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WHAT IS SELF-ADAPTATION?

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WHAT IS SELF-ADAPTATION?

A Master's Thesis

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To David Byrne



WHAT IS SELF-ADAPTATION?

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
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by

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ANKARA

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By Ada Beliz Özduran

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

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ABSTRACT

WHAT IS SELF-ADAPTATION?

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This thesis defines self-adaptation and establishes its markers. Self-adaptation, although a known practice across multiple fields, remains understudied and lacks a definition which clearly highlights its structure and the markers necessary for a work to be considered self-adaptation. This study, based on the definition it establishes, breaks down the practice into its disciplines, star, adaptation, film, performance and music video studies and connects them to a larger theoretical frame. Then, it answers pressing questions that prevail in self-adaptation such as the matter of authority, artistic collaboration, how different media forms fit in the practice and how artists actually perform self-adaptation. The thesis then highlights self-adaptation's practice from different time periods by performing an extensive case study on David Byrne which not only shows Byrne's decades long career packed with examples of the practice but how it prolongs careers and artistic visions. It further supports it with smaller studies that examine Nick Cave, Jim Jarmusch, Neil Young and David Bowie.

Finally, the thesis concludes with showing how self-adaptation is currently being practiced by contemporary stars as a means of expanding their artistic horizons and for artistic resilience. Ultimately, the thesis aims to define the practice in a way that makes the definition and its markers applicable for further study.

Keywords: David Byrne, Multi-media Studies, Performance, Star Studies, Self-Adaptation,



ÖZET

ÖZ-UYARLAMA NEDİR?

Özduran, Ada Beliz

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Colleen Bevin
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Bu tez, öz-uyarlamayı tanımlar (self-adaptation) ve işaretlerini oluşturur. Öz-uyarlama birçok alanda kullanılan bir uygulama olmasına rağmen, yeterince araştırılmamıştır ve bir çalışmanın yapısının, self-adaptation olarak değerlendirilebilmesi için gerekli işaretleri, açık bir şekilde vurgulayan bir tanımdan yoksundur. Bu çalışma, oluşturduğu tanımları temel alarak bunu, sanatçı, adaptasyon, film, performans ve müzik video çalışmaları disiplinleri pratiğine ayırıp, bu disiplinleri daha geniş bir teorik çerçeveye bağlamaktadır. Daha sonrasında, otorite, sanatsal işbirliği, farklı medya türlerinin pratikte nasıl uyum sağladıkları ve sanatçıların gerçekte bunu nasıl uyguladıkları gibi, öz-uyarlama alanının acil sorularına yanıt vermektedir. Tez, David Byrne hakkında, David Byrne'in farklı zaman dilimlerindeki öz-uyarlamayı uygulama örnekleriyle dolu, onlarca yıllık kariyerini anlatan kapsamlı bir çalışma olup, aynı zamanda self-adaptationın, kariyerini ve sanatsal vizyonunu nasıl uzattığını da vurgulamaktadır. Bu görüş, Nick Cave, Jim Jarmusch, Neil Young ve David Bowie'yi de inceleyen daha küçük ölçekteki çalışmalarla desteklenmektedir. Son olarak tez, öz-uyarlama alanının, çağdaş sanatçılar tarafından, nasıl sanatsal ufuklarını genişletmelerinin ve sanatsal

dayanıklılıklarını arttırmalarının bir yolu olarak kullanıldığını göstererek tamamlanmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak bu tez, oluşturduğu tanım ve markerlerin, daha sonraki çalışmalarda kullanılabilmesini amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: David Byrne, Multi-medya Çalışmaları, Öz-uyarlama, Performans Sanatçı Çalışmaları



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ÖZET.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xv
 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	 1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY.....	7
2.1. Literature Review Introduction.....	7
2.2. Methodology.....	8
2.3. Star Studies.....	11
2.4. Adaptation Studies.....	34
2.5. Film Studies.....	51
2.6. Performance Studies.....	56
2.7. Music Video Studies.....	66
CHAPTER 3: PREDECESSORS.....	73
3.1. Entertainment.....	73
3.2. Adaptations and Reliance on Textuality.....	77
3.3. Moments of Self-Adaptation.....	81
3.4. Music Videos as Self-Adaptation.....	84
3.5. Music to Movie, Movie to Music.....	87
3.6. The Who: <i>Tommy</i> (Russell, 1975)	87

3.7. <i>Pink Floyd: The Wall</i> (Parker)	89
3.8. <i>Purple Rain</i> (Magnoli, 1984)	90
3.9. Concert Film as Genre	91
3.10. Importance of Authority.....	95
CHAPTER 4: THE CASE STUDY OF DAVID BYRNE.....	98
4.1. Introduction.....	98
4.2. Talking Heads, <i>Fear of Music</i> (1979), <i>Remain in Light</i> (1980), <i>Speaking in Tongues</i> (1983)	100
4.3. <i>Stop Making Sense</i> (Demme, 1984)	114
4.4. <i>True Stories</i> (Byrne, 1986)	127
4.5. <i>American Utopia</i> (Byrne, 2018) and <i>David Byrne's American Utopia</i> (Lee, 2020)	151
CHAPTER 5: MOMENTS OF SELF-ADAPTATION.....	168
5.1. Introduction.....	168
5.2. Nick Cave.....	170
5.3. Jim Jarmusch, <i>SQÜRL</i> and the Question of the Music Video.....	178
5.4. Neil Young and The Matter of Simultaneous Release.....	183
5.5. Artistic Change or Self-Adaptation? A Look into the Many Personas of David Bowie.....	189
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION.....	194
FILMOGRAPHY.....	201
DISCOGRAPHY.....	205
REFERENCES.....	206

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1. David Byrne’s centrality as a persona takes center stage in the “Once in a Lifetime” music video. It is accompanied by his stylistic dancing, which becomes a marker for him and his self-adaptation.....	110
Fig. 2&3. David Byrne at the opening of the music video as an example of the use of literal imagery with the water ripple backdrop.....	111
Fig. 4. This shows Byrnes' use of a green screen as he stands behind a video that shows a tribe of women continually making the same motion as he mimics them. The repetition highlights the lyrical idea of “same as it ever was.”	112
Fig. 5&6. Reflects Byrne’s use of literal and surreal imagery to convey lyrics and express the song's style and meaning, establishing his directorial style in Burning Down The House (1983).....	113
Fig. 7. David Byrne is acting as different interviewers in the promotional video for Stop Making Sense.....	116
Fig. 8. Demme captures all narrative elements for each song, including this one from “This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody)”.....	118
Fig. 9. The band performing “This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody).”.....	119
Fig. 10. Byrne dancing with the lamp while performing “This Must be the Place. (Naive	

Melody)”.....	121
Fig. 11. Byrne performing “Psycho Killer” alone with his stereo.....	121
Fig. 12. David Byrne performing Once in a Lifetime with a similar costume to the music video of the same song.	122
Fig. 13. David Byrne interviewing himself in the promotional video for the concert film while wearing his famous Big Suit.	123
Fig. 14. Byrne dancing in the big suit to “Girlfriend is Better.”.....	124
Fig. 15. David Byrne performing and dancing to “Life During Wartime”.....	125
Fig. 16. The opening credits for Stop Making Sense.	126
Fig. 17. Byrne at the start of the film as the narrator who is explaining the town of Virgil and how it came to be with a detailed speech on American history.....	128
Fig. 18. Byrnes character, the narrator, explaining what he came to see in Virgil, Texas	129
Fig. 19. “Computer Guy” expressing the importance of technology and computers...130	
Fig. 20. An introduction to Louis Fyne.....	132
Fig. 21. Louis Fyne’s house with a “Wife Wanted” sign outside.....	132
Fig. 22. Both the actors and the band perform Wild Wild Life in the film.....	134
Fig. 23. Talking Heads musis video for “Love on Sale” playing on the TV.....	136
Fig. 24. Man in a grey suit dancing in secret	138
Fig. 25. Characters from the fashion show scene in grass, leaf and greenery suits.....	138
Fig. 26. Byrne, wearing an ivy jacket designed by Adelle Lutz for “True Stories,” Photographed by Annie Leibovitz for Vanity Fair’s October 1986 issue.....	139
Fig. 27. Byrne narrating an introduction for the Lazy Woman.....	140

Fig. 28. The Lazy Woman explaining her perspective on food prices.....	140
Fig. 29. The commercials that play as the Lazy Woman watches television.	142
Fig. 30. Byrne as the narrator explaining mall and shopping culture.	143
Fig. 31. The Culver family having dinner with the narrator.....	144
Fig. 32. Byrne roaming around and assessing one of the many malls of Virgil.....	145
Fig. 33. Byrne is often driving in this film and consistently comments on the structures, buildings and highways.....	146
Fig. 34. Byrne once again driving around the town to comment on buildings and having a conversation with Earl Culver about what they mean.....	146
Fig. 35. The last line of the film Byrne narrates while he is leaving Virgil.....	149
Fig. 36&37. Frames of and photos with names listing victims of police brutality in (mostly) recent American history that take place during the performance of Janelle Monae's anthem <i>Hell You Talmbout</i>	153
Fig. 38. Byrne introducing the show and himself after the opening song is performed.....	155
Fig. 39. Byrne and his musicians on stage with matching grey suits, fully immersed with the staging.....	156
Fig. 40&41. Byrne speaking about people and their relationships while directly addressing and interacting with his audience.	157
Fig. 42&43. Byrne interacting with his audience while talking about the importance of technology, mainly the place of contemporary developments such as dating apps.....	159
Fig. 44. Byrne performing Once in a Lifetime while doing the signature dance from the music video.....	160

Fig. 45. Byrne and his performers performing and dancing to <i>Road to Nowhere</i>	161
Fig. 46&50. Byrne talking about several relevant and contemporary matters such as immigration, political turmoil and the economic state.....	162-163
Fig. 50. Byrne returns to his foundational work in a contemporary context with “This Must be the Place.”	165
Fig. 51. Byrne returns to his foundational work in a contemporary context with “Road to Nowhere.”.....	165
Fig. 52. Cave is sitting with long-time musical collaborator Warren Ellis in a scripted conversation regarding their works in Ellis’ home.	176
Fig. 53. Cave driving long-time friend and musical collaborator Kylie Minogue while they talk about their own collaboration and Cave’s songwriting.....	176
Fig. 54. Nick Cave and his sons, Arthur and Earl Cave, are in their home enjoying what he calls a typical night at home.	177
Fig. 55. Talking Heads wearing their recognizable suits while performing the song in the music video.	181
Fig. 56. Talking Heads performing a dynamic and elaborate dance (Byrne’s signature) in the music video.	181
Fig. 57. The album cover of <i>Greendale</i>	185
Fig. 58. The movie poster for <i>Greendale</i>	185
Fig. 59. The album cover of <i>Purple Rain</i>	187
Fig. 60. The film poster for <i>Purple Rain</i>	187
Fig. 61. Album cover for <i>True Stories</i>	188

Fig. 62. The original film poster for <i>True Stories</i>	188
Fig. 63. A collage of images shows most of Bowie's eras and personas, starting with his first album and continuing to his last.....	190
Fig. 64. A side-by-side image of David Byrne in his Big Suite from <i>Stop Making Sense</i> and the promotional trailer of A24's remastered 2023 concert film release.....	192



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In the vast tapestry of artistic expression and multimedia creation, the concept of self-adaptation emerges as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon, captivating scholars and practitioners alike. It encapsulates the process wherein creators, driven by a desire to explore new realms of creativity, embark on the transformative journey of reinterpreting their own works across different mediums. This thesis endeavors to explore self-adaptation comprehensively, aiming to elucidate its theoretical underpinnings, examine its practical manifestations, and delve into illuminating case studies of prominent artists who have traversed this terrain.

This thesis will ask and attempt to answer the question, “What is self-adaptation?”

While this question in an initial reading may appear straightforward, the nature of self-adaptation and its presence or sometimes lack thereof in both academic and artistic

fields renders the research question essential and deserves a detailed and applicable answer. The thesis is broken down into three parts. By incorporating previous literature and practical examples, one attempts to define self-adaptation, develop a theoretical basis for it, and, most importantly, clearly establish self-adaptation markers. The second part attempts to differentiate between what can or cannot be considered self-adaptations based on practiced examples and highlights how particular practices prevalent in different media forms can change in examples of self-adaptations. The last part aims to apply the found markers and traits to real-life examples from various artists to assert that self-adaptation has a prominent place in multi-media artistry, adaptation studies, and, ultimately, the creative process for a multitude of fields.

While the chapters in the thesis will define self-adaptation in great detail, the most basic understanding of self-adaptation is that it refers to the process where a creator adapts their work from one medium to another. At its essence, self-adaptation represents a dynamic process that transcends the conventional boundaries of artistic creation, inviting creators to dialogue with their own works across diverse mediums continually. Self-adaptation embodies the artist's pursuit of innovation, reinvention, and evaluation as they navigate the shifting terrain of creative processes. Central to the concept of self-adaptation is the notion of artistic agency and autonomy, as creators assume a significant amount of control over the evolution and transformation of their own works and their own artistic personas and selves. Unlike traditional forms of adaptation, which often involve reinterpreting external source material, self-adaptation emerges from an intimate and symbiotic relationship between creator and creation, blurring the

distinctions between originality, fidelity, and reevaluation. It can be a personal and subjective process where the creator assumes control over the majority of the work, and it can also be a collaborative effort that puts the creator in charge but in exchange with other art and artists that is ultimately shaped by the artist's unique vision, their aesthetic and their creative impulses.

Moreover, self-adaptation tackles medium specificity, encompassing diverse artistic practices, including but not limited to literature, music, film, visual art, and stage performance. Self-adaptation can permeate the fabric of contemporary culture, offering artists a canvas upon which to explore new media. Crucial to our understanding of self-adaptation is its dual nature as both a process and a product. Ultimately, self-adaptation embodies the essence of artistic evolution and transformation to forge new pathways of creativity, artistic resilience, and survival. While this happens to be the case for adaptation studies as well but the difference with self-adaptation is that the role of authorship is more evident and how the core idea behind authorship is essential for the understanding of the practice.

The thesis and research question presents a challenge at its core. The reason for this, as mentioned before, is that although self-adaptation has concrete examples that make up a large part of this work, it is ultimately understudied, without a clear definition upon which work and research can be based. The attempt of the thesis, to define and apply the term “self-adaptation”, becomes a study of intersections where various fields must come together to create markers for another field. In order to contextualize the

phenomenon of self-adaptation within the more extensive landscape of artistic theory, it is important to engage with established frameworks of adaptation, multi-media artistry, and creative evolution is imperative. The thesis draws upon the seminal works of theorists such as Kamilla Elliot, Richard Dyer, Thomas Leitch, Carol Vernallis, Martin Shingler, P. David Marshall, Erving Goffman, and James Naremore and many more, to explore the complex interplay between fields, that makes up the practice of self-adaptation. By interrogating these concepts and the manner in which they apply to real-life examples and theories and the dynamic relationship to the creator of texts, constructing a theoretical core through which to interpret and analyze the mechanisms of self-adaptation across varied artistic fields can become possible and is the end-goal of the thesis.

While the roots of self-adaptation cannot necessarily be traced to a specific period or moment in multi-media studies, its contemporary manifestations appear to be shaped by a significant number of factors, from artistic resilience to art being used as a way to take a stance socially or even politically. It is due to this reason that the thesis has chosen to perform a close reading on a mix of case studies with various aims.

Methodologically, the thesis has a multi-layered approach, with textual analysis and theories of various fields, to present what self-adaptation looks like when practiced. By engaging with diverse textual, visual, and auditory materials, the thesis will show both the function of self-adaptation and the artist's role in bringing these types of works to life. Firstly, and most critically, the case studies are a way of showing the markers for self-adaptation. Close reading these will show how the markers for self-adaptation are

clear when given a name and are consistent amongst the works the thesis describes as self-adaptation. Secondly, it will show the artist's power and how their creative process, artistic persona, and overall styles make self-adaptations happen. Lastly, the case studies highlight how self-adaptation is a critical presence in media studies and how it is a factor and practice that can ultimately positively impact the longevity of an artist's career and creativity.

The thesis consists of one large case study followed by four smaller studies that support the arguments made in the more prominent one. While many currently active artists show a practice and understanding of self-adaptation with their works, the thesis as chosen musicians, writer, director and screenwriter David Byrne to use as the central case study. While many factors contributed to this choice, the most essential reason is how Byrne has built a career on self-adaptation. His decades-long career shows a trajectory of using his own works over and over again by considering elements of social and cultural change to create artistic meanings that also reflect these changes consistently. Nick Cave, Neil Young, Jim Jarmusch and David Bowie will then be studied, to not only support the markers developed for self-adaptation but to also show how self-adaptation in multiple ways and can be practiced by artists who condense the practice to suit a particular aim within the broader arc of their career.

The thesis will be constructed from six chapters. Chapter I, the introduction, Chapter II. the literature review and methodology, Chapter III. Predecessors, Chapter IV. The Case Study of David Byrne, Chapter V. and Chapter VI., which is the conclusion. Ultimately,

this thesis has the very clear goal of defining self-adaptation and its markers, seeing how it can be and has been practiced with a specialized focus on chosen artists and how self-adaptation presents and is the future when it comes to multi-media artistry and artistic and creative resilience in changing times, practices and technologies.



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Literature Review Introduction

The literature review for this thesis presents a unique challenge as it is an extensive, complex and multidisciplinary topic. The review is curated by creating intersections from the fields of studies addressed which are star studies, adaptation studies, film studies, performance studies and music video studies to develop the literature on self-adaptation. Self-adaptation, in its clearest sense, is the practice and process by which a text (in any media) is transformed into any medium (can remain the same medium) by its own creator or originator. This entails the creator of the hypertext taking on the role of the adaptor, bringing their own work into a new hypertext. While the basic definition can be expressed as such, this thesis will show that self-adaptation withing itself is highly multilayered. Not only can it involve creative artistic collaboration, intertextual reflexivity, artistic continuum, intermediary transformation and multimedia artistry it can also be subdivided into various sub-practices such as thematic self-adaptation, style

(directorial, narrative...etc.) based self-adaptation and artistic image and persona based self-adaptation. Self-adaptation, as a topic of study, is a relatively new perspective that draws on a multitude of academic and artistic fields. It transcends the borders of the academic fields that this literature review will mention and creates intersections that ultimately produce the broader field of self-adaptation. As a product of intersecting fields, self-adaptation is a relatively uncharted territory. Most certainly, self-adaptation is not a new phenomenon, and discussions and studies related to it highlight how artists adapt from their works to enhance their artistic styles and further their presence not just in their fields. However, an all-inclusive work that embodies the functions with real-life examples is less prevalent than the mentioned smaller studies. Regardless, the literature on self-adaptation and how it functions needs to be enhanced. The greatest contributor to this thesis and this literature review is the current literature gap on this topic and field.

2.2. Methodology

One of the most foundational traits of the topic of self-adaptation is the multitude of fields it comprises, as well as the abundance of artistic elements it takes into consideration. In order to connect theory with creative study, it is essential to choose a methodology that presents the flexibility to examine critical details and connect the findings to create a large theoretical and practical understanding of self-adaptation.

Close reading offers the flexibility to integrate the needed theories and articulate how they apply to practical instances of self-adaptation. As stated previously, this thesis aims

to show how self-adaptation can be defined, how it works, who has done it before, and how it can be studied both as an academic concept and as a creative practice. In order to do so, a thorough examination of different types of media examples will be performed. Close reading grants the ability to be as detailed as the subject demands.

In order to cover all of the ground needed to present self-adaptation as a critical field of study comprehensively, the thesis assembles a series of close readings in the form of individual and extensive case studies. While the most prominent application of the close reading methodology will focus on one case study, it will be used further in the smaller, supportive case studies. Having a career that spans five decades, from the 1980s to the present day, David Byrne has produced work in several artistic fields. The close readings will examine music/albums, music videos, film, concert film, stage and Broadway performances, and several smaller works. The key texts that the close reading will cover will start by covering Byrne's albums with his band, Talking Heads, specifically *Speaking in Tongues* (Byrne, 1983). Here a significant focus is on the music videos produced for the band, which involved several notable directors. It will continue with *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), the band's concert film created by Byrne, which acts as a blueprint for the production of contemporary concert films. It will continue with *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986), the first full-length film by Byrne, which is again an application of his musical and artistic style. Finally, jumping ahead a few decades, it will delve into his contemporary work, focusing on his Broadway stage show *David Byrne's American Utopia* (Byrne, 2018) and the film version directed by Spike Lee, which recalls and repurposes his older work based on modern

understandings and social structures. The large case study and the close reading aim to show a full-length career journey that has managed to stay alive and active through the specific application of self-adaptation.

While the Byrne case study will be the primary chapter highlighting the functions of self-adaptation, other examples will also be used similarly, showing that self-adaptation as a practice has a visible presence in multi-media artistry. These will include artists such as Nick Cave, Jim Jarmusch, Neil Young, and David Bowie and delve into contemporary examples such as Beyonce and Taylor Swift. Unlike the Byrne case study, these examples embody either one or two works by these artists, and the close readings will be done accordingly. The aim of doing a close reading on the smaller examples is not only to support the larger thesis of Byrne as a prominent example of artists practicing self-adaptation but also to show how self-adaptation is an effective way of continuing particular themes or works by changing the media or form of text that artist puts forth.

Self-adaptation blurs the lines between texts and individuals, particularly in the context of star discourse. When a person becomes a star or a public figure, their identity is intertwined with various texts. In this interconnected relation, it can be challenging to pinpoint where one text ends and another begins, as they all contribute to shaping and representing the individual's persona. This highlights the complex nature of intertextuality, which refers to how texts refer to, influence, and become influenced by other texts. In the case of self-adaptation within star discourse, the individual's identity

becomes textualized, meaning it is constructed and represented through the texts or the works they create. This abundance of texts and the necessity to look at the star as a text and ultimately inspect how the star text fuels particular elements of self-adaptation, is the core reason for the choice of method. The close reading will provide the space and practice to highlight the interconnected nature of the practice.

Overall, a close reading methodology presents the most expansive form of individually examining the different forms of texts that all present different information regarding the functions of self-adaptation. By taking into consideration the artist, the time period, the form of text/media, the artistic approaches, the general style and themes an artist presents, a close reading becomes the best way of conveying the essential details. The following section will summarize the methodological approaches that connect to the range of media studies subfields taken up in the topic of self-adaptation.

2.3. Star Studies

Before an in-depth analysis of the literature on star studies is performed, a critical explanation is needed. While thesis may use the words “celebrity” and “artist” to refer to particular matters, the predominant term that the thesis will focus on will be star. Literature can often conflate the terms celebrity and star which they certainly have commonalities one of the most important being a common ground of recognizability, there are critical differences. The thesis will prefer the term star over celebrity due to some of these differences. Firstly, the works that will be covered in this thesis often pair the term star with that person’s craft, similar to artist. Celebrity on the other hand

appears to reference recognizability. Additionally, using the term star implies a centrality to cultural markers. In the case of Byrne, he is a star not only because of a visible and prominent connection to his craft/s, but Byrne needs that self to convey what he is doing with self-adaptation.

Furthermore, the distinction between "star" and "celebrity" extends beyond semantics. Stars, embody a deeper cultural significance beyond just being recognizable figures. They often serve as symbols or representations of broader societal themes, ideologies, or cultural understandings. For example, David Byrne's status as a star is not solely attributed to his visibility within the music industry, but also to his embodiment of certain ideas he delivers with his self-adaptation works.

"Star" in literature on star studies, delves into the complexities of fame, identity, and cultural significance as embodied by individuals who transcend mere celebrity to become iconic figures within their fields. Through this lens, the analysis will seek to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which stars shape their self-adaptation and reflect the cultural zeitgeist of the works respective eras.

The self in self-adaptation is deeply connected to the topic as a theory and a creative practice. Questions such as who can perform self-adaptation, who has done it, and what it means regarding the artists doing it, are critical in studying the practice. Arguably, star studies and studying the artists before analyzing the work produced in the self-adaptation practice are essential to understanding its functions and what they imply on a

larger and more cultural scale. Contrary to the more linear reviews of the other fields in this chapter, with star studies, there is a more intertextual and interconnected idea at the base of the field. While no single theory or theorist directly states this, it is important that the star be considered regarding self-adaptation as a practice. It might seem ill-fitting to consider the human element as “text”; however, this allows for the ability to analyze the functions of this human element and create a discourse of the practice by presenting the star as a potential marker of self-adaptation. Additionally, the textualization of the star must distinguish between the star, the artist, the image, the character, and the persona, as all of these levels can play crucial roles in creating self-adaptation. It is pivotal to understand how the star is created, how to read the star, and what the different forms of the star mean in the given field. This factor is particularly the case for David Byrne.

In order to express the theoretical idea of these two points, the review of star studies has used multiple star studies scholars and theories to create a coherent idea of the way stars should be considered in studying self-adaptation. For this to be a well-rounded theory, it is pivotal to consider the foundational texts of star studies, mainly Richard Dyer’s *Stars* (Dyