a number of letters asking for an update on the film in late 1987 and early 1988. The questions they asked were often as alarmingly simple as “Is this feature completed?” or “Is there an English version?” (Couturier 1).

to pick up the film for international distribution—outside of France and French-speaking territories—though this, too, would eventually come to nothing, given that MGM would soon claim international distribution rights to the film (Christie 1989, 1).²⁵ When Argos was finally able to show the film publically—at the 1991 Cannes Film Festival—it was still only able to do so after Ruiz and editor Rodolfo Wedeles made another set of (small) modifications to the last two reels of the film. This would be the last creative input the director or any of the post-production staff would have (Grosset 1).

Heading for Choppy Waters

This thoroughly unstable production process, that continued from pre- through to post, meant that the first festival release of the film at Cannes—its inclusion in the *un certain regard* section a product of Dauman’s close relationship to head-programmer Gilles Jacob, who accepted the film so as to aid with its eventual distribution—was accompanied by promotional material that was replete with conflicting conceptions (Jacob 1). Indeed, in early production correspondence following the film’s completion we read that Argos even considered enlisting the help of French pop singer Sheila to promote the film, but perhaps most notably, the trailer was initially to feature Wim Wenders—a regular Argos collaborator—who, whilst “a text was being typed at a typewriter next to his photo,” would discuss the film in voiceover (“L’Île au trésor: Production

²⁵ This is because Giancarlo Parretti’s Pathé bought and ran MGM/United Artists for a very short time in the early 1990s. Parretti—echoing Golan and Globus’ earlier struggle to purchase Cannon in the late 1970s—could not raise sufficient funds to purchase the company, so he instead promised MGM/UA rights to the libraries that Pathé then owned (“Pathé in Sale to Cannon”, D19). As Cannon’s catalogue had already been incorporated into Pathé’s after the latter’s takeover by the former, Parretti’s subsequent criminal trial, in which he lost ownership of MGM, led to MGM retaining the rights to Pathé’s and—by extension—Cannon’s film catalogue (Hammer 46). This however, is murky legal territory: the only other evidence I possess in relation to the matter is a letter from MGM to Argos in 2000 requesting that Argos provide MGM with high-resolution footage of “The Island” (Cannon’s title for the film—see their promotional poster above) because MGM intended to re-release the film. This explains why there is a version of the film available on the Internet, which contains an MGM logo in the top-right hand corner—the film played on MGM’s dedicated TV channel at some point in the last fifteen years. Florence Dauman, for her part, told me in no certain terms that it didn’t matter anyway: “How would we ever sell *this* movie in the States?”

Note”).²⁶ At every turn it seems that Ruiz’s film is the subject of some sort of (re)interpretation: Dauman, clearly disconcerted by the final cut, was attempting to demonstrate its potential by proxy, believing that the only way to sell it would be to promote it through some of Argos’ more commercially established and successful directors.

After the first public screening at Cannes, the film would tour several smaller festivals such as the Chicago Film Festival, London Film Festival and Rotterdam Film Festival, before receiving a limited release in both France and the United States. It was then released on video cassette in France in 1997 by *Platypus*—the running time of this “international” version a whole 20 minutes shorter than the still-unreleased English version—before disappearing into legal oblivion: it would seem that very few countries were given legal rights to show or distribute it after the video release, despite the fact that Anatole Dauman spent a number of years ensuring Argos would obtain all legal rights from Les Films du Passage. Indeed, Argos and MGM still dispute the film’s status, and in the last ten years it has been shown only in an educational or promotional context, most notably when Ruiz presented the English translation of his follow-up novel, *In Pursuit of Treasure Island*, at the Renoir cinema in London in 2008. Moreover, a (not so) simple internet search reveals that multiple unlicensed copies of the film exist: from pirated Swiss DVDs on eBay which promote the unlikely and minor appearance of Sheila in the film, to a much-disputed MGM-remaster whose provenance is almost impossible to determine (which can be found on a rather disreputable torrent website), as well as a Spanish-subtitled print swimming in grain and murky incoherence, currently only viewable on YouTube. For my part, I was at first only able to view a passable English version of the film as a result of the invaluable support of Duke University, who received a print of the film after Ruiz passed away in 2011 (a

²⁶ In full: “un texte en train d’être frappé à la machine avec une photo de Wim Wenders et la voix de Wim Wenders à propos du film de Ruiz.”

fact that is strange in itself: how did the director maintain legal rights to something he had signed away 25 years previously?) It was only a chance-stumbling on a Sheila fan website in which dedicated fans had meticulously detailed and dissected every frame of her brief—and dubbed!—appearance that I was able to find an individual in France willing to make me a copy of their tired and heavily scrutinized international French VHS edition.

Turning to the Cannes press dossier then, it is not surprising that we find information that foregrounds—rather than conceals—the very unstable ground on which the film stands. In perhaps less kind terms: one gets the sense from this booklet that no one quite knows what is going on. So, on the one hand, Ruiz explains that the film concerns “[une] quête perverse [sic] d’un trésor... dans [notre] monde ludique... Ce film raconte l’histoire d’un enfant, presque un adolescent, qui ne veut pas jouer” (Ruiz 1990, 5), and on the other we have the *nouveau roman* writer Alain Robbe-Grillet, a close friend of Dauman’s, whose participation was in the same vein as Wenders, offering this cryptic reading:

“Souvenirs d’un adulte explorant l’imaginaire du petit garçon qu’il a été, qui avait trop lu Stevenson et transformait à chaque instant les épisodes de sa propre tragédie familiale—le faux père, la vraie mère volage et—en signes mystérieux venus du grand large et des côtes lointaines.” (Robbe-Grillet 7)

Many critics would share Robbe-Grillet’s Oedipal reading: Paul Willemen in his program notes for the Chicago International Film Festival observes that Poupaud’s Jonathan is a “budding Oedipal detective,” steeped in “old Hollywood images” (Willemen 91) and, in a similar vein, Jonathan Romney in *Sight and Sound* argues that the most useful and “coherent model”—if, indeed, a model should be applied at all—with which to understand Jonathan and his “working

over [of] the mysteries of the adult world” is a psychoanalytic one (Romney 47). The Rotterdam Film Festival program, for its part, suggests that this film of all Ruiz’s work “most closely resembles a normal feature film.” (“L’Île au trésor Rotterdam Film Festival”, 68). Quite what normal means here we are left to wonder.

This foregrounding of the multiple registers in which the film operates—as much, it seems, a product of Ruiz’s fertile imagination as it is a reflection of the chaos that characterized the production—does not preclude, however, the acknowledgement by most critics that the film was scarred. Lor, an ominously named reviewer in *Variety*—a publication where one imagines there are few if any Ruiz enthusiasts—not only remarks that the film will “confuse rather than amuse children” but also that it is an “incoherent assemblage of footage passed off as a feature film,” adding that it is “insulting in terms of craftsmanship” (Lor 54). Romney echoes this sentiment, though in slightly less scathing terms, explaining that the film is “profoundly discontinuous... a richly messy narrative bricolage... [T]here is little continuity between the Ballantrae section and the treasure hunt itself.” J. Hobermann agrees, and adds that the film is “alternately irritating and inspired, tedious and droll,” nonetheless admitting that “the adaptation is quite faithful to Robert-Louis Stevenson [sic]—particularly insofar as the Stevenson novel is a nightmarishly sordid, amoral tale of treachery and greed” (Hoberman 45).²⁷ *Positif*’s Pascal Pernod builds upon this, adding that in the second half of the film we witness an unfortunate “[a]ppauvrissement de l’invention visuelle, comme si Ruiz abdiquait lui-même de son style pour sombrer dans une mise en image sans surprises” (Pernod 83). This “sécheresse rebutante” as Thomas Sotinel in *Le Monde* describes it, is most encapsulated in the characters and their behaviour, who are emptied “de toute intensité, sans épaisseur, théoriques...[et qui]...restent

²⁷ The *Sight and Sound* review does not even manage to get the name of Jean-Pierre Léaud’s character right: he is listed as “Medasa” instead of Midas! (Romney 47).

étrangers à toute séduction, condition absolue du cinéma” (Sotinel; Ostria 32). The split that all critics mentions here is, of course, the point at which money started to vanish from the production, and it is somewhat ironic to note that it is only when the characters embark upon their quest for treasure that the money, in the world of production, dries up. Despite Dauman’s push towards commercialization, it would seem that the film had failed in its primary task, if we understand the work latterly completed on it as an attempt to “clean-up” an impossibly messy production. We have returned, then, to the question that began this chapter: the complicated relationship between a certain B-movie aesthetic and Ruiz’s more theoretical concerns.

It has been the aim of this chapter to consider the ways in which Ruiz’s theory and practice interrelate—the manner in which, so to speak, his interest in the ludic and the unexpected was met by a particularly trying set of circumstantial limitations, the kind that it would seem the director would never face in such a substantial and seemingly insurmountable manner again. If this has allowed us to trace out a relationship between the precarious circumstances in which the director worked and the theory that both fed and encouraged him, then it is now time to turn to how these same interests play out in the film itself: that is to say, we must look at the ways in which the film allegorizes the process of reading itself, offering the audience not only a guide to the aberrant adaptation process that Ruiz subjects all literary hypotexts to, but also the manner in which this process may account and speak to the particularities of how Ruiz theorizes the concept of reading. In an interview conducted many years after the shoot, Melvil Poupaud remarks that *Treasure Island* carries the marks of its chaotic production process (Bax & Béghin 77). From this chaos, then, we shall now try to understand how this fact may have helped Ruiz to produce an account of the literary reading process.

