

SHAKESPEARE, THE MOVIE, II

Popularizing the plays on film, TV,
video, and DVD

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OUT DAMNED SCOT

Dislocating *Macbeth* in transnational
film and media culture

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13 Donaldson (1991: 65) reads this as evidence that the King's reform is marked by his being cleaned up, but I do not believe the reform motif is a crucial part of Branagh's representation of the King, nor that Branagh's demystification of war is as complete or successful as Donaldson believes.

14 *Henry V* promotional video viewed at Shakespeare Association, Philadelphia, April, 1990. Bibliographic information unavailable.

15 Seminar directed by Douglas Kellner and held at the International Association for Philosophy and Literature conference, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, April, 1993.

Exploring the effects of verisimilitude in theater and film, Walter Benjamin observes that the concept of "place" in the theater cannot, ultimately, be severed from the spectator's location beyond the footlights, despite even the most powerful illusions of *mise-en-scène*. By contrast, cinema's ability to efface its own location in time and space is the very condition of its scopopic seduction. It is, according to Benjamin, a kind of representational oasis, "an orchid in the land of technology" capable of removing us from the trivium of "[o]ur taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories . . . burst[ing] this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling" (1992: 672). Benjamin's cautiously euphoric description of the centrifugal potential of cinematic representation uncannily invokes a far more recent arrival, digital technology, which has not only changed the landscape of film production by making it widely affordable and accessible through digital distribution, but also revolutionized the act of reception as a mode of "production" in its own right. Indeed, the digital video disk (DVD) caters to the spectator's implied longing for supplemental spaces beyond the purview of the camera – provisional and performative places that invite us to construct our own film from the remnants of discarded footage, photo gallery stills, press kits, censored scenes, and multilanguage menus.¹ Accordingly, although this often highly privatized experience of home theater invokes a return to the solitary, orchid-like splendor that Benjamin ascribes to the hypnotic pull of celluloid, I would suggest that the experience of cinema today is more firmly rooted in the contested province of the thistle – a cross between a lone flower and a menacing mass of weeds – and, of course, the symbol of one place in particular: Scotland. Indeed, I shall argue that Scotland, and, more specifically, the dislocated "Scotland" that figures so prominently in twentieth-century media adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, suggests a compelling metaphor for the transnational playground wherein the challenges and possibilities of globalization may be traversed.

In the late 1990s and the new millennium, there have been no fewer than nine, highly varied film, television, and internet adaptations of *Macbeth*, including a high-school video production available exclusively on the internet, adult straight to video and DVD spin-offs such as *In the Flesh* (Stuart Canterbury, 1998), and moderately

It is significant that this line is uttered as voice-over, for as Joan Copjec argues, voice-over issues from an uncanny off-screen space, the space of the "intemporal voice" that "cannot be situated in – nor subject to the ravages of – time or place" (1993: 185). This resolutely intemporal "place," I will ultimately argue, is the locus of the *real* Scotland, however much it may initially suggest the spectral appearances of *Brigadoon*. Voice-over narration is a staple of film noir, a genre that emerges, according to Copjec, as an attempt to cope with – and to warn of – the historical replacement of "desire" with "drive":

the old modern order of desire, ruled over by an oedipal father, has begun to be replaced by a new order of the drive, in which we no longer have recourse to the protections against *jouissance* that the oedipal father once offered . . . Which is to say: we have ceased being a society that attempts to preserve the individual right to *jouissance*, to become a society that commands *jouissance* as a "civic" duty. "Civic" is, strictly speaking, an inappropriate adjective in this context, since these obscene importunings of contemporary society entail the destruction of the *citizitas* itself . . .

(1993: 182)

Shallow Grave, though by no means a noir detective film, opens with a voice-over that conveys a similar warning. For this initially comic story of middle-class twentysomethings in search of a new flatmate quickly devolves into a murder rampage when the newcomer is found dead in his room with a huge stash of money. Rather than report the incident to the authorities, the roommates attempt to eliminate everyone who poses a threat to their efforts to hoard the money for themselves; and, as in *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*, few indeed are left standing at the film's conclusion. In hindsight, then, the line issuing from the death-inflected, disembodied voice-over – "this could be any place" – functions as a powerful warning that the fetishization of drive – of private *jouissance* – has "mortal consequences for society" as "ever smaller factions of people proclaim their duty-bound devotion to their own special brand of enjoyment . . ." (Copjec, 1993: 183). That the "any place" featured in *Shallow Grave* is Scotland as opposed to "Scotland" is significant, not just for the obvious admonitory suggestion that such perverse self-interest has become the rule as opposed to the exception but also for the more subtle implication that understanding the difference between the two Scotlands may, in the not-too-distant future, be the difference between life and death.

Something is rotten in the state of Scotland

The fact that *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy* have been commercially more successful than films such as *Shallow Grave* and, later, *Transpotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996) is not due to production values alone; rather, it is their contrasting ideological values, masked as differences of genre, that constitutes the geopolitical gap between the "Scottish" film and the Scottish film. If *Shallow Grave* and *Transpotting* suggest postmodern variations on the discomfiting themes of film noir, then *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy* are more at home among the maverick triumphs that are the topos of the American western. However, I would argue that whereas film noir confronts us with an alienating vision of a society that embraces drive over desire, the western – or, more accurately, the neo/"Scottish"

successful independent films like *Scotland, PA* (Billy Morrissette, 2001).² What the adaptations I discuss have in common is not only a somewhat oblique relationship to Shakespeare's play but also a rather peculiar relationship to "Scotland": not one of them is set or shot in Scotland, and yet the idea of "Scotland" operates as a powerful metonymy for a place that is everywhere and nowhere in particular.³ For example, the Glen Ridge High *Star Wars*-style *Macbeth* begins: "A long time ago in a galaxy far far away . . . Scotland" (Ben Concepcion, 2001). Similarly, *Scotland, PA* invokes "Scotland" only to displace it alongside the descriptive abbreviation "PA" rather than "UK." Ironically, though, the filmmakers started shooting in rural Pennsylvania only to find that they could not reproduce the look of middle America in the 1970s, and so the production moved to Nova Scotia – literally, "New Scotland." The portability of "Scotland" in the *Macbeth* films of the late 1990s and the new millennium is not, however, a mere capitulation to the hopelessness that Fredric Jameson ascribes to the postmodern condition, wherein the past can only be accessed through stereotypes that keep real history at arm's length but forever beyond our grasp (1992b: 19–20). Despite their obvious differences in production values and genre, these films more importantly suggest an attempt to map – "cognitively" and culturally – the co-ordinates of a new frontier that is not about taking the "high road" over the "low road" but, rather, about Scotland as a metaphor for the *road not taken*, a once and future landscape suspended between the imperatives of warfare and welfare, waiting upon our direction.

Taking the high(land) road

Macbeth may be known as "the Scottish play," but the Scottish film is decidedly not *Macbeth* nor, paradoxically, is it "Scottish." As Brian Pendreigh (2002) observes, Scotland has historically been invoked on film as a place that is, in point of fact, anywhere *but* Scotland. A classic example is *Brigadoon* producer Arthur Freed's conclusion that, having toured picturesque locations in the highlands, "nowhere in Scotland . . . looked quite Scottish enough" and, therefore, he "went back to Hollywood, created Scotland in the studio and filled it with Americans in tartan."⁴ Despite complaints of celluloid imperialism in classic films such as *Brigadoon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1954), however, the habit of viewing Scottish scenery and history through the lens of other national fantasies dates all the way back to the *Rob Roy* films of the silent era and culminates in their 1990s' counterparts: *Rob Roy* (Michael Caton-Jones, 1995), starring Irishman Liam Neeson, and *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995), a film shot largely in Ireland starring the Australian-born "Mad Mac" himself, Mel Gibson. Although *Braveheart* in particular placed Scotland and Scottish history in an international spotlight, it did so, as Pendreigh points out, only by converting the character of William Wallace from lowlander to highlander, subscribing to the *Brigadoon* version of "Scotland" as a place of misty mountains, token tartans, and carefully cropped kilts. It seems only fitting that the film was most successful among Americans, who, quite unlike lukewarm audiences in Scotland, voted *Braveheart* the second "most important film of all time" (quoted in Pendreigh: 2002).⁵ It is almost predictably ironic, then, that when the *real* Scottish film industry enjoyed a modest boom in the 1990s, marked by the release of *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1994), this film – conspicuously shot in Edinburgh – opens with a disavowal of origins: "This could have been any city."

western – only *pretends* to restore the reverse order. For heroes like William Wallace and Robert Roy MacGregor engage in mass military campaigns that fulfill their personal need for “revenge” and “honor,” respectively, only by masking these private drives as political desires tied to land, freedom, and the sexual possession of women’s bodies. The ideological upshot of *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy* is, therefore, not the isolated and, ultimately, dispensable victory of the traditional “outlaw” hero of the American western from Shane to Dirty Harry but, rather, the insidious validation of the corrupt *system* itself – a twist that is often missed in the glorification of individual courage that figures prominently in 1980s neo-westerns such as *Robocop*, *Rambo*, *Top Gun*, *Diehard*, and *Superman*.⁶ In all of these films, the means – that is, drives – are never called into question so long as they achieve the *desired* ends. As Susan Jeffords explains, “the removal of a few bad individuals – whether incompetent police captains or hardened criminals such as Lex Luthor will presumably return the system to its operating purpose: serving average Americans” (1994: 20). In *Rob Roy* and *Braveheart*, we need only substitute the corrupt Scottish gentry for the “police” and the arch-evil English King Edward Longshanks for “Lex Luthor” to apply Jeffords’ conclusion; in the former, an already corrupt system is shored up when Rob Roy earns the respect and protection of the gentry who wish him – and each other – dead, just as in the latter film, the one-time-traitor-turned-Scottish-king, Robert the Bruce, replaces the martyred commoner William Wallace to lead the rag-tag Scots to victory over the English. The conclusion of both “Scottish” westerns boils down to the choice of a lesser evil that ultimately does little to change the system: the unpardonable English crime of genocide gives way to the provincial Scottish acceptance of indiscriminate homicide.

Where, then, does *Macbeth* enter the picture? Ever since Orson Welles failed to keep his 1948 *Macbeth* film – originally recorded in a Scots burr – from being redubbed into “accent-free” English, subsequent film versions have blatantly called the bluff of the play’s setting by featuring visibly non-Scottish locations – from Ken Hughes’s Chicago-based mafia film *Joe MacBeth* (1955) to Akira Kurosawa’s medieval samurai setting for *Throne of Blood* (1957) to Andrzej Wajda’s Yugoslavian film *Siberian Lady Macbeth* (1961) and, finally, to Roman Polanski’s hallucinatory “Playboy” *Macbeth* (1971).⁷ As in the traditional western genre, these films cannot be interpreted apart from the landscapes against which they emerge. But Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is neither a traditional nor a neo-western of the Reagan/Bush Sr. era; it is, rather, a “northern” western in both its topological and sentimental climate, which is to say, *Macbeth* is a noir western that is also, unarguably, *Scottish*. What I am calling the noir western takes as its point of departure the recognition that there *never was* an old “modern order of desire, ruled over by an oedipal father” in the *first place*. Rather, like the historical predicament of pre-modern Scotland, there are only so many chieftains posing as would-be fathers among their clans, all of whom maintain varying claims to the land and the personal ascriptions of entitlement it embodies. In other words, the Scotland of Shakespeare’s play, like the unevenly globalized network of late capitalism, does not revolve around the choice between two evils but the proper choice of *pleasures* in a system characterized by an excess of *jouissance*. And the range of possible articulations of drive in these films is as broad as the ideological expanse that separates the enabling heterogeneity of the Scottish clans from the oppressive singularity of the “Scottish” Ku Klux Klan. What the noir sensibility interjects into the framework of the western, then, is quite literally a change of scenery, converting the hero’s mastery of the great outdoors to the

menacing interior spaces – industrial and psychological – that characterize the noir anti-hero’s increasingly claustrophobic sphere of action. In this spirit, the *fin-de-siècle Macbeths* I shall turn to now go one step further than their screen predecessors by dislocating Scotland from its moorings in *any place at all*, as “Scotland” becomes synonymous, for better or for worse, with a state of *mind*.

Macbeth meets Mad Max, or, the persistence of (Mel Gibson’s) memory

In *Shakespeare, The Movie* (1997), Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt cite *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 1995) as a symptom of Shakespeare’s increasing displacement by marketing strategies that privilege, in the case of Heckerling’s film, “knowing Mel Gibson’s *Hamlet*” over knowing Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1997: 8). The lure of Gibson’s star persona, in other words, contains enough pop cultural capital to compensate for the fact that Cher (Alicia Silverstone) has lapsed momentarily from thunderdome to loserdom by watching a Shakespeare film in the first place. What’s most curious about this episode, as Boose and Burt explain, is the fact that *Clueless* is based on the canonical Austen novel, *Emma*, which makes Cher’s anti-intellectual equation of “success” with “pride in *not* knowing one’s Shakespeare” a startling departure from the tradition that posits “Shakespeare and the English literary tradition . . . [as] a rallying point of national superiority” (1997: 12). Thus, *Clueless* suggests the extent to which Hollywood capitalism has infiltrated even the most intractable markets. Only two years later, Michael Bogdanov’s English Shakespeare Company teamed up with Channel 4 UK to create a made-for-television version of *Macbeth* that reveals an even greater, albeit selective, dependency on Mel Gibson’s star power to sell Shakespeare; for this film is nothing less than *Macbeth* shot through the lens of *Mad Max* and, perhaps, a more subtle attempt to divert attention away from the recently released *Braveheart*. Though both the gun-toting Mad Max and the broadsword-bearing William Wallace serve as intriguing screen prototypes for a 1990s Macbeth, the former implies a rationale for British colonialism, whereas the latter clearly critiques it: the lawless renegades in the *Mad Max* series are the indigenous, pleasure-seeking Others who must be “civilized” or eliminated, whereas the hedonistic marauders in *Braveheart* are the English themselves. Significantly, Bogdanov’s film was released in the same year as a Scottish referendum voting for devolution and the establishment of a Scottish parliament, the first in nearly three hundred years.

Filmed on location in the Australian outback, *Mad Max* (George Miller, 1979) and its sequels, *Road Warrior* (1981), and *Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), are all set in a post-apocalyptic no-place featuring salvaged scraps of sheet-metal, motorcycles, black leather and, most memorably, Mel Gibson as the former-cop-turned-rebel-with-a-cause, seeking to avenge the murder of his wife and child. Bogdanov’s setting for *Macbeth* suggests a “Scottish” variation on this theme – a dystopian *Brigadoon* that emerges from the smoke of intermittent bombs rather than whimsical highland mist, revealing, in the process, the burned-out vestiges of a once green and hilly landscape. According to the video jacket description, *Macbeth* occupies “a timeless zone,” set “against a raw, urban industrial environment giving the film a surreal quality.” Entering this “timeless” space as road warriors in their own right, Macbeth (Sean Pertwee) and Banquo (Michael Maloney) burst onto the scene astride motorcycles, sporting paramilitary garb replete with tartan accessories. But this is the point at which *Macbeth* and *Mad Max*

speech, choice, etcetera. Once traditional privilege is destroyed, and everyone is involved in the same system of global economic relations, there is no further need for democracy.

(1993: 284)

The problem with this assertion, of course, as critics of globalization have made clear, is that not "everyone is involved" *equally* in this system, just as "drive" cannot enter into equilibrium with "desire" but instead only displace it. Significantly, in Bogdanov's *Macbeth*, it is Duncan (Philip Madoc) who is implicitly aligned with senile capitalism's uneven distribution of resources. Distinguished by his impeccably clean, non-combat wardrobe and his train of bodyguards who, later, sport slick, slim-lined suits and sunglasses – the dry-clean-only uniform of the corporate thug – Duncan suggests a portrait of senile capitalism in its worst incarnation, namely, "microfascism." As the seamy flip-side of postmodernism's exaltation of fragmentation, microfascism crystallizes as "smaller, more localized but equally exploitative power formations" made possible by an uneven global economy (Braidotti 1994: 5). This is the pseudo-medieval and distinctly postmodern fiefdom over which Duncan presides in Bogdanov's film.

Though Bogdanov's *Macbeth* fails to appeal to audiences expecting a sequel to *Romeo + Juliet*, his film is, in many ways, far more current than even Luhmann's. For his updating of *Macbeth* is firmly rooted in a culture wherein the paternal metaphor has undergone a perverse mutation – a mutation that is encoded in the empty, abject interior spaces that pervade this film and signal its placement within the paranoid perceptual schemes of the noir universe. What is most striking about Bogdanov's approach to these interiors is the opaque quality of their emptiness; it is as if the emptiness itself is always already "filled" with a void. Lady Macbeth's chamber is a case in point: dwelling in an enormous horizontal space punctuated only with hurricane lamps and satin pillows clustered together on a dirty floor, Lady Macbeth (Greta Scaachi) reposes elegantly on the pillows in a conspicuous attempt to recover a sense of dignity long since eroded with the scraps of Duncan's royal favor. Far from being the benign, essentially absent, Oedipal father of Shakespeare's play, then, Duncan suggests the obscenely present, noir father who serves not to protect but to prevent his subjects from threatening his control of the resources. Indeed, how could such an allegedly good king allow the thanes who bleed for him to live in such grotesque urban squalor – wherein people dwell like rats in abandoned warehouses-turned-tenements, entering and exiting their vast crawl spaces through windows, scaffolding, and fire escapes? The result of a dramatic shift in the demographics of factory work in the 1990s, this post-industrial wasteland is a clear indication that the jobs have all moved away to unnamed places where the labor is cheap and the workers are infinitely replaceable. As for the loyal drones who stayed behind – Macbeth and company – their occupations, like their surroundings, appear to be Duncan's whim.⁸

At least at the beginning of the film, then, Macbeth is the figure who embodies the broken promises of senile capitalism. Prompted by the indigent witches to reflect on his own slumbering sense of self-worth and, it would seem, on Duncan's failure to provide for his kingdom, Pertwee's Macbeth can barely conceal his shock and rage when he is passed over by Duncan as the heir apparent to the throne. Even the other soldiers seem to expect Duncan to name Macbeth as his successor; but instead he singles out his son – the smug, spoiled Malcolm (Jack Davenport) – whose distinctly

appear to part company, for although Pertwee's Macbeth – with his spikey hair, tinted shades, and studied sense of road rage – bears a family resemblance to Gibson's Max, Pertwee's "Mad Mac" lacks the personal justification that is the trademark of Gibson's enraged screen personae. In reading Bogdanov's film through the lens of the noir western, however, we may discover that this Macbeth does have a battleaxe to grind after all, one that shifts our prurient gaze away from the devastated wasteland that is "Scotland" to the abject interiors that are its source, namely, "the guilty horizon of bourgeois comfort and detachment" (MacCannell 1993: 280).

The singular irony of the neo-noir revival of the early 1990s, according to Dean MacCannell, is that films such as *Public Eye* (Howard Franklin, 1992), *The Two Jakes* (Jack Nicholson, 1990), and *Barton Fink* (Joel Coen, 1991), offer a "fictional recuperation" of classic noir's interest in seamy, gritty, subproletarian city spaces "just as the actual proletarian space is historically lost" (1993: 282). The upshot for filmmakers is that they have been forced to virtualize, if not fantasize, "the imaginary boundaries of urban misery" in the form of artificial sets (1993: 282); however, the consequence for the actual occupants evicted from these spaces during the Reagan revolution is, of course, literal homelessness. It is significant, then, that in Bogdanov's film Macbeth does not come across as angry or "mad" until after his encounter with the witches – the abject threesome who are also marked as homeless. Poised over a flaming trash-heap, the witches are clad in filthy layers of tattered clothing, bandanas, and grime; they speak with thick Cockney inflections and gesture with dirty fingers poking out of hole-ridden gloves. Their open-air, makeshift dwelling is crudely assembled from discarded junk. Two of the witches are caucasian, one is black, and their capacity to horrify resides in their uncanny familiarity – they are, in other words, not otherworldly enough but, rather, altogether too *real*. Accordingly, although Bogdanov's film was received both critically and commercially as a poor imitation of Baz Luhrmann's highly successful version of *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) released the year before, I would argue that the primary shortcoming of this *Macbeth* is its failure to live up to the escapist fiction it promises. Far from inviting us into a timeless zone, Bogdanov's film is a brutally timely allegory of the *present*.

After Macbeth's encounter with the witches, the scenery that begins in the province of the wide open spaces of the western shifts almost exclusively to interiors – large, vacant, post-industrial spaces that once served as the urban playground of film noir, which, in the noir western, have become a metaphor for the dark corners of unexamined conscience. This is the psychic landscape that Dean MacCannell identifies with "senile capitalism," a capitalism that has forgotten its once enabling relationship to democratic ideals. MacCannell's provocative reflections on this unexplored tension at the very heart of film noir warrants quoting at length:

After defeating its external enemies, fascism and communism, capitalism entered its "twilight years"; increasingly it began to turn its fading powers against its own partner, democracy, for harbouring and promoting a historically antiquated, inefficient ideological surplus. From the perspective of mature capitalism, the historical purpose of its partnership with democracy was (1) to break the privilege of aristocratic classes, making way for new entrepreneurial elites, and (2) to win the hearts and minds of socialists and others still tied to noncapitalist modes of production by offering them freedom of

unsullied uniform, perfectly tilted beret, and tough-guy grimace (the product of long hours of practicing in the mirror) resembles what the young George W. Bush must have looked like when he served his cushy, dramatically abbreviated term in the Texas National Guard to avoid Vietnam. Following the forced round of applause that punctuates Duncan's unexpected announcement, Macbeth begs his leave to become "Mad Mac," violently kicking the fuselage at his feet when he is barely out of sight of the others. Like no other version of Macbeth before it, Bogdanov's film implies that Duncan gets exactly what he deserves. Indeed, the fact that the only high-tech moment in this putatively futuristic film occurs when the King's royal train enters Macbeth's "estate" via a stretch water limo – a tableau that seems to parody the lost splendor of the medieval castle moat – is a clear indication that Duncan approaches postmodernism's potentially democratic dislocations of time and space as an opportunity to revive feudal privileges. What distinguishes Bogdanov's film as a noir western, then, is the fact that such privileges are figured spatially, that is, as the masterful occupation of real and psychic space. In such a context, homelessness is not defined as the loss of "home" but as the loss of a *meaningful* relationship to space.

This is where Scotland enters the picture as a locus for imagining the possibilities of futuristic dislocation, which I call "cinematicism," namely, the refusal to be bound exclusively to one "plot" of narrative, action, or land. For a short time, Macbeth seems committed to the distribution of social justice – and redistribution of resources – implied by this concept. Indeed, his murder of Duncan and, consequently, the expulsion of his privileged sons to England and Ireland, seem to leave Scotland with a clean slate, a space for renegotiating the lost contract between the free market and democratic freedoms. But under Mad Mac's leadership, "Scotland" becomes increasingly identified with nostalgia for the future, a variation on what Fredric Jameson calls "nostalgia for the present" in the form of the future that *never will be*.⁹ For the bleak, post-industrial spaces that we see through the eyes of Pertwee's Macbeth suggest a perverse Dickensian fairy tale in which the ghost of capitalism future – microfascism – has already arrived. Thus, more than anything else Bogdanov's setting seems to comment cynically on the Scottish tourism boom of the 1990s, which was stimulated by the creation of *industrial* theme parks designed "to recapture the glories of Scotland's industrial past which was now vanishing fast from the real manufacturing economy" (Devine, 1999: 596). Bogdanov's film of Shakespeare's Scottish play takes up this "theme" not from the perspective of the accidental tourist but from the specter of the intentionally evicted and occupationless.

However sympathetic Macbeth may be at the beginning of the film, Mad Mac cannot be the hero of this noir western, for this genre is marked by the refusal to anthropomorphize what is, fundamentally, a corruption of space itself. Consequently, Macbeth succeeds in vanquishing Duncan's neo-feudal, micro-fascist dynasty only by falling prey to the same horizon of bourgeois comfort and detachment as his predecessor. Unlike Duncan before him and Malcolm after him, though, Macbeth never looks comfortable in his borrowed robes. Rather, he wears his gaudy suits with the self-ironizing posture of an aging rock star, attuned to every coarse crackle of his leather pants and glaring shimmer of his saten shirts, as if he were straining under their lack of breathe-ability even as they mark him as capitalism's synthetic, that is, self-made man. Thus, when he attempts at the end of the film to restore his road warrior look with paramilitary garb and tartan trim, it is painfully obvious that the Macbeth of old,

like the Scotland of the future, is a thing of the past. Indeed, in the process of wrestling with Macbeth, Macduff (Larcon Cranitch) reveals that *he* is now wearing the pants – in the form of long underwear bearing the royal Stuart tartan. But if, in the twilight years of capitalism, the clothes still make the man, in 1990s *Macbeths*, the tartan no longer makes the Scot; for in the very instant that Macduff finishes off Macbeth, Malcolm arrives fresh from the croquet lawn of his English mansion (or is it his Texas ranch?) to take credit for the victory. Unique to Bogdanov's version, Macduff glares resentfully at the perfectly coifed Malcolm, but climbs into the hummer to join him and his henchmen anyway. Malcolm proceeds to assert his mastery over the space he inherits by abandoning it, peeling away from this scene of industrial apocalypse in search of greener, undoubtedly suburban pastures. And so the Reagan/Bush revolution returns in the form of the son who is too young to be senile but old enough to repeat Daddy's mistakes by rote. In the final scene, Macbeth is dumped by a garbage truck onto a trash heap, and the witches eagerly pillage his body in search of accessories for their nomadic dwelling, assuring us with sinister certainty that the vicious formula of this noir western will, like Macbeth's body, be recycled.

Taking the low road: Shakespeare does Scotland

The next version of *Macbeth*, Stuart Canterbury's 1998 porn-feature *In the Flesh* (written by Canterbury and Antonio Passolini), ventures a step beyond Bogdanov's *Macbeth* to explore the abject "interior" spaces that define the explicit sex film. In many respects, hard-core pornography suggests the ultimate articulation of the noir western, not only for its exploration of the forbidden territories associated with sexual transgression but also for its vision of apocalyptic capitalism – that is, consumption without (re)production – based on the fetishization of the all-important "come shot." Like Bogdanov's *Macbeth*, *In the Flesh* takes for its point of departure the triumph of drive over desire in a landscape that is rife with a retro-futuristic sense of déjà vu. Macbeth (Mike Horner) and Banquo (Valentino) enter the film via a military jeep, dressed in disruptive combinations of crisply decorated military jackets and tartan kilts. And, as in Bogdanov's film, they dodge flames from detonated bombs as the jarring rattle of machine gun fire pervades the air. Similarly, the witches are represented as homeless refugees – "probably shell-shocked," Banquo mutters – as the vaguely other-worldly women warm themselves over the flicker of a garbage can fire. Unlike Bogdanov's *Macbeth*, however, these indigents are not shunned as pariahs but, rather, marked as alluring threshold figures whose implied nomadicism is sexy, suggesting the ancient association of female mobility (*nomas*) with sexual promiscuity and prostitution. Clad in black latex body suits that leave nothing to the imagination, the witches beckon toward Macbeth and Banquo, inviting them to sample their wares. But contrary to our expectations for hard-core porn films, Macbeth blithely rejects their offer, paternalistically advising an all-too-eager Banquo that it is "best not to sleep with witches." Quite literally left to their own devices, the weird sisters proceed to get downright freaky among themselves, taking the viewer on a sexploitation obstacle course that culminates in the head witch using a double-pronged dildo to pleasure the other two. In the broader context of the film, this image suggests the proverbial fork in the road – and, for Macbeth, the "road not taken" – to Scotland.

Even before Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches, *In the Flesh* opens with a series of allusions to the "Scottish film." With the help of an establishing shot of a

medieval castle façade enveloped in highland mist and a voice-over in a heavy Scots burr, the film begins with an aura of *grainitas*, as the indignant voice exclaims:

Kings come and kings go. That's the nature of war, that's the nature of life. How many battles have been fought for next to nothing? For a piece of land, for a piece of respect, for a piece of ass – but never for peace itself. That's the big lie. And it's what men do best. As men we build out castles of power and greed and lust – and then – like beasts we knock them down.

This is the pseudo-medieval “Scotland” of *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*: the land frozen in time, shrouded in fog, and filled with noble barbarians. But this is the last we hear of Scottish accents as the scene shifts from the pastoral haunts of haughty highlanders to the hidden pleasures of urban bohemians, as the DVD jacket promises:

Shot on film in the exotic locale of Budapest, IN THE FLESH is a perverse twist on the classic tale of *Macbeth* – complete with greed, betrayal, madness, and of course, plenty of lust. Set in a retro-future world of castles and cars, and packed with the most beautiful new actresses Europe has to offer, this lush epic depicts the rise to power of Lord Macbeth (Mike Horner) and his insatiable wife, Lady Macbeth (Kylie Ireland). Featuring the hardest action imaginable in the most breathtaking locations, IN THE FLESH is an assault on the erotic senses, a sex spectacle of unprecedented proportions, that only Stuart Canterbury (*Dreams, Foolproof*) and Antonio Passolini (*Caffè Flesh 2, Devil in Miss Jones 6*) could create.

“Location,” as it appears in this description, resonates as a naughty pun, since nothing in the film – from the castle interiors to the alfresco frolicking in the open air – signifies a place that is specifically “Budapest” other than the thick eastern European accents and swarthy, “Magyar” look of the cast members. Yet the artificial Budapest of *In the Flesh* has much more in common with Scotland – the land dislocated from the historical fictions I have been exploring here – than we might first realize.

Originally a borderland dividing settled cultures from nomadic ones, Hungary has historically been more deserving of the designation “Bohemia” than the Czech-populated land to the north-west, serving as a pivotal point of passage not only for Huns, Turks, and Mongols, but also for northern European tribes like the Finnish Magyars who eventually settled there. Like the “Scotland” of *Macbeth* and, as we shall see, the Hungary of *In the Flesh*, the concept of the “bohemian” is constituted precisely by its lack of a meaningful connection to place. Falsely ascribed to a nomadic people thought to live in Bohemia, the term “bohemian” emerged in association with “gypsy” which, in turn, is a word mistakenly tied to Egyptians. Nomadic in its own right, “bohemian” is a word that has accrued a variety of subversive associations over time to become a catch-all expression for “an extravagant sexual life, mobility in abode, and freedom from governing morality” (Peters 1999: 37). It seems only fitting, then, that these nomadic energies (spurred by the steady flow of capital into the former Soviet bloc) should return to Hungary and, in the process, transform Budapest into the new “Bohemia” as the center of the global porn industry. Porn, as Joseph W. Slade explains, has always been a matter of national self-interest, serving as a lucrative export for northern Europe and, in

southern European countries like Spain, offering opportunities for increased tourism to cities where hard-core theaters are legal. The situation in Hungary is quite different, for unlike its European competitors, Budapest is known not only as a hotbed for Slavic beauties who “perform enthusiastically,” but also as a place that welcomes the cinematic energies of the global market.¹⁰ Budapest is, therefore, particularly appealing to American producers seeking to package their product as sufficiently “bohemian” – that is, dislocated from the sociopolitical imperatives of “place” – in order to circumvent GATT restrictions, which stipulate that half the programs broadcast in Europe be European in origin (in France they have to be 60 percent “French”). Under the deceptive aegis of “co-production,” then, porn has become a truly multi-or, better put, *transnational* product, promiscuously following the flows of globalization so that an “American” film, for example, will “borrow the capital from a German bank, employ a Hungarian cast assembled by a European casting agency, shoot in English, distribute through a French company, and sell the product everywhere” (Slade 1997: 6).

Such a process is akin to what Dean MacCannell describes as “the perverse accommodation of capitalism by democracy” (1993: 289), a by-product of a distinctly noir environment wherein guilt – but not necessarily the pleasures associated with it – gets distributed “evenly,” that is, “globally.” Accordingly, the closer we look at the real conditions of production in Budapest, the more disturbing they become from the perspective of the ratio of guilt (expenditure) to pleasure (profit). Indeed, there is something vaguely sado-masochistic about the fact that Hungary, as Joseph W. Slade explains, uses porn as a means of reducing its foreign debt; in fact, the Hungarian government “actively encourages porn production because it injects revenue into the service sector” (1997: 8). Of course, this industry inflects the phrase “service sector” with distinctly bawdy overtones, which, ultimately, offer insufficient comic relief from the more sinister reality that Budapest has become such a popular site for porn films not only because of the comparatively low cost of production, but also because the women tend to be less educated and, consequently, less aware of AIDS (Slade 1997: 8). In this respect, a porn-noir western like *In the Flesh* literalizes the trope of the femme fatale which, in classic film noir, represents “desire as something that not only renders the desiring subject helpless, but also propels him or her to destruction” (Cowie 1994: 145). Yet *In the Flesh* simultaneously poses a variation on this theme. For if, as in Shakespeare’s play, this film is bound to end in an apocalyptic vision of death (and indeed, in the porn noir universe, the specter of AIDS suggests the ultimate embodiment of the obscenely present, devouring father), then “survival” is not predicated on winning the war but, rather, on enjoying all the battles along the way. In this brave new “Scottish” world of bohemian sexual coalitions, Mike Horner’s Macbeth is defeated *not* because he succumbs to the femme fatale but because he *desert*s: Macbeth is the villain of this film because of his monogamous refusal to “enjoy his symptom” of globalization.

When in Scotland, do as the Bohemians do

In the Flesh is particularly fascinating for the way in which it updates Shakespeare’s Scottish play to further its own ideological enterprise. The conspicuous absence of Malcolm – along with Lady Macduff’s children and Banquo’s son Fleance – underscores the fact that dynasties are irrelevant in the world of non-procreative and nomadic sexual relations. But the freedom from sexual orthodoxy that is the *raison d’être* of porn

is precisely what Macbeth resists in this film. After Macbeth's rejection of the witches' invitation, the scene shifts to Lady Macbeth (Kylie Ireland) satisfying herself with a dildo in preparation for Macbeth's arrival. Whether she is igniting the home fires in anticipation of more pleasure with her husband or as a pre-emptive strike against his impotence, is uncertain. It is significant, then, that Lady Macbeth casts the proposition to kill Duncan (Mike Foster) in terms of a sexual bargain; not only does she threaten to leave Macbeth for a "real man" if he doesn't rise to the occasion but, worse, upon his initial refusal, she ups the ante by resolving to dress him up in her "dirty little panties" and make him her "pet," her "puppy dog." Rather than suffer this apparent humiliation, Macbeth determines to "do whatever it takes to be a man," and proceeds to engage in the standard progression from oral to vaginal to anal sex with his demanding wife. But this is the first and last time that Macbeth has sex in a porn film in which he is purportedly the star. Moreover, his is the most uninventive, uninspired sex scene, compared with Duncan's two-women-on-one-man before and seemingly three-men-on-, under-, and over-one-woman after. Macbeth's sudden and seemingly irreversible decline from virility to virulence is signified most dramatically by his lack of participation in the banquet, which, in this film, takes the form of an orgy. Indeed, Macbeth can only recoil in horror at the site of Banquo's ghost participating in the tartan-trimmed flesh-fest that takes place on the long table over which he presides. In this Bacchanalian spin on Shakespeare's banquet scene, Macbeth is mortified not by Banquo's return from the dead but, rather, by the fact that he is being showed up by a ghost. The implication is that Banquo is an even more potent lover in death than he was in life, thus rendering the murder a failure and Macbeth an unlikely victim of John Ashcroft syndrome.¹¹

In this "Scottish" film, then, Macbeth is what is wrong with the picture, for he is the only non-Bohemian. Consequently, Lady Macbeth's death is represented as being causally related to Macbeth's impotence.¹² Constantly assuming the sexual initiative at the beginning of the film, Lady Macbeth is, by the end, reduced to a mere spectator. Dwindling through the dungeon with candle in hand, she assumes a posture of disaffected voyeurism as the cell block denizens mock her plight with their sexual antics. The flickered and, finally, snuffing out of her "brief candle" thus signals the death of her phallic prowess. Appropriately, her masturbation and ensuing suicide in the bath tub – labeled "final fantasy" on the DVD menu – shows her dreaming of one last tryst with her once-hardy husband: the implication, according to the mercenary logic of porn, is that monogamy, not promiscuity, kills. As if to reinforce this distinctly noir suggestion, just prior to this scene Lady Macduff (Mira) is killed immediately after having sex with her well-hung Hungarian husband, which serves as foreplay to the kilt-clad Macduff's murder of Macbeth. However, the fact that Macduff (Zenza Magg) is the implied sole survivor at the film's conclusion does not ultimately endorse the idea that monogamy kills but instead suggests that the horizon of microfascism has shifted. For in the age of AIDS, this film ultimately suggests that nomadic encounters "in the flesh" have necessarily been replaced by the prosthetic pleasures of autoeroticism. Yet these pleasures are not automatically "safer" than their bohemian counterparts, for they remind us – like the opening scene of self-detonating war instruments issuing intermittent flames – not only of the zero-sum game of suicidal terrorism, but also of the spectacle of remote control warfare with smart bombs and unmanned planes, which remains the isolationist prerogative of those nations with the most pleasure and the least guilt.

Macbeth, the comedy: from Luke Skywalker to Walker Shortbread

In 2001–2, three parodies of *Macbeth* emerged to mark the turn of the new millennium: the Glen Ridge High *Star Wars: Macbeth* (2001), *Scotland, PA* (2002), and *Macbeth, The Comedy* (dir. Allison LiCalci, 2001); the first and last are digital films shot in a matter of days on next-to-nothing budgets, whereas *Scotland, PA* is an independent film featuring recognizable faces such as the imitable Christopher Walken, *ER* star Maura Tierney, and *Ally McBeal* cast member James LeGros. The comedic aspect of these *Macbeths* in no way disqualifies them as noir westerns, for these are distinctly "dark comedies" that use place – often reflected in product placement – to spin sinister tales of corporate ambition even as they imagine the possibilities of a post-corporate cinemadictism. What is most provocative about the Glen Ridge High *Star Wars: Macbeth* and *Scotland, PA* is that in contrast to the retro-futuristic worlds of Bogdanov's *Macbeth* and *In the Flesh*, these films stage their unintentional but relentless returns to the present with a detour through the past – and, more specifically, the recent past of the 1970s. In both films, however, the nostalgic focus on the more simple pleasures of bygone decades cannot ultimately insulate their *mise-en-scènes* from the ruthless pleasures of the present; for neither film can erase the specter of what Slavoj Žižek calls the "unhistorical kernel" which, by way of its inexhaustible repetition, gives the lie to every "new" epoch by dressing up the same historical crisis in different clothes (1992: 81). The central gambit of these noir westerns, then, is to mask time – and the attendant traumas of history – in spatial terms, focusing on "far far away" places in which lived temporalities are subsumed by a nostalgic fascination with space.

In peculiar respects, the Glen Ridge High School student production of *Macbeth* suggests a sequel to *In the Flesh*, for the traumatic kernel that its location can never completely repress is the notorious gang rape of a retarded girl by Glen Ridge High School jocks in 1989. Suddenly, this small, extremely affluent American town that prided itself on its above-average SAT scores, successful sports teams, and no fewer than 666 of the 3000 remaining gas lights operative in America, found itself in a seedy national spotlight. Describing the Glen Ridge community, the local Congregational Church minister explained that "[a]chievement was honored and respected almost to the point of pathology . . . whether it was the achievements of high school athletes or the achievements of corporate world conquerors" (quoted in Lefkowitz 1998: 130). Teachers, parents, and citizens in this 1.5 square-mile community were accused of turning a blind eye to the increasingly disturbing behavioral patterns they witnessed among the popular boys at Glen Ridge High, which involved parsing people – mostly women – into categories of conquest, culminating in the rape of fourteen-year-old Leslie Faber. One such objectified group, however, was comprised of mostly males: the nerds that the jocks called "giggers," a derogatory combination of "gigabyte" and "niggers." Nine years later in the spring in 1997, the giggers struck back, creating a video (digitally remastered and released in 2001) for their High School English class that represented the geeks inheriting the earth or, better put, the galaxy.

In keeping with the history of the Scottish play on screen, this version of *Macbeth* begins with the simultaneous citation and displacement of Scotland: "A long time ago in a galaxy far far away . . . Scotland." In this film, Scotland is identified as a revisionary landscape, a place of childhood nostalgia that is, in fact, no further away than the 1970s – the decade before the golden boys turned bad – when they were just

kids hooked on the recently released *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977). Significantly, the filmmakers themselves weren't even born yet; but when they reached the age that the jocks had been when they first watched *Star Wars*, these "giggers" were bombarded with news footage of the galactic meltdown occurring in their own back yards. Their ensuing retreat in *Star Wars: Macbeth* to a space-time before they were born thus enables the filmmakers to engage in a form of nostalgia which, in Walter Benjamin's terms, is "revolutionary": by synchronizing the past with the future, *Star Wars: Macbeth* imagines thwarting the teleological march of historical inevitability that will culminate in the Glen Ridge tragedy of the late 1980s.¹³ In this context, then, Scotland is identified with a once and future place in which the giggers prevail and kids with cameras are capable of digitally remastering history.

Offering a variation on the dark comedy that constitutes the American high-school experience, this film features an attractive, athletic-looking Macbeth (Ben Concepcion) being defeated by glasses-wearing, semi-preppy nerds. Following a slew of lightsaber fencing, the rather awkward "Luke Skywalker" character, Macduff (Donald Fitz-Roy), presents an African-American "Malcolm" (Robert Fuller) with Macbeth's head in a backpack. Moments later, this McForce, replete with "Hans Siward" (Raymond Perez), makes their getaway from the Glen Ridge High gymnasium (a place where geeks are never at home) by departing in a replica of the Millennium Falcon spacecraft. The implication is that this multicultural entourage is now headed "back to the future" with a clean slate, having eliminated the evildoers who will give the school and its surrounding community a bad name a decade later. What remains uncertain, however, is what these whiz kids will do when they return to the future. Indeed, given the post-Columbine release of the digital version of the Glen Ridge High School *Macbeth*, it would be difficult not to infer – even amid the fairly innocuous lightsaber battle scenes – an image of the jocks and popular kids being murdered by nerdy, trenchcoat-sporting outcasts. Yet what is markedly different about the scenario posed by *Star Wars: Macbeth* is the multiracial cast; these are not the disturbed, underachieving, neofascist white boys of Columbine High but, rather, the gifted products of transnational mergers of people, places, and profit shares in the cosmopolitan north-east. It's not surprising, then, that almost all of the cast members are currently attending Ivy League universities. But the conspicuous product placement at the end of this short film makes us wonder which "forces" will prevail when these boys leave school once and for all. Following the triumphant finale wherein the student cast is spliced into film footage of *Star Wars* itself in order to receive their rewards from a pimply-faced Princess Leia (Rebekah Heinzen), the scene suddenly cuts away to Macduff and Malcolm back at school enjoying a Coke in front of the soda machine. This moment of brotherly solidarity between young black and white men explicitly invokes another media product of the 1970s: the "I'd like to buy the world a Coke" campaign. Whether these Glen Ridge High grads teach the world "perfect harmony" or corporate conquest remains to be seen – and screened. In the meantime, they offer "Scotland" as a piece of cinematic real estate where, at least for now, *anyone* can be at home, as "Yoda's advice for the budding filmmaker" on their website implies: "If you have a video camera lying around, and better yet some editing equipment (pretty cheap for computers nowadays), go experiment. Be your own director, Go Hollywood . . . use a skateboard for dollying shots, or a fishing rod for special effects. . . . You don't need The Force – just some friends with a video camera."¹⁴

Scotland, PA is an inherently darker film that heads west from the affluent borough of Glen Ridge, New Jersey to explore the discount dreams and working class realities of dilapidated, rural Scotland county, also known as western Pennsylvania. Unlike the escapist fiction of the *Star Wars: Macbeth*, Billy Morrisette's vision of the 1970s hearkens back to the recession and disillusionment with the government that followed the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal. Here, the forces that the characters contend with are explicitly commercial, as the film tells the story of a thirtysomething couple who, trapped in the abyss of lower-management, suddenly become seized with the ambition to be the wealthiest, most successful folks in town. But the "McBeths" lack the all-important punch of pedigree and, therefore, their meteoric rise to power is short-lived. In Morrisette's film, this fundamental lack has everything to do with location, which seems to inscribe the social pathology of "going nowhere" in the non-descript topography of the land itself. Like the transitory status of Budapest, western Pennsylvania is a borderland situated between the industrial-agricultural economy of the Midwest and the slick corporate ethos of the tri-state area. By default, then, western or "Scotland" Pennsylvania is the natural habitat of "American McAnybody's" – and, perhaps, McEverybody's – "duking it out over the most popular power structure around, the small business" (Rippy 2002: B16). What makes this outrageous comedy a tragedy, as Marguerite Rippe incisively observes, is the nature of the lesson the McBeths learn from Shakespeare, namely, "that British primogeniture survives intact in American capitalism" (2002: B16). Thus, in *Scotland, PA* it is hard not to root for Joe "Mac" McBeth (James LeGros) and his wife Pat (Maura Tierney) to succeed in their quest to be *somebody's*, since we cannot avoid thinking that at one time or another, "Scotland" – the place of loss, shame, and unfulfilled dreams – is somewhere we've all been before.

The fact that Morrisette stages his version of *Macbeth* as a literal tragedy of appetite situates this film firmly within the perceptual schemes of the noir universe, wherein it is not the specter of failure – and, consequently, of desire – that propels the narrative but, rather, its relentless *satisfaction*. Indeed, *Scotland, PA* draws us into the void of unfulfilled desire that lends meaning to the McBeths' loser lifestyle only to render us complicit in the formation of their super-sized drive for forbidden, deep-fried *joissance*. Most profoundly, then, *Scotland, PA* explores the insidious symbiosis between space and ambition that is the topos of the noir western. As in Bogdanov's *Macbeth*, when we initially enter this space our sympathies lie with McBeth, since we have already seen Norm Duncan (James Rebhorn) pass him over for promotion and, worse, appoint his estranged son Malcolm (who wants nothing to do with his father or fast-food) as the new head manager. Consequently, when McBeth crowns Duncan in the deep-fat fryolater, he becomes a local hero, for once the old order of Oedipal prohibition is eliminated, the illusion of the democratic right to consume takes its place and, suddenly, enjoyment becomes the ultimate expression of "civic duty" (Copjec.1993: 182). With the help of the nomadic technology of the drive-through and a traveling French fry truck, McBeth's business expands exponentially. In the process, however, Pat's psychic space suffers steady constriction, an infirmity that works its way outward to the fryolater burn on her hand, which, she believes, is only worsening with time. That's because time cannot be synchronized with drive; by its very nature, it can only be identified with lack: "We're not bad people, Mac," Pat says to her husband while urging him to kill Duncan, "we're just underachievers who have to make up for lost time." But Pat

health-food restaurant where no one, the film's conclusion implies, will go to eat. Fittingly, following the melodramatic showdown on the roof of the restaurant, McBeth flees, pausing in front of his car to take one last look at the neon sign that bears his name; seizing the advantage, McDuff jumps from the roof onto McBeth, impaling him on the steer horns that adorn his car. Punished in kind for grabbing the bull of social ambition by the horns, McBeth's gruesome death implies that it is not his bad deeds that destroy him, but his bad taste. This scenario might be funny if it weren't for the fact that Morrissette's film, with its Bad Company soundtrack, bell bottoms, Cameros, and *McCloud* in-jokes, actually succeeds in making us nostalgic for 1972, and even for "low-end. . . corporate cutthroats" like the McBeths.¹⁶ For the problem is that *Scotland, PA* can never completely escape its real location in 2002, which makes Mac and Pat's small-time, small-town McCruelty seem like child's play compared to their sequel. Indeed, what the fetishized arches of the letter "M" in this film ominously point to is what comes after "M" – "En" – as in noir and, of course, Enron, whose solution to the forgotten pact between capitalism and democracy is to steal from *everyone*, though not necessarily in equal measure. Compared with stock land, Scotland never looked so good.

If we didn't know that *Macbeth: The Comedy* was shot on location in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and New York, its setting could be just about anywhere that Walker Shortbread ships. Indeed, even more so than in *Scotland, PA*, in Allison LiCalsi's film, "Scotland" is not so much produced as it is consumed, for Walker Shortbread, Glenlivet Scotch Whisky, "mad for plaid" fashions, and "Thank God I'm SCOTTISH" placards make all the Scottish world a stage for comedy – and commodities.¹⁷ Yet what distinguishes *Macbeth: The Comedy* from *Scotland, PA* is the fact that rather than serving as markers of distinction and separation, the product placements form a continuum between places defined as home and the marginalized spaces of exile: "have shortbread, will travel" seems to be the only social qualification for movement in this film. *Macbeth: The Comedy* thus refuses to inscribe Shakespeare's play within the structures of loss and longing that are, according to Homi Bhabha, the province of globalization. For in the process of creating access to "a range of materials and material cultures with an ease never before imagined," globalization, Bhabha contends, erodes the prospect of "being-and-belonging by virtue of the nation, a mode of experience and existence that Derrida calls a national ontology" (1999: ix). With the exception of LiCalsi's film, the *Macbeths* of the late 1990s and new millennium ultimately suggest a conservative reaction to this loss of national ontology in their portraits of "Scotland." For if Bogdanov's *Macbeth* and *In the Flesh* are fueled by the diasporic energies of transnational media culture and, consequently, look to Shakespeare for ontological stability, then the Glen Ridge High Star Wars: *Macbeth* and *Scotland, PA* are exile narratives that similarly appropriate Shakespeare as a source of nostalgia for better times and places that remain, nonetheless, hopelessly out of reach. Set in neither the "retro-future" nor the recent past, *Macbeth: The Comedy* privileges not a monadic conception of "Shakespeare" but, rather, a cinemadmic idea of Scotland.¹⁸

As in the other noir westerns I have explored here, the through-line in LiCalsi's comedy is its preoccupation with the centrifugal energies of multinational capitalism. However, in this film, the act of conspicuous consumption is not visibly marked by class distinction, and capitalism itself is conceived of as a horizontal, rather than vertical, force. For example, although the three male witches appear homeless as they wander across the snowy countryside of New York bedroom communities, their clothes

will have to settle for space, for her one moment of glory occurs when, for the first time in her life, she appears content in her surroundings; drink in hand, she is buoyed up by the sheer bliss of her location which, the camera pulls back to reveal, is an above-ground pool, marking her arrival on the scene of the modest, Midwestern American dream.¹⁵

Unlike the other *Macbeth* films I have examined here, *Scotland, PA* is the only one that privileges place over protagonist, underscoring the notion that this is not really Mac's tragedy but PA(T)'s, the figure most identified with her surroundings. She is also quite clearly the brains in the operation but, like other women in the 1970s who were contemplating their autonomy for the first time, she still requires a man to execute – and, consequently, profit from – her plans. And though she attempts to safeguard the private moments of *joissance* that come from her suddenly, solidly, middle-class existence, the "burn" on her hand which, unbeknownst to her, has healed *completely*, begins to drive her insane. Copejec's observations on the paranoid, increasingly claustrophobic dimensions of the noir universe are particularly apropos of Pat's predicament: "from the moment the choice of private enjoyment over community is made, one's privacy ceases to be something one savours when sheltered from prying eyes . . . and becomes instead something one visibly endures – like an unending, discomfiting rain" (Copejec 1993: 183). After pharmacological creams and burner mitts fail to remove Pat's sensation of pain, a meat-cleaver does the trick, and she dies with a grin on her face. Thus, if the "burn" is the symptom of Pat's forbidden enjoyment of middle-class existence (forbidden because, based on the choices she made at nineteen, she'll never be considered classy enough to deserve this lifestyle in her thirties), her smile suggests her identification with the *vulturne*, or, "the impossible junction of enjoyment with the signifier" (Žižek 1989: 123). In other words, Pat's smile of relief signifies her liberating realization, having traversed the fantasy of her impossible class ambition, that there is nothing left

for her but to identify with lack itself, for "beyond fantasy," Žižek explains, "there is no yearning . . . only drive . . . pulsating around some unbearable surplus-enjoyment" (1989: 124). Thus, Pat's violent removal of her hand is not so much the mark of a guilty conscience as it is an acceptance of the absence of desire itself – the loss of the desire to desire. As Žižek contends, "the image that most appropriately exemplifies drive is not 'blind animal thriving' but the ethical compulsion which compels us to mark repeatedly the memory of a lost Cause" (1991: 272). Scotland, Morrissette's film implies, is the place where dreams go to die.

The remainder of the film takes shape as a battle between the pseudo-Scots McDuff and McBeth or, more appropriately, *McCloud* and *McBeal*. Indeed, Christopher Walken's unlikely crime-stopping character parodies the 1970s detective series *McCloud*, whereas James LeGros's McBeth invokes his personification of Mark Albert on the recently canceled series *Ally McBeal*. Like McBeth, Mark Albert is not a leader but a follower; hence, he is drawn to phallic women (on *Ally McBeal*, he actually dates a woman whose incomplete sex-change operation leaves her with a penis). Pat McBeth is, of course, the phallic woman par excellence and, for a time, she exercises masterful control over their new-found, fast-food kingdom. But not even she could have anticipated the Loch Ness monster that McBeth becomes, roving and ravaging the open spaces that now seem too small to contain his appetites. Appropriately, then, the vegetarian McDuff steps in to restore the old order of prohibition, turning McBeth's meat joint into a

outbursts in *medias res* ("Stares hide your fires' – no, stop that!") or decoding them in her own terms ("So foul and fair a day I have not seen." We really kicked some ass.") But by the end, her decisive decline into insanity is signaled when she is handed the "tomorrow" soliloquy on a scroll by her servant (Lisa Rezac), and, upon reading it, compliments the verse profusely, exclaiming: "did you write that? I gotta tell ya, it's really good." Naturally, the servant takes credit for the work, claiming enthusiastically, "there's more where that came from!"

Like Shakespeare's Macbeth before her, this female Macbeth is foiled by her pathological embrace of the witches' prophecy which, ironically, she fails to interpret *literally enough*. It never occurs to her that Macduff could be the product of a C-section, or that Birnam Wood will come to Dunsinane not of its own volition but, rather, with a little help from soldiers in search of camouflage. Often seen with book in hand and citing Shakespearean verse by wrote, the witches in LiCalisi's film represent the lapse from cinematic fluidity – "an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries" (Braidotti 1994: 56) – into the prescriptive assertion of textual certainty, ushering in Macbeth's tragic destiny. Ironically, in this comedy, it is tragic when Macbeth dies, not only because she's so likable but also because Malcolm, the new King, is devastated by her death. Indeed, he christens his reign by sobbing hysterically: "I could've changed her [from a lesbian] . . . I know I could've." And in some respects we can't help but believe him, for in this provisional space called Scotland, we are led to believe that anything is possible. Here, lesbians can be legally married, servants claim to authorize Shakespeare, homeless people sport Karl Lagerfeld fashions, and everyone "thanks God they're Scottish" – whatever that means. Indeed, whatever location this film gestures toward, we can be certain that it won't play in Peoria, but we can hope that it will emerge from the mists once and for all in another hundred years.

Conclusion: "If it isn't Scottish it's crap!" – Mike Myers

It seems only fitting that in *Macbeth: The Comedy*, it is the witches' wretchedly worded prophecy that is associated with the menacing noir core of Shakespeare's play, much in the same way that film noir – despite its claims to esthetic autonomy – can never escape classification based on the detective fiction that precedes it. But if, as Marc Vernet provocatively claims, "Film noir is a collector's idea that, for the moment, can only be found in books" (1993: 26), then these recent *Macbeths* remind us that Shakespeare, too, is a collector's item that, for the moment, can only be found in films. I would suggest, then, that it is not "Scotland" but *Shakespeare* who is the damned spot, Scot, or what you will, which these films relentlessly seek to traverse, inhabit and, ultimately, displace. But it is one thing to displace Scotland; it is something else entirely to replace Shakespeare as the "unhistorical kernel" that constitutes every new version of *Macbeth* as an unwitting act of repetition. Indeed, it should not surprise us that there is an outpouring of *Macbeth* films when, in the world at large, we are witnessing "an explosion of vested interests that claim their respective difference in the sense of regionalisms, localisms, ethnic wars, and relativism of all kinds" (Braidotti 1994: 146). Given the extent to which the horizon of reception has changed in the wake of the digital diaspora, the temptation has never been greater to retreat further into the private *joies-sance* of our personal entertainment units. But the proper choice of pleasure, as Shakespeare repeatedly reminds us, lies not in reproducing the home theater of cruelty

signify their bohemian lifestyle as fashionable, even willful. This utopian concept is first introduced in the opening scene, where the witches huddle together for warmth over a steaming kettle until – in a moment of unimaginable horror – a Karl Lagerfeld sweater rises to the surface of the bubbling cauldron and "Sassy sister" shrieks: "I told you it was dry clean only and now it's ruined, you bitch!" But the class markers that are absent from this seemingly non-discriminatory distribution of products are reinscribed in the frequent citations of Shakespearean verse, virtually all of which result in annoying interruptions of the dramatic action and are signaled by the sudden irruption of "serious" orchestral background music. Duncan (John Little), for example, requires Donalbain (Gerald Downey) to translate for him every time a character cites lines from the play. "You'll have to excuse my father," Donalbain explains, "Ever since verse came into fashion, he's been a bit confused." Unlike Karl Lagerfeld, however, "Shakespeare" is a brand name that is clearly out of fashion in this film. For in this bizarre vision of late capitalism as all play and no work, *Shakespeare himself* comes to be identified with the old order of prohibition – the blocking figure who interrupts the flow of consumption as characters desperately labor to produce his lines with proper accent and inflection. According to this logic, then, Malcolm (Hugh Kelly) is represented as the heir apparent only because he is the son who practices his Shakespearean recitations at every conceivable opportunity, but, like his father, he often fails to comprehend their meaning.

Suggesting a variation on the theme of *Scotland, PA*, which sets out to answer the question "What if the McBeths were alive in '75?," Allison LiCalisi's comedy asks "What if the Macbeths could say what they were really thinking in the play?" What classifies *Macbeth: The Comedy* as a noir western is, therefore, its attempt to turn Shakespeare's play inside out: to expose, in the dark recesses of each character's conscience, the thoughts that they are cloaking in the often obscure semantics of Shakespearean verse. Consequently, the film subscribes to an entertaining form of literalism that paradoxically liberates Shakespeare's metaphor-laden language from the landscape of hidden meanings, recreating it within the tops of "plain English." The effect is the equivalent of *Macbeth* on a truth serum, for every Shakespearean line is accompanied by a Stanislavskian paraphrase that tells the real story behind the words. For example, upon determining to leave Scotland, Donalbain exclaims with conviction: "I'll go to Ireland," adding, "the beer will be cheaper there." Similarly, in the process of easing Malcolm's guilt over fleeing to England, Macduff (Ted de Chatelet) calls the bluff of his own cowardice, freely confessing: "I myself only the other day deserted my wife and kids." Plot ambiguities are likewise given logical, albeit updated explanations, according to LiCalisi's parodic approach to her Shakespearean predecessor. Consequently, the "weird sisters" are not siblings but, rather, gay male fashion mongers named Sassy Sister (Michael Colby Jones), Scary Sister (Phillip Christian), and Southern Sister (Christopher Briggs); meanwhile, Macbeth (Erika Burke), whose manhood is repeatedly indicted in the play, is literally converted to a woman in a lesbian marriage with Lady Macbeth (Juliet Furness) – a scenario that also conveniently explains why the Macbeths can't produce a legitimate heir to the throne. The most unpredictable aspect of this seemingly reductive approach, however, is the way in which it deepens and complicates the psychological layers of Shakespeare's play, as this cinematic *Macbeth* increasingly appears to struggle against the pull of her textual destiny. In the beginning of the film, Macbeth is fully capable of either interrupting her Shakespearean

featured in *Macbeth* but, rather, in adopting a politics of movement that generates accountability from positionality. This, then, is the "damned spot" that marks the "X" -- the point at which the high road and the low road meet in the recognition that every road can lead to the enabling dis-location that is Scotland, provided we are willing to leave the comforts of our homes.

Notes

I especially wish to thank Caroline Cox, Skip Willman, Marguerite Rippy, Allison LiCalsi, Patrick Murray, and Richard Burt.

- 1 My thanks to Richard Burt for letting me read his introduction and related material on digital culture and globalization from his book-in-progress, *Reclaiming Shakespeare across Media: Post-diasporic Citations and Spin-offs from Bollywood to Hollywood*.
- 2 In addition to the films and television adaptations I discuss, other versions include a French adult feature entitled *Macbeth* (dir. Silvio Baudinelli, 2000), *Macbeth* (dir. Jeremy Freeston, 1997), filmed in Scotland and set in the eleventh century, *Macbeth on the Estate* (dir. Penny Woolcock, 1997), set in English housing projects, *Macbeth in Manhattan* (dir. Greg Lombardo, 1999), a play-within-a-film, and *Macbeth-Sangrador* (dir. Leonardo Henriquez, 1999), filmed in Venezuela. Two versions of *Lady Macbeth of Mzensk*, were also filmed, one of Dmitri Shostakovich's opera with soft-core sex scenes (dir. Petr Weigl, 1992), and the other of the short story on which the opera is based (dir. Roman Balayan, 1989). The latter is available on video but without English subtitles.
- 3 Richard Burt (1999: 77-125) makes the point that even Jeremy Freeston's use of Scotland in his 1997 *Macbeth* is highly mediated by *Braveheart*. On the reception of *Braveheart* in Scotland, see Maley 1998.
- 4 <<http://www.insideout.co.uk/scots/briefhistory.shtml>>.
- 5 *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy* also suggest conservative reactions to the multiculturalism debates of the 1990s, since these films represent places and identities that enable white men to get in on the game and "go ethnic" themselves.
- 6 See *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987); *First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982); *Rambo: First Blood Part Two* (George Pan Cosmatos, 1985); *Rambo III* (Peter MacDonald, 1988); *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986); *Diehard* (John McTierman, 1988); *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978); *Superman 2* (Richard Lester, 1980); *Superman 3* (Richard Lester, 1983); *Superman 4* (Sidney J. Furie, 1987). For a discussion of these films, see Susan Jeffords's *Hard Bodies* (1994), particularly Chapter 1: "Life as a Man in the Reagan Revolution."
- 7 It is worth noting that Welles's *Macbeth* is now available in its "restored" form (with the Scottish accent) on both DVD and video.
- 8 Bogdanov's vision of Duncan as the post-industrial, obscene father may trace its imaginative origins -- particularly given its production in the UK -- to the Michael Gambon character in Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, 1989.
- 9 See Jameson's chapter in *Postmodernism* (1992b), titled "Nostalgia for the Present."
- 10 For a thorough analysis of the global politics of the porn industry, see Joseph W. Slade 1997.
- 11 John Ashcroft was defeated in the Governor's race on November 7, 2000 by Mel Carnahan, who died before election day but nonetheless beat Ashcroft.
- 12 On impotence and Shakespeare porn more generally, see Burt 1999.
- 13 See Benjamin 1968.
- 14 See <<http://www.glenridge.org/Macbeth.mainpage.html>>.
- 15 Appropriately, just before the premiere of *Scotland, PA*, Pat's (Maura Tierney's) *ER* character, recovering alcoholic Abby Lockhart, fell off the wagon after six years and drank a beer. Although her fall from grace received "jeers" in the "Picks and Pans" section of *TV Guide*, what seemed gratuitous on *ER* proved the perfect backstory to Pat McBeth's single moment of glory in *Scotland, PA*.

- 16 <http://www.lot47.com/scotlandpa/press_macbeth.html>.
- 17 I am especially grateful to Allison LiCalsi and Patrick Murray for generously providing me with a copy of *Macbeth: The Comedy*, as well as for offering detailed information about the conception and making of the film.
- 18 The opening credit sequence underscores this rather contestatory relationship between Shakespeare's play and LiCalsi's film. Alluding to a line at the beginning of Sam Taylor's 1929 *Taming of the Shrew* that reads "Based on the play by William Shakespeare, with additional dialogue by Sam Taylor," LiCalsi's film ups the ante with the statement: "story and additional dialogue by William Shakespeare." It seems only fitting that this allusion to a claim that mortified purists in the first-ever Shakespearean "talkie" should be revisited as an opportunity for virtually silencing Shakespeare in this millennial parody of *Macbeth*.