CHAPTER TWO

Reconstructing the House that Stevenson Built: The Ruizian Child as Imaginative Reader

“Qui est ‘Jim Hawkins’?” – The French Captain, Raul Ruiz’s *Treasure Island*

About halfway through Raul Ruiz’s adaptation of *Treasure Island*, with a grave if somewhat contrived expression on his face, The Captain—also known as the Stranger, played by Martin Landau—asks young Jonathan, who sometimes goes by the name of Jim Hawkins, to make him a promise. “You see those books?” he asks, “I want you to promise me to read *every single one of them* care-f-f-fully.” Something is happening. The Captain is stuttering. He tries to continue, but the words seem stuck in his mouth. “Because...” A portentous brass arrangement begins a little prematurely, and it’s clear we’re being encouraged to believe that the character is soon to die. Or perhaps the sound mixer simply made a mistake.²⁸ “Because...on that...is based...the fate...of We...We...Western...Civ...Civilization!” The Captain’s mouth falls open, he squeezes his eyes shut, and drops his head to one side. It seems that he has died, yet none of this is particularly “realistic” or well-acted. Martin Landau certainly does not seem to be a good actor—or perhaps we should say the Captain.²⁹ Or even the stranger? Next, a set of strings arrive—right on cue. “Doctor,” the millionaire Tim Moretti adds, who has been watching this scene unfold from the doorway, “I think the Captain just died.” Badly dubbed and ever the empiricist, the Doctor—played by Lou Castel, the same actor who, earlier in the film, played Jonathan’s

²⁸ As Ruiz’s long-time composer, collaborator and friend Jorge Arriagada points out about scenes like the one above: “Il y a un problème de mixage sur ce film [*L’Île au trésor*], qui n’a jamais été terminée – je ne sais donc pas si l’effet est complètement volontaire...” (Rocher & Béghin 102).

²⁹ This scene in *Variety*, for example, is described as a “hammy and much-mocked death scene” (Lor 54).



Figure 6 - The Doctor “pulls” copies of *Treasure Island* from the Captain's mouth.

deceased “first” father—responds in off-hand fashion: “How do you know?” The Doctor then proceeds to rummage through the Captain’s small but nonetheless revealing book collection, and it turns out that the latter’s apparently grand speech about “rotten democracies” was subtended by more than a hint of conspiracy-theory anti-Semitism: a medium shot, using a split-field diopter lens to separate the frame diagonally into two sharp planes of focus, shows the Doctor pulling the books from the Captain’s now gigantic and distorted mouth (see figure 6). Clearly amused, the Doctor reads each title to his friend in an attempt to better understand the Captain’s apparent passing: “*Mein Kampf*, *Cathars*, *The Universal Jew*, *Protocols of the Elders of Zion...Treasure Island*, *Treasure Island*, *Treasure Island!*”³⁰ With the third utterance of Stevenson’s text an earthquake begins, and the music stirs in response to this “unexpected” natural disaster. It seems that the game has changed: the Captain is awoken from his deathly

³⁰ *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is an anti-Semitic hoax text, written in Russia in the early twentieth century, which purports to demonstrate evidence of a Jewish master plan for world domination. It was famously used as Nazi propaganda (Ben-Itto xv). The Cathars were a dualist Christian sect whose texts were read by certain Nazis for their apparently anti-Semitic perspective on the Old Testament (for example, they believed that the God of Israel was an evil demiurge [Barber i]). *Mein Kampf* needs no introduction.

slumber and darts around the room, panicked, confused and seemingly lost—“wasn’t I supposed to be dead?” he seems to be thinking. “Are you afraid, Captain?” asks young Jonathan, excited, apparently, by the increasingly ridiculous circumstances. With his face caught in the reflection of a mirror shaking violently under the force of the earthquake, the Captain raises his voice to respond: “I’m not afraid to die... now it can be told, it’s now or never: this thing’s got a secret and you’ve got to know. You’re my son!” Jonathan, under-lit and cloaked in the surrounding darkness, shakes his head: “I don’t believe you, I don’t believe in anybody!”

It is difficult for Jonathan to believe in the notion of a “father” or the sanctity and singularity of *Treasure Island* when he is surrounded by so many different versions of them. Indeed, it should be clear from a description of this short scene that the content of Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel plays a somewhat secondary role in Ruiz’s fiction: characters seem only to share names with their literary counterparts, and exist in a liminal space between fiction and “reality,” acting out their own personal and obsessive interpretations of the text. The Captain’s multiple copies of the novel—not to mention his own dubious but personal collection of intertexts—attest to this ludic and imaginative engagement with source material, in which a single text is shown to be open to multiple often contradictory—but crucially individual—visions, that can only come alive through contact with the individual reading subject—not the hierarchical (and conventional) demands of the literary institution. This scene, then, not only serves as an entry point into the treasure hunt section of Ruiz’s film—the point too, at which money disappears from the production and a slightly more “direct” if somewhat abbreviated adaptation begins—but also as a useful entry into our discussion, distilling at it does the film’s central concerns: Ruiz’s *Treasure Island* it is at once an aberrant adaptation of Stevenson’s novel and an allegory of the act of reading itself.

If in the first chapter we argued that the fraught production context contributed to a scarred aesthetic, then this chapter will focus on the manner in which the film's navigation of numerous texts, generic devices and production failures provides Ruiz with the means to visualize this reading process. Indeed, the film establishes—and then deconstructs—a series of binary pairs, such as child/adult, b-movie/avant-garde, author/character, so as to redraw, in the process, the boundaries between author and readership. I will begin with a brief explanation of how the plots of the two central texts differ, and will then situate Ruiz's film in relation to a meta-fictional fable written by Stevenson nearly ten years after the first publication of *Treasure Island*, using narratological work on the concept of metalepsis as a guide. This will allow me to trace a conceptual through line from Stevenson to Ruiz, and will lay the foundation for my argument that the film is an allegory of the reading process. Lastly, I will situate my formal reading of the film in relation to inquiries into literary reading by Gilles Thérien, using his work—outlined in the introduction—as a way of unpacking the relationship between the imagination, memory and the literary institution in Ruiz's film—that is, the manner in which the film constructs a readerly *memoria*.

“A Kind-of Friend...”

Stevenson's original story, as the author writes in *My First Book*, began as a map—“an inexhaustible fund of interest for any man with eyes to see or two-pence worth of imagination to understand with!”—with the characters, the author explains, appearing “visibly among imaginary woods... their brown faces and bright weapons peep[ing] out upon me from unexpected quarters” (Stevenson 1894, 287). The plot that developed from this image—if we are to believe

Stevenson's account—is easy to recapitulate: a young boy named Jim Hawkins, soon to lose his father to an unknown but grave illness, comes upon a treasure map, an item which belonged to a recent pirate patron of the establishment his parents own and run called the Benbow Inn. After an ominous visit from a blind man named Pew in which his parents' inn is ransacked, Jonathan recognizes the great potential contained in such a map and takes it to Dr. Livesey—a local doctor and magistrate—and Squire Trelawney, both of whom are keen to follow its co-ordinates to the site of buried treasure (hidden there by a pirate named Captain Flint a number of years previously). Consequently, the men assemble a crew to explore the island. This team, however, contains a number of pirates with previous connections to the treasure in question—most notably the central “villain” of the text, Long John Silver and his long-time associate Israel Hands—and, following the arrival of the ship on the island, a mutiny begins. Several fights and deaths ensue—with the naïve but reliable Jim usually at the centre—until the young boy and his crew succeed in overcoming Long John Silver and his men, and discover the treasure, hidden for a number of years by a marooned ex-crewmate of Flint's named Ben Gunn. Long John Silver ultimately lives to tell the tale, but the rest of the mutinous crew either die in pursuit of the treasure or are left marooned on the island.

The plot of Ruiz's film is more difficult to explain. In Gérard Genette's terminology, it is a “hypertext” to Stevenson's original “hypotext,” a relation defined by “transformation” or “translation” (Genette 2004, 7). That is to say: although it occasionally transposes an event or a line of dialogue from Stevenson's novel—the fall of Israel Hands, for example, or the manner in which characters in the film (very) occasionally speak in verbatim quotations from Stevenson's text—it deals largely with the Scottish author's novel as an object of scrutiny, reducing—or omitting—most parts, and amplifying certain others. Moreover, the film not only transforms

some of the events but also the spatio-temporal context of the diegesis, moving the action from mid-18th century England to an unspecified location in present-day Europe. Beginning as an adaptation in the form of a *roman de gare* in which the central idea is that, in opposition to Stevenson's process of beginning with a map and ending with a story, it is now Stevenson's book that provides a map to find treasure, the film contains a number of stories that sometimes interlock, but often times diverge, or, in the words of J.W. McCormack, "superimpose prismatically" (McCormack, 2011).³¹ After watching an episode of his favourite television show featuring guns, mercenaries and treasure (and in this sense very much resembling mid-80s Cannon productions), Jonathan is convinced that the Stranger's arrival—a man who also goes by the name of "Captain"—at the Hotel Ballantrae (taken from Stevenson's 1889 novel *The Master of Ballantrae*) is but an extension of this fictional world. The young man, who is the inn owners' son, begins to spy on the Captain, realizing that this man has a history with his parents—a history that may involve once legal but now illegal mercenary activity. Then, a blind man—an echo of the character Pew in the original novel—visits the hotel several times, bringing with him glass eyes and speaking in codenames about gang members such as "The Crab" and "The Eagle." The Captain and Jonathan's parents—who also seem to have their own codenames—engage in bizarre, violent and ritualistic activities with certain members of the gang, which leads eventually to Jonathan's father's death. The boy then leaves home, and meets Silver, a man who owns a restaurant called the Hispaniola (the name of the ship in Stevenson's novel). Upon his return to the inn, a Doctor and his millionaire friend named Tim Moretti—who will, at an undefined point, become The Squire—appear, and begin to talk about diamonds. Everyone seems to know about this treasure, and more specifically about Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, but Jonathan: he once

³¹ Although, interestingly, the original script suggested a much more "straightforward" tale in which mercenaries search for treasure in "modern times," as Cannon described it in their contract, and as discussed in the first chapter.

again toys with the idea that the events of the film are simply an extension of the fictional world of his favourite television programme, and thus his parents and their “thug” friends are mere simulacra. Then, the boy’s Aunt arrives,³² and soon, all—Silver, Israel Hands, The Doctor, Squire, Jonathan and a money-obsessed French captain—set out on an expedition for the island, using the original novel as a map. At this point, the film begins to more closely resemble Stevenson’s book, yet all the characters seem to be simply playing the roles of “goodies” and “baddies”—that is, everyone except Jonathan, who “doesn’t play games.” Once on the island, a series of disconnected scenes which, in incredibly abbreviated fashion, follow the fighting that breaks out between rival camps in the original novel ensue. Ben Gunn appears briefly, waxing philosophical about the nature of diamonds (“they’re like your mother or your best friend...”) before Jonathan is treated to a “final” explanation of the events: Silver, it turns out, is not, in fact, the Long John Silver readers of *Treasure Island* know—or, at least, not *only* him—but Professor Omar Amiraly, a lecturer working in the field of Polemology at the University of Ghent. Everything Jonathan has witnessed and participated in has merely been an exercise in militant game theory. This casual revelation—which in no way accounts for the contradictory and overlapping stories that have comprised most of the film—comes with further, more world-changing ramifications: Silver/Amiraly assures Jonathan that understanding the rules of this game will allow participants to understand the rules of global conflict, and, as a result, give them the knowledge with which to find “ultimate happiness.”³³ Subtending all of these stories is

³² Ruiz’s decision to include a female character in the treasure hunt seems to be a somewhat crude response to Stevenson’s reflection on writing the book that “[*Treasure Island*] was to be a story for boys; no need of psychology or fine writing; and I had a boy at hand to be a touchstone. Women were excluded” (Stevenson 1894, 287). Indeed, at the end of the film it is Jonathan’s Aunt who says that she wants to prove that the game of *Treasure Island* “isn’t just for men.”

³³ Comprising part of an ending that was rewritten three times (Le Roux & Scarpetta 49), Silver’s explanation of the “true meaning” of the events in the film is, of course, a joke typical of the director. This is made absolutely clear when, appearing from the darkness that surrounds the mercenaries, Jonathan’s aunt follows Silver’s revelation with a claim of her own: “the incompleteness theorem will prevent you from ruling the world!” This is a reference to the

Jonathan's relationship to the elusive figure of Jean-Pierre Léaud's Midas—to which we will turn now—who is best described as the diegetic representation of the literary author, his impossible metaleptic role being to write the events of the cinematic fiction we are watching as they unfold.

The Author and Their Puppets: Metalepsis & Morality

Why does it disturb us that the map be included in the map?... I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious.

(Borges 231)

Jonathan and Midas' on-screen relationship is a visualization of the literary author/character relation, and unfolds through a number of short encounters, ending with the revelation that the first person narration the audience have taken to belong to Jonathan—a voiceover that appears regularly, often clarifying and embellishing upon visual information—in fact belongs to Midas. This first person narration is not only performed by Jean-Pierre Léaud—something not

Austrian mathematician Kurt Gödel, and his famous proof (or “incompleteness theorem”) that a formal mathematical system can never be both complete and absolutely true: there will either be contradiction, or a proposition that cannot be proved through recourse to the logic of the system itself. This was a theorem explicitly directed at attempts by Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell to construct a complete account of the foundations of mathematics in their three-volume *Principia Mathematica* (1910, 1912, and 1913) and other mathematical works with similar aims. The loose attitude it is necessary to take in order to make the connection between Gödel and Silver's plan meaningful is a testament to the aleatory nature of Ruiz's process: one can quite easily imagine that he had recently read an article/book on Gödel and thought to himself: “why not?”

immediately apparent in the final version of the film, given that he is dubbed in English in the story and speaks in French in the voiceover—but his character also explicitly acknowledges in voiceover in the final moments of the film that his role is to “étudier les sentiments de chaque nouveau Jim Hawkins pendant qu’il participe au cycle de l’Île au trésor.” This is an acknowledgement that Jonathan is a *written* character in a novel—Midas’ novel—and that the contents of any first-person narration are mediated through the (usually) invisible presence of a literary author. It is thus a disturbance of fictional boundaries, and Jonathan’s increasing awareness of Midas’ role in the film encourages the former to resist being written, and to instead become an active and imaginative reader of the events unfolding around him. In order to argue this point, however, I must first explain the concept of the rhetorical figure of metalepsis, applying it to a short story of Stevenson’s so as to tease out the manner in which Ruiz’s text develops certain meta-fictional concerns of the Scottish author.

In Gérard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*, the French narratologist offers the compound term “narrative metalepsis” as a way of categorizing “any intrusion by the extra-diegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a meta-diegetic universe, etc) or the inverse... produc[ing] an effect of strangeness that is either comical... or fantastic” (Genette 1982, 234). Elaborating on this definition in his 2004 book *Métalepse*, Genette adds that the term suggests a form of “manipulation... de cette relation causale particulière qui unit, dans un sens ou dans l’autre, l’auteur à son œuvre, ou plus largement le producteur d’une représentation à cette représentation elle-même” (Genette 2004, 14). Recent work in the field of narratology and transmedia theory has developed further distinctions, refining Genette’s original taxonomy. Monika Fludernik, for example, offers what she sees as five distinct cases of the term, two of which are useful for our purposes: authorial metalepsis—in which the author foregrounds

“the nature of the narrative as *fictio*, the narrator’s invention of the story... the baring of mimetic illusion by undermining the realistic expectation that the narrator merely tells a story over which he has no control”—and narratorial metalepsis—“the literal move of the narrator to a lower (intra)diegetic level” (Fludernik 385). Marie Laure Ryan, recognizing the nature of the enterprise—that is, the sense that metalepsis can only exist if we agree that there are consistent and recognizable distinctions between the intra- meta- and extra- diegetic worlds—wishes to clarify further: although we can label any transgression of the boundaries that separate each level of the narrative as an example of metalepsis, it is crucial, she argues, that we distinguish between its rhetorical and ontological form. That is to say, rhetorical metalepsis occurs when a

small window [is opened] that allows a quick glance across levels, but the window closes after a few sentences, and the operation ends up reasserting the existence of said boundaries... the author may speak *about* her characters, presenting them as creations of her imagination rather than as autonomous human beings, but she doesn’t speak *to* them, because they belong to another level of reality. (Ryan 4, emphasis mine)

On the other hand, Ryan suggests, ontological metalepsis occurs “when an existent belongs to two or more levels at the same time, or when an existent migrates from one level to the next, causing two separate environments to blend” (ibid).

What is at stake in these distinctions is how disruptive and anti-illusionistic the intentions of the particular metaleptic gesture intend to be. And indeed, this tension is played out in Stevenson’s *The Persons of the Tale*, a posthumously published fable written sometime between 1887 and 1888—six years after the first publication of *Treasure Island* in *Young Folks* magazine

(Tomaiuolo 80). Ruiz specifically asked for this text to be included in the press booklet for the film's 1991 Cannes' release, and it is clear that he did so in order to provide the audience with a guide to reading the film—as well shall see, the director inherits and complicates the questions that Stevenson's tale raises, specifically with regards to the concept of metalepsis discussed above. The text is a meta-fictional “fable” in which the characters—or “puppets” as Stevenson calls them—of Captain Smollett and Long John Silver meet “outside” of the text of *Treasure Island* to discuss their fictional roles. Lodged between the 32nd and 33rd chapter of the novel, the fable immediately follows the characters' discovery that no treasure remains in the original location that Captain Flint's map specified (we could label this one of the original story's peripeteias, along with the apple barrel scene). In the opening line Stevenson describes the situation thus: “After the 32nd chapter of TREASURE ISLAND, two of the puppets strolled out to have a pipe before business should begin again, and met in an open place not far from the story” (Stevenson 2012, 1). And then, in the final few lines, he ends with Captain Smollett's exclamation:

‘But there's the ink-bottle opening. To quarters!’

And indeed the Author was just beginning to write the words:

CHAPTER XXXIII (ibid. 4)

In the opening lines it is the simultaneous acknowledgement of the materiality of the text and the space of the story that signifies Stevenson's metaleptic intent. Moreover, the use of the word “open,” serves two functions: it delineates a location divorced from the fictional spaces that characterize *Treasure Island*—the relation between context and character in the novel temporarily suspended—and it also suggests the possibility of *openness* with regards to character: *Persons of the Tale* will provide a space in which both Silver and Smollett can

consider otherness in relation to themselves and the story in which they feature. No longer is this a question of the “business” and labour of conventional storytelling, but it is instead a consideration of play and difference. The last line clarifies this concept, and represents an explicit example of authorial/rhetorical metalepsis: for an instant narrative and discourse time run side-by-side—the opening of the ink bottle and the characters’ return to their “places”—and it is as if the story were unfolding at the very moment of its writing. In terms related to the discussion above, Stevenson adds a further story level between *Treasure Island* and the extra-diegetic space of the narrator, and then renders the boundaries between the two levels porous, providing a brief “window” between the two levels.

Stevenson provides this brief glimpse into the authorial realm—the temporary simultaneity of the narrative and discursive space in the last lines suggesting, quite impossibly, both the perfection of the real Author’s vision and the character’s “independence” from his fictional incarnation—so as to open up a space in which he can ask a series of questions concerning the relationship between the Author and their characters, and more broadly, chance and fate (in more explicitly theological terms: free-will and pre-destination). That is to say, if narrative and discourse time in *Persons of the Tale* are coterminous, one is given the impression that there were no revisions to the text of *Treasure Island*—or at least that is the fantastic implication. Silver, for example, realizing that his chances of survival cannot be great, asks Smollett: “But I’m the villain of this tale... what I want to know is, what’s the odds?” The Captain responds unequivocally: “Were you never taught your catechism?... Don’t you know there’s such a thing as an Author?” (Stevenson 2012, 1). The play here, on “Author” is a

theological one, and the analogy obvious: God is to man what an Author is to his text.³⁴ Smollett then continues, frustrated by Silver's apparent inability to think beyond his immediate predicament in the story: "Don't you believe in a future state?... Do you think there's nothing but the present story-paper?" And in more damning terms he adds: "You're not through this story yet; there's trouble coming for you" (ibid. 2). Given that the reader of this tale is likely to know that Silver is unsuccessful in his pursuit of treasure, this line bestows upon the narrative of *Treasure Island* a certain predictability, the implication being that conventional morality determines who "wins" and who "loses" in the narrative (The Captain and Silver at opposite ends of the spectrum). Indeed, not only does this short and fatalistic exchange—formally reinforced through authorial metalepsis—speak to the over-determined nature of characters and their relationships in a particular mode of storytelling—moral pathologies that can be articulated, justified and set against one another—but also to the intimate relation between the author and reader, and thus between the spheres of production and consumption. If writing—and shooting a film, we might add—is a one way process in which meaning travels from source to destination, then the reader's position is fixed, unchanging, and their prediction of the story's "future" events merely a question of understanding the generic routines and conventions that frame it. The space of *Treasure Island*, then—in contrast to that of *The Persons of the Tale*—is not "open" and, in this sense, the characters possess, in Ruizian parlance, limited "free-will."³⁵

³⁴ Indeed, Silver even recapitulates a tiresome argument concerning the (non)existence of God, when he wonders whether there can be an Author if he can allow characters like Pew—the Blind Man who was trampled to death by a group of horses in the original novel—to die in such horrible circumstances (Stenson 2012, 2).

³⁵ In numerous articles as well as in his theoretical work, Ruiz has spoken to the similarly constraining effect of American industrial practice on cinema, more specifically the "central conflict theory" that determines the very nature of the stories that are told, and by extension, the characters portrayed (Ruiz 2005, 14). In his critique of the scriptwriting textbooks he was introduced to during his university studies, for example, Ruiz suggests that there was a "system of credibility" that all scripts were subject to, and he argues that this is problematic in that it harms "the valorization of the image, and [replaces] it by the valorization of what it pretends to make the film's centre: characters" (Ruiz 2003, 16). For Ruiz, all stories conceived of under such conditions can be summarized thus: "a story begins when someone wants something, and someone else doesn't want them to have it... all the elements of

This notion that the characters of *Treasure Island* are bound by certain moral conventions that determine narrative trajectory is, of course, also tied to a particular and classical conception of the author/reader relationship, a model which posits a one-way and largely communicational relation between them. That is to say, the notion that the reader experiences only what is transmitted to them by the text in question, and has no free-will to imagine events and characters otherwise. Although Ruiz inherits Stevenson's desire to turn his characters into readers of their own lives—their own fictions—we can see how the formal device of metalepsis is used to take Stevenson's intention further, and to introduce Jonathan—and by extension, the spectator—to a greater potentiality for the reading process in general, transforming the fatalistic relationship between Stevenson's Silver, Smollett and the fictionalized author figure in *The Persons of the Tale* into something more liberating. Jean Pierre Léaud's Midas, is, as we have explained, the diegetic embodiment of the literary author, and his relationship to Jonathan throughout the film establishes a symbiotic relation between author and character, or, more accurately expressed, between author and reader, in which the literary story—delivered in the past tense of the voiceover—is destabilized by its unfolding in the perpetual presentness of the cinematic image. Indeed, as Cyril Béghin notes:

Jim et l'écrivain... sont deux faces bataillantes d'un même être, Janus tiraillé sur la
 ligne du temps, qui ne fait pas des tours mais des va-et-vient, 'passé'/'avenir',
 'fiction'/'écriture de la fiction' (Béghin 2003, "Treasure Island")

the story are arranged around this central conflict" (Ruiz 2005, 12). Not only does this structure posit a "direct relation between [the] will, which is dark and oceanic... and the petty play of strategies and tactics around [the] goal" but it also forces the audience to "take sides," and ignore "secondary objects and events" (ibid). In the latter stages of his career, this attendance towards the secondary, the peripheral and the fleeting would manifest most explicitly in Ruiz's claim that every shot constitutes a film in itself, and that, by extension, a film is *always already* a matrix of contradictory and fragmentary events. See the chapter *Central Conflict Theory* in *Ruiz's Poetics I*. For an excellent introduction to Ruiz's Poetics, see Michael Goddard's *Towards a Perverse Neo-Baroque Cinematic Aesthetic: Raúl Ruiz's Poetics of Cinema* (2004). Goddard's emphasis upon a non-systematic approach to the text is a methodology equally useful for the study of Ruiz's cinema.



Figure 7 - Midas' Impossible Entrance into his own Narrative

Now, in strictly narratological terminology, there is always an external—and thus transcendent—extra-diegetic narrating instance in film which is crucially separate from the Author, that is, the textual operation of meaning which occurs at the level of *mise-en-scène*, editing etc—what Christian Metz, borrowing from Albert Laffay, refers to as “Le Grand Imagier” (Metz 21)—but I contend that Midas’ intermittent appearance in the film serves as a structuring device, one that shifts the responsibility and authority of meaning from his character to Jonathan. Indeed, Jonathan undergoes a transformation in the film, developing from a character who is written to a character who *reads*.

In the audience’s first introduction to Midas, the voiceover—still in the first person—recalls how “un nouveau personnage” burst into Jonathan’s life—a semantic play on Midas’ fictional role, as well as the eccentricities of his behaviour—“[qui]... avait l’air de me connaître, de tout savoir de moi.” Shot through a wooden window grating in medium close-up, his face obscured by the fog and the excessively orange glows of the evening—Ruiz here using a filter so as to accentuate the fantastical element of the scene and “storyteller”—Midas stares at an initially confused Jonathan, and performs a series of exaggerated hand-gestures (see figure 7). The music is equally hyperbolic in expression: a series of sinister string and brass instruments building to a crescendo. The signs that Midas delivers—which seem to resemble the crazed

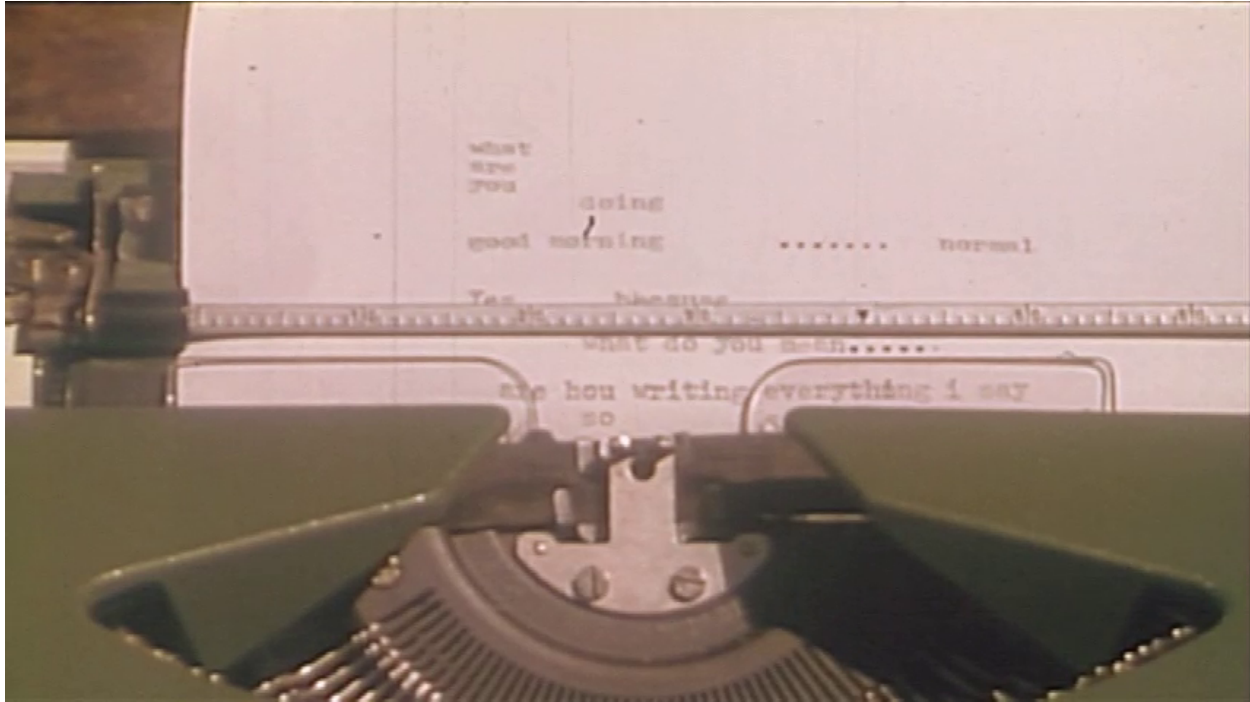


Figure 8 - Midas writes his own metaleptic interrogation

fumblings of a parent trying to scare a child or a terrible magician preparing his act—seem beyond Jonathan’s comprehension: all the character can do is hold his head in anguish and then smile.

This initial bewilderment—as if Jonathan is unsure of his role, his function within Midas’ fiction—is clarified soon after: in the second encounter the spectator is introduced to a dynamic that will persist, establishing a mutually constitutive relationship between the characters. Returning from an odd encounter with the Blind Man, a wide shot depicts Jonathan traipsing back to his parent’s inn. In voice-over once again, Midas/Jonathan explains that, upon returning home and seeing “the typewriter” he realized that “the adventure had not yet run its course.” “What are you doing? Why this candle?” Jonathan asks. Shot in profile, Midas responds with resigned indifference: “When I don’t have ideas... I burn my hand.” Jonathan then proceeds to inquire into Midas’ role as a storyteller. At this point, a close-up on the typewriter allows the audience to see what Midas is writing, and it is, in fact, a rough approximation of the events

unfolding at that very moment: in a series of single words organized vertically, we can read “what are you doing?” and then later in a single line: “are you writing everything I say?” (see figure 8).³⁶ Next, when Jonathan asks Midas if he writes stories, and the latter responds with a comical, indifferent air—shot in claustrophobic profile—that “there aren’t anymore... I write down what happens to others,” we can read in this moment a gesture towards a persistent “present-ness” of the text, a constant unfolding which invokes the Barthesian dictum that in writerly texts “there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is eternally written here and now” (Barthes 4). That is to say: Midas, the author, is writing Jonathan into existence, and yet the very words he writes represent an interrogation into his own role as the author of the literary story the spectator is in the process of watching unfold. Here, then, the authorial metalepsis in Stevenson’s story—in which we saw an impossible contiguity between the act of narrative and discourse time—is reproduced in visual terms.

Ruiz, though, is quick to re-establish tension: upon hearing that Jonathan has no friends, Midas exclaims in frustrated fashion, “we *always* say that!” The suggestion here is that the state of Jonathan’s story and stories more generally is one of repetition and circularity: Jonathan is, inescapably, a character who is *written*, who is fated to act exactly the way he does.³⁷ “This

³⁶ The slight difference between what is spoken by the actor (dubbed) and what is written by Midas on the typewriter speaks to the vicissitudes of any cinematic production process, and as such, does not present an impediment to my reading of the film in the terms above.

³⁷ Indeed, this tension between free-will and pre-destination is a common concern in Ruiz’s cinema. He explains the origins of his inspiration—through theological debates between Molinism and Thomism—thus:

[I]l est question de possession, il est question de prédétermination, puisqu’on va voir une histoire déjà tournée, qu’on sait déjà comment elle va finir, qu’on sait que quelqu’un sait comment elle va finir et puis qui nous concerne immédiatement, c’est notre histoire et donc c’est le problème du libre arbitre, de la prédétermination qui est là, et si tu prends la querelle du libre arbitre et de la prédétermination au XVII^e siècle entre les molinistes et les thomistes, si tu prends la solution thomiste, ça veut dire qu’il y a une espèce de bilan final au moment de la mort qui fait que si tu es condamné, c’est juste, même s’il ne pouvait arriver que cela, donc il suit certaines règles logiques—c’est différent de la solution moliniste, ou à chaque moment l’ensemble de la vie, l’ensemble du film se réécrit et donc il n’est pas question de faire un bilan final, mais le film finit et recommence à chaque moment et même si ça a été tourné avant. (Ruiz & Schefer 67)



Figure 9 – Midas’ impotence beckons Jonathan to the world of imaginative readership famous Captain that everybody is talking about... he’s still with you, isn’t he?” Midas inquires, to which Jonathan responds with his own frustration: “So this is all about the captain—I *knew* it!” Midas is clearly pushing Jonathan to negotiate the events of his life, and it is instructive that he compliments Jonathan’s capabilities: “Good Line!” Here, the music takes on a sinister complexion, as Midas presumably begins to type the ideas that Jonathan’s assertion have generated. We now witness two scenes intercut together: this is not parallel cutting—Jonathan is present in both scenes—but, in fact, the audience are encouraged to believe that they are witnessing the second scene in the moment of its unfolding, and thus the boundaries between extra-diegetic and intra-diegetic narration are made porous.³⁸ This, then, is an even more pointed cinematic analogue of the authorial metalepsis cited above, which is made absolutely clear when

For (a little) more information on Ruiz’s relationship to Molinist/Thomist debates, see his extraordinary film *Combat d’Amour en songe* (2001) in which Melvil Poupaud—Jonathan/Jim Hawkins in Ruiz’s *Treasure Island*—plays a young theology student who increasingly struggles to differentiate between the two positions.

³⁸ Now, this is not to assert that there isn’t a fundamental distinction between the two, but we must allow that our experience of such a self-evident contradiction produces a kind of *pleasure*. In Ruiz’s words, this might mean “cinematographic emotion.”

Jonathan asks the Blind Man for an explanation of the events unfolding around him in the scene “under construction.” With a frontal close-up on Midas grimacing, we hear the Blind Man respond that “it would be a lot easier if I could spell the whole thing out... but it is out of the question.” Next, we cut back to a long shot of Midas, burning his hand presumably because he can’t think of any ideas—a parallel is thus drawn between Midas’ impotence and the Blind Man’s. This shot depicts an overly illuminated hand appearing from the left hand side of the frame—a seemingly impossible duplication of Midas’ hand that covers the flame, or perhaps a spectre from a fictional future—whilst Jonathan looks on, his face tightly framed on the opposite side (see figure 9). This shot does not follow logically from those that we have seen before—Jonathan’s body position having shifted, the lighting more subdued, the colors de-saturated—and the sound of blowing wind serves to create a brief repose, a moment in which distinctions between discrete temporal moments disappear. Indeed, in Ruizian parlance, this shot presents a shot fulfilling an “holistic” function, in that “it alludes to and synthesises the totality of shots and the stories they tell” of the film in question (Ruiz 2004, 58). That is to say: Jonathan, the burgeoning reader, is being asked to *create*, to have *free will*—in other words, to *imagine* and visualize in greater and more personal detail the literary events that surround him. By disturbing the boundaries that separate the spheres of production and consumption of literary texts, and by visualizing literary metalepsis, Ruiz—through Midas—asks Jonathan to provide a direction for the fictional events that will follow, whilst at the same time acknowledging the

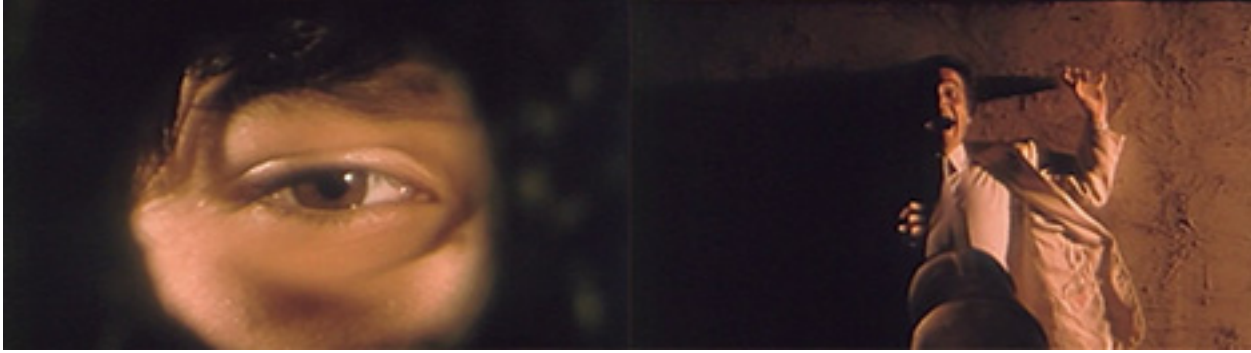


Figure 10 - Jonathan's "oeil du seigneur" and Midas' death

utterly impossible nature of the enterprise.

Indeed, this conception of Jonathan's reading process—which sidesteps traditional notions of comprehension and intelligence so as to foreground its personal and imaginative nature—is emphasized through the film's constant reference to vision itself, the implication being that the reader—embodied through Jonathan—can “see” whatever they want when they read a book. For example, almost all of the characters, at a certain point, respond to a declaration on the part of another with the expression “I see” (this fact is even remarked upon by Jonathan, who, frustrated with this sense of repetition, responds to the Captain's use of the term at one point with a biting “nothing new”). Moreover, the objects that the mercenaries bring to the Captain as incitement to play the game of *Treasure Island* are glass eyes, and the implication is clear: to play this game, to read the novel well, means to *envision* it. More substantially, Jonathan spends the first half of the film spying on the Captain, using what he/Midas refers to as “l'oeil du seigneur”—more usefully translated as the “Eye of God” in the English version of the film—a spy hole in the attic of the inn that sits directly above the Captain's room. The top-down view that is offered to the audience, coupled with the repeated shots of Jonathan's inquisitive eye peering down at the events unfolding develops a voyeuristic relation between, in particular, Jonathan and the Captain, but more generally between Jonathan and the other characters in the film. In a sense, it also serves to establish the inherently personal nature of the reading process:

the reader is free when reading a book to use his “*oeil du seigneur*,” that is, to construct an imaginative and all-seeing vision of the text in question. If the cinematic audience is limited to what they see—to what the camera *shows* them—then the literary reader, embellishing upon what they are *told*, is free to imagine a great deal more.

This notion is exemplified in a brief scene in the film in which The Captain realizes that Jonathan is spying on him: lying on his bed, the Captain reaches into a drawer and fishes out his gun. Next, he raises it to Jonathan’s *oeil du seigneur*, as the camera cuts to a temporally discontinuous shot in which, in the foreground, we see the barrel of the gun, and in the far end of shot a brief glimpse of Midas. As Midas’ body is replaced with Jonathan’s in a matched jump-cut, we hear the intermingling of the two character’s cries as the Captain fires the gun, the two character’s bodies impossibly glued to what we presume to be the ceiling of the Captain’s room. Jonathan then falls back on his bed, holding his head in his hands. Not only are we witness, here, to the symbiotic nature of the relationship between Midas and Jonathan as outlined above—and thus between author/reader, a relation in which one cannot exist without the other, that a book, and by extension an author are only given meaning once a text has been “filled in” by the reader’s imagination—but this scene also serves as an amusing and quite literal reference to Barthes’ article *Death of the Author* (1977). The fact that Jonathan continues to live only reinforces the idea that the meaning of a text is constantly in the process of personal and imaginative renewal.

***Le Sculaire* and *La Complexité*: Intertextuality and Personal Memory**

This emphasis upon the imagination lays the ground for a representation of the process of intertextual recognition—literary and otherwise—that furnishes both Jonathan’s and other characters’ reading experiences with a personal series—let us remember our discussion of Therien’s *scalaire* in the introduction—within which they can locate, complicate, and individually grasp and appropriate for themselves Stevenson’s text; in other words, they can imaginatively construct a *memoria*. This is established, in broad terms, through the film’s coarse and characteristic embellishment upon an oft remarked-upon subtext in the novel: Jim Hawkins’ search through the central male figures—Captain Smollett, Dr Livesey and, most importantly, Long John Silver—for a Father figure, and, by extension, for a heterosexual familial stability that will enable him to pursue entrance into the adult world. In the original novel, Jim’s father is conspicuously absent: we read not one line of reported speech from the character, and instead learn of his deteriorating health through Jim’s narration, often accompanied by a foreboding reference to a future state: for example, “I am sure the annoyance and terror he lived in must have greatly hastened his early and unhappy death” (Stevenson 1955, 14), or, “my poor father was little likely to see the spring” (ibid. 17). In Ruiz’s film this psychoanalytic reading of the text becomes explicit and somewhat banal: the many fathers that populate the film all wish to lay claim to Jonathan—his “first” father, The Doctor, The Captain, Israel Hands and Silver, who all, at one time or another, proclaim vocally their paternity—and to help guide him into a particular—and crucially, institutional—future, the implication, of course, that childhood and adulthood represent discrete stages of (literary) experience, and that there are, by extension, “good” readings and “bad” readings of literary texts. The irony, of course, is that in their sheer number and variety this coterie of fathers instead emphasize the inherently multiple nature of

both (Ruiz's) cinematic adaptation, and the reading process itself: that is to say, if Jonathan-the-reader's paternity is multiple, then his experience of reading *Treasure Island* must be, as a consequence, furnished with and informed by a series of personally-significant intertextual material.

One moment in the film which highlights this fact comes when, following their desertion of the schooner, Jonathan, the Doctor, Tim Moretti and the French Captain come upon another ship, apparently also playing the "game" of *Treasure Island*. Stepping upon the ship, The French Captain encounters a Mexican Captain, who—speaking English—proceeds to explain to him how he has heard that Frenchmen were very "civilized." The French Captain responds mockingly: "Monsieur, sur ce point, je suis pas un produit typique: je ne lis presque jamais!" The point here is that (literary) culture and civilization are synonymous, and the exchange cannot help but invoke the Arnoldian dictum that "culture is the best of what has been thought and said" (that is, it suggests a conventional understanding of the literary institution as the locus of "significant" literary experience). The exchange continues—in a series of tight close-ups—with the Mexican Captain eventually asking the Captain: "You mean to tell me that you've never heard of *Benito Cereno* by Herman Melville?... You've missed something of real, great importance! I read every book that I can put my hands on, especially those about sea!" This comment not only marks the manner in which Ruiz's text is haunted by the presence of other intertexts, but also that The Mexican Captain's very memory and method of engagement with Stevenson's novel invokes other texts concerning sea-adventure, and, more particularly—given that Melville's novel involves mutiny—a theme that Stevenson's novel shares. Here, we are witness to Thérien's notion of the serial nature of the reader's memory, an intertext invoked and justified by the reader's affective response. The Mexican continues: "I already know *everything*

there is to know about you, and I'm already a great admirer of yours, great!" The French Captain, however—because he has not read *Treasure Island* and is, therefore, "uncultivated"—can only respond: "Mais là, je ne comprends pas de tout!"³⁹ The Mexican Captain's knowledge and love of sea-faring tales breeds a particular kind of readerly self-awareness: the complexity of the reader's *scalaire* lies in their knowledge of their favourite genre and the peculiarities that attend to it, not to any alienating and aseptic institutional notion of "literature."

A little later in the scene, around the dinner table in which Moretti, The Doctor, Jonathan and his Aunt are being cooked for by Silver and the other mercenaries held prisoner by the Mexican Captain, we witness the latter attempting initially in vain to remember the title of Melville's book. Shot in tight close-up, he proceeds to unravel a series of associations that characterize his memory, and we witness here a (very amusing) demonstration of the way in which literary and personal memory are intertwined: "What's the name of that liqueur they make in France? And those medieval buildings... that they have up there?" asks The Mexican Captain. A medium close-up on the Doctor—accompanied by the swelling of a sinister string arrangement—shows the character increasingly discomforted with the turn the conversation is taking: it's almost as if the Mexican Captain is willing the events of Ruiz's film to change by his constant invocation of Melville's novel. He continues: "what's the word for these people, who make a business out of living, and then dying?" Later: "And that gesture the pope does, that we all do?" "Benediction?" Moretti responds. "And the drink?" The Captain asks. "Benedictine?" "And the man, who founded the Benedictines?" "Saint Benedict?" "And in Spanish?" "*San Benito*" "Now you take away the San..." "Ah *Benito Cereno!*" exclaims the French Captain, the intertext having finally been recovered after a ridiculous trapeze through the Mexican Captain's

³⁹ When questioned at another point in the film about his lack of literary experience, The Captain responds in all seriousness: "Je suis désolé: depuis que je suis marié, je ne pense qu'à mes dettes"



Figure 11 – Silver’s intertextual intervention

memorial associations. Explaining the plot to the other characters—“It’s about a rebellion on a slave ship...the jailors pretend they’re prisoners, and the prisoners pretend they’re jailors”—Moretti’s words accompany the arrival of Silver’s men—attired, once again, in the outfit of mercenaries, and clearly acting out the events *just* described. Using a split-field diopter lens once more, the camera cuts to a medium close-up of Silver peering through the cabin window, exclaiming: “Alright, alright the party’s over! I would be very grateful if you would eat your food and come down into the hold.” On the left of frame sits Silver’s face—smirking as if this event was always destined to happen—and on the right, an “African” totem of unknown provenance (figure 11). This shot is typical of Ruiz’s style: the totem, though causally related to the preceding discussion, seems to appear from nowhere, and to belong to no place in particular, instead serving a kind of objectification of the Mexican Captain’s memory. In other words, it figures as further visual evidence of the productive—rather than static—nature of the reader’s memory: not only does *Treasure Island* invoke particular and affective connections with other

textual material, but it recalls objects in the reader's life that they deem significant and enriching to the reading of the particular text in front of them. Indeed, if *Benito Cereno* has provided an interpretive guide for the literary spectator—helping them to determine what course of events Ruiz's peculiar reading of *Treasure Island* will take—then it also simultaneously functions as a way of demonstrating a particular conception of the reading subject in general, who furnishes their virtual *memoria* of the primary text in question with a variety of figures drawn from memory.

It is not only the serial nature of the reader's literary experience that Ruiz foregrounds in the film, but also, more broadly, Jonathan situates the text—and, more importantly, his reading of it—within a more contemporary intertextual “media ecology” (Goddard 84). Indeed, it is in the opening shots—which turn out to be unused material from the abandoned, more script-reliant version of the film—that Jonathan/Midas explains to the audience that, after a powercut, he (mis)understood the events of his life to be a mere extension of his favourite television series. More interestingly, it is later in the film that we witness a substantial engagement with the dynamics of memory in relation to televisual imagery and the reading process: in voiceover, Jonathan/Midas explains, following the death of the Captain, that the key to the events unfolding around him may have been in his possession all along. We are then shown three shots of Jonathan's favourite television series edited in continuous fashion so as to show two mercenaries fighting unknown aggressors. Jonathan/Midas' voiceover continues: “Ma soif de comprendre me faisais superposé les personnages!” Here, a shift occurs, and from this moment onwards, each of

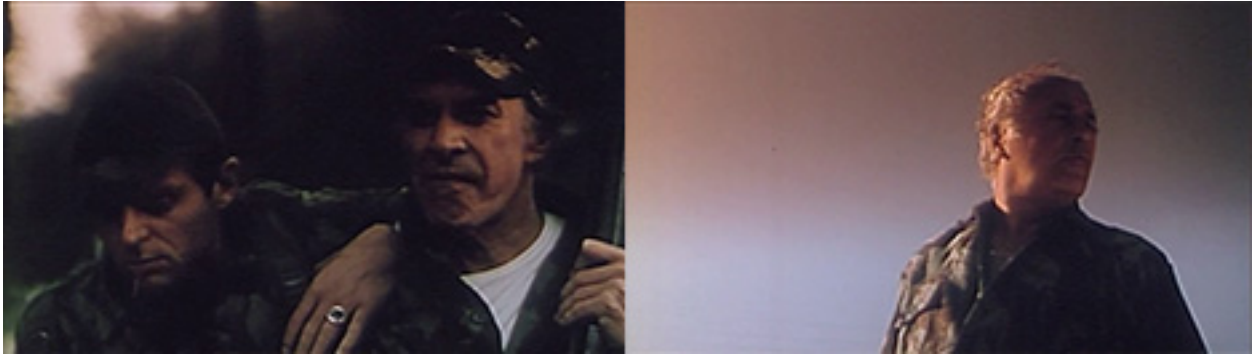


Figure 12 - Jonathan superimposes the story of his favourite television series onto *Treasure Island* the shots represent a particularly affective and discontinuous moment within Jonathan's memory of this series: a medium close up of the Crab and the Captain shows the former spitting grotesquely, the latter chewing gum prodigiously as he holds his gun up in clichéd fashion, as the voiceover explains "Stork, le chef, devait être le capitaine, Wilbur était Crab" (see figure 12); next, a medium close up of Jonathan's mother's grimacing face as she stalks through the smoke of excessive gunfire ("Nadia était surement ma mere"); a medium shot of Tim Moretti screaming as he fires a gun whilst the doctor tries to pull him away ("Texas était probablement le docteur, Timo le millionaire); a medium shot of the Blind man—now attired in mercenary costume—stopping in the middle of shot to fire his gun off into the unknown distance ("Pew... était l'aveugle"); The Rat beckoning troops as he runs wildly across screen from right to left ("Joey... était le Rat"); and finally, Silver jumping down from a jeep and stopping, quite perfectly, in the middle of shot as he surveys his surroundings ("et le terrible Abu Ali... était Silver). In the next shot, we see Jonathan staring at the television, his face overexposed, illuminated by the



Figure 13 – “Do you read a lot?”

screen’s glare. However, the audience see only the reflection of the television in the piano to Jonathan’s right, and the shot is in fact a repetition of the first shot of Ruiz’s film (which is, one suspects, as much an indication of the limited material Ruiz possessed for this abandoned version). It is clear from this description that Jonathan is not watching television but, instead, we are witnessing his particular recollection of memorable moments from his favourite series—provoked by his engagement with Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*—and that this fictional superimposition is in fact, more accurately put, an attempt to visualize the reader’s *memoria* as outlined in the introduction. This collection of images, then—which is both a recognition of the film Ruiz’s *Treasure Island* was once to be, if we recall our discussion from chapter one and, more broadly, a nod to Cannon’s cheap and (not so) cheerful action-aesthetic—hits upon the nature of Jonathan’s personal memory: each image from the television series captures a particular moment or gesture, self-contained, affective, inconsequential, one that Jonathan connects with the characteristics he sees as analogous to the figures that populate his (literary)

life. In a sense, the reader's imagination, here, has been furnished with images and "themes" from the television series that he sees as intimately related to the literary world of *Treasure Island*, and he has "superimposed" them onto the literary text that he is both a participant in and reader of. Ruiz's film is thus attempting the impossible: to (re)construct Jonathan's multimedia *memoria*.

In this chapter we have paid particular attention to manner in which Ruiz's *Treasure Island* might act as both an example of Ruiz's aberrant adaptation process and an allegory of the way the director reads literary texts more generally. To do this, we turned to the narratological figure of metalepsis and through it demonstrated how Ruiz establishes the grounds with which to proceed: young Jonathan's relationship to Midas becomes a way for the director to question the hierarchies implicit within conventional reading of literary texts, in the process opening the door towards a more imaginative and personal engagement. Then, by turning to a series of scenes from the film, we were able to establish how Ruiz attempts to visualize—through specifically cinematic means—the construction of particular readers' *memoria*. One final image—and perhaps one of the most striking in the film—will suffice to close our discussion: Jonathan is spending the afternoon at his new friend Silver's inn named the "Hispaniola." Following the appearance and declaration of paternity from *another* father (this time, The Rat, a "thug" friend of his parents) Jonathan notices something rather bizarre: the entire contents of Silver's secret library seem to consist of various editions of one text, and one text only: Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (see figure 13). "Do you read a lot?" Jonathan asks Silver. "Come," the latter responds—his paternalistic voice echoing off-screen—"I want you to choose pyjamas." In Ruiz's film "reading a lot" does not mean acquainting oneself with the cannon, nor does it mean locating a fixed meaning hidden beneath the words—rather, it entails the recognition that the individual's

reading experience is singular—indeed, *different* with each engagement—and that there is a multiplicity at the heart of all texts, its excavation only possible through recourse to the dynamic interplay between personal imagination and memory. The Ruizian reader may read a lot, but they imagine a great deal more.

CONCLUSION

“Wherever in the world there’s something happening, wherever you find your destiny taking shape, there is always a hole, a vantage-point, from which you can discover, or see, everything you need to know, in good time. And I do mean ‘in good time.’” – The First Narrator, Raul Ruiz’s *In Pursuit of Treasure Island* (Ruiz 2008, 7)

In 1989, Ruiz would publish a follow-up novella entitled *In Pursuit of Treasure Island*, two years before he and editor Rodolfo Wedeles completed the final edits to the last reel of the film, and therefore before its first theatrical release at the Cannes film festival in 1991. The novella suffers, as one might expect, from the same professional slapdashery that characterized the film’s production: the book’s blurb wrongly lists the film as having been shot in 1984, and even misquotes a passage from the novella that it uses as the principal textual enticement to the reader (all three of them, one imagines). It then describes the novella as a “prelude,” of and a “continuation” to Ruiz’s film, as well as a “follow-up” and a “pursuit” of Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*. Indeed, it is with this novella that the director further complicates the questions concerning process that we have attempted to address in this thesis: working in closer detail with certain scenes present in the original script but omitted from the final cut, and combining them with scenes unique to the film as well as altogether new material, Ruiz reflects on both his experiences shooting *Treasure Island* and on his cinematic process more generally. This is not, then, merely a recuperative gesture in which the wrongs of a fraught film production can be “righted” within the safe(r) confines of the novella form, nor does the text substantially build upon the theory of reading outlined in the second chapter: rather, the book shifts focus,

transforming the film into simply another intertext amongst many. It is with a brief reflection upon this novella—which loops back through Ruiz’s theory to the project’s origins—that we shall conclude, given that it provides both an apt summary of and departure from the central claims of this thesis.

Although Ruiz retains the child as the central figure through which the story is recounted, he no longer names him Jonathan—in fact, he does not give the character a name at all, further evidence that for the director *Treasure Island* is an immortal story which is destined to be repeated and relived—but instead turns the character into one of two potential actors playing the part of Jim Hawkins (from Jonathan’s many fathers in the film, then, we shift to *Treasure Island*’s many children). The first section of the text is told from the perspective of this character, whose fictional life echoes to a large extent the events of the film—that is, it retains the same principle characters such as his mother, father, Silver and, most importantly, Midas, as well as the idea that *Treasure Island* provides them with a map to find treasure. However, the narration frames his account not as a journey through his imagination and readerly *memoria*, but instead as an attempt to translate his “multilingual memoirs into French” (Ruiz 2008, 5). He is only the first of three narrators: in the second section, another unnamed boy becomes the narrator for a single chapter as he recounts his interest in—and the plot of—a fictional novel entitled *Confessions of a Woman in Africa*. Once the game of *Treasure Island* “officially” begins—that is, once the characters set sail for the island—it is revealed that this second child narrator is in fact an actor employed to play Jim Hawkins, and the original narrator is merely a “stand-in.” Then, the first narrator—regaining the narration—witnesses Midas’ apparent suicide, usurps his position as author of the *Treasure Island* game, and begins to write the events of the game as they unfold. Soon losing track of the events on board the ship, however, the boy is dismissed from his

position, which leads him to realize that the treasure is to be found in a location specified by the fictional text *Confessions of a Woman in Africa*, and not by *Treasure Island*. Finally, at the very end of the text, we are given a different account: the story was the invention of an apparently insane man. As his son in the second epilogue explains:

“I have decided to allow [the book’s] publication in the hope that it will furnish irrefutable proof of his insanity... He believed himself to be a living incarnation of his father-in-law, a celebrated anthropologist whose magnificent collection of coloured glass eyes is still in my possession” (ibid. 111)

The convoluted nature of the plot recounted above—that is, the seamless blending of the two child figures’ narration coupled with the palimpsestuous presence of the events from the film and original script—further displaces Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* from any supposed point of origin. The style of the text also contributes to this sense of disorientation: discrete temporal moments are often juxtaposed within single sentences, and lengthy dialogue exchanges are accompanied by little external description, giving the impression more of a film script than of a novella. Ruiz’s text, then, much like the film, is in a perpetual state of deferral: no figure or mode of expression is stable or constant, and the new intertextual matrix within which he situates his reading of Stevenson’s text can only recall Thérien’s claim that each reading of a literary text is a singular experience.

The blurring of the boundaries between novel and script form—let us recall Ruiz’s comments in chapter one that his initial script for *Treasure Island* resembled a *roman de gare*—is the most obvious manner in which the novella returns the reader to the genesis of Ruiz’s *Treasure Island* project. More substantially, it inherits the questions concerning fictional free-

will and pre-destination that characterized Jonathan's relationship to Midas in the film—it does not use them, however, to theorize a particular reading process or author/reader relationship, but it instead leads to a reflection on the production of the original film itself. Midas' function within the text, as the child actor playing Jim Hawkins explains, is to “report back everything” on the actors involved in the *Treasure Island* game, yet it is also Midas that writes the dialogue and events *before* they happen (ibid. 95). This impossible relation between fictional past and future, and thus between literature and its adaptive cinematic embodiment, is what the narrator investigates after having taken over Midas' role (the latter commits suicide because no one will let him play Jim Hawkins). The narrator comments, for example, in a manner that can only invoke the games with tense and time characteristic of the *nouveau roman* genre in France in the 1950s that “[t]here is something odd about writing a story in the past tense even though it has yet to take place. I suppose, the present tense would be better, and easier” (ibid. 99). And later, he adds with surprise that he is, in fact, able to control the story's trajectory: “everything I had planned takes place before my very eyes. The precious and unselfconsciousness of the action is very moving... I have to say that I predicted yesterday that I should write these lines today” (ibid. 102).

This *Treasure Island* game—in which the past-tense of traditional literary form is embodied in the present incarnations of the figures that populate the novella—shares a great deal in common with Ruiz's practice of filmmaking, particularly as it was outlined in the first chapter. At one point the narrator explains that his “daily script is called a call-sheet. Every morning, each of the players receives a copy and, at the end of the day, we held a meeting to assess the day's work and outline the following day's program” (ibid. 103). The point, here, is clear: a call-sheet

is a form that is used on film sets to organize and facilitate daily production. The narrator then goes on to explain his methodology:

My current method is that I start off by writing down a sequence of events without specifying the players' intentions or any kind of detailed action. This is called the plot. Then I go on to describe each of the character's hidden motives, any last minute changes which may occur and the range of possible events arising from certain flaws in the game. The sum total of flaws in the game constitutes the final plot. Flaws actually determine the underlying force of events. As I see it, the course of events is a kind of fluid but unbelievably cumbersome, raw material out of which emerges an unexpected and inexplicable sequence: the actual story-line.

The story is, therefore, in polarized opposition to the game (ibid. 103)

The game—we might even say the mathematics—of *Treasure Island* suggests not only the singular nature of all literary adaptation, then, but it also functions as a reflection upon the vicissitudes of shooting cinematic fiction: the cumbersome course of events represents the contingent nature of any shoot and the rushes that they produce, and the “inexplicable sequence” is the final product—only available in post-production. Ruiz, here, is alluding to the chaotic production process that left such visible scars on his original film and, more broadly, to the dichotomy of structure and construction that we outlined in the first chapter (with “story” mapping onto structure and “game” onto construction). That is to say: the flaws in this novella's particular incarnation of the immortal story of *Treasure Island* can only invoke those that led to the actual film's (eventual) completion—a film that was scarred by financial lack and excessive external input. By turning the game of *Treasure Island* in the novella into such a pointed

reflection upon its own origins, Ruiz returns to the questions of theory and practice that define this thesis.

The aim of briefly assessing *In Pursuit of Treasure Island* was to draw out the pendular nature of Ruiz's creative process, emphasize the consistency of certain film-theoretical concerns within the director's work in general and, I hope, point in the direction of future work on Ruiz's *Treasure Island* project in particular. As such, my reading of the novella is in no way exhaustive. The fictional intertexts that populate the novella re-establish certain post-colonial themes that the original script dealt with, and it would be profitable to put this in dialogue with critique of Stevenson's text that raises similar questions. Moreover, a closer attendance to Ruiz's particular writing style—the text is, of course, only one of a few novellas the director produced during his career—would also help to highlight some useful parallels with the film's style, and lay the foundation for work on the director's literary output more generally.

Towards Future Work

In the first chapter, this thesis addressed a significantly understudied area within academic accounts of Ruiz: the larger historical context that informs and surrounds the creation of the director's cinematic (and theoretical) work. Partly informed by a wish to ground Ruiz's output within the economic and material boundaries in which he found himself in the mid-80s—a chaotic moment in which Cannon Films was looking to “civilize” its output, Ruiz one of a number of auteurs contracted by the company to adapt significant works within the European canon—it also, I hope, serves to illuminate the importance of investigating this relationship more broadly. This is not to say that we must excavate the remains of the director's most tortured or

fraught productions and rebuild them in accordance with some vague notion of his original vision—for that would be a most unfortunate and hagiographic auteurism—but rather that Ruiz’s position within a precarious cultural-economic landscape, the idiosyncratic manner in which the director approaches his films, and the particular mandates of the cultural institutions that fed and encouraged him should be put into closer conversation. Looking toward future work on the subject, then, there are a number of films within Ruiz’s oeuvre—particularly within the 1980s—which present such productive collisions: *La présence réelle* (1984)—as Michael Goddard describes it, “at once the portrait of a precariously employed actor and a documentary about the Avignon festival” (Goddard 87)—and *Histoires de glace* (1987)—a triptych of films produced by the French ministry of Foreign Affairs—offer but just two examples.

In the second chapter, we took Gilles Thérien’s work on literary reading, and, in particular, focused on the manner in which Ruiz, through the figure of Jonathan, produces an allegory of the reading process, in which the reader’s imagination and memory combine so as to construct a readerly *memoria*. This attendance to the particularities of Ruiz’s method of reading literary texts—informed by certain theological questions as much as it is by memory as it was conceived in ancient rhetoric—helped us to better understand the director’s peculiar form of literary adaptation, an area within work on Ruiz that has been, up until now, understudied. Indeed, there is not only a great deal of work left to do with regards to Ruiz’s engagement with *individual* literary texts—that is, we must investigate whether the director reads the same kind of literature in the same way, and if the source of financing, say, and the context in which he produced particular adaptations significantly affected their aesthetic—but also with other artistic forms more broadly: Ruiz produced a number of theatrical adaptations throughout his career—*Richard III*, *Bérénice*, *Professeur Taranne* (1987) to name a few examples—and it would be

productive to put his conception of the theatrical process in conversation with his theoretical work (in other words: if we have thought in more detail about how Ruiz conceives the reader, then what can be said of the theatrical spectator?)

A chaotic production, a scarred film; a peculiar adaptation, an allegory of reading. In the introduction to this thesis we emphasized the slipperiness of Raul Ruiz's oeuvre—particularly within the most consistently extravagant period of his career in the 1980s—and the consequences for readings of his work. The director's films hide from the analytic gaze of those determined to find consistency and coherency within the cinematic text, and *Treasure Island*—as well as its follow-up novella—is certainly no exception: it's overlapping, conflicting stories—which marry allegorical insight with aleatoric abandon—provide a challenge to any kind of significant and sustained analysis. The film—like a great deal of the director's work (and here we might remember his claim that 400 shots means 400 films [Ruiz 2005, 57])—is composed of seditious fragments, and if we have been able to read in them a certain desire to allegorize—and, more importantly, visualize—the process of reading literary texts, then it is only because the very theory of reading we have inherited and developed shares the director's wish to disassemble the architecture of conventional analysis. The Ruizian reader is merely a node in an ever-shifting intertextual configuration.

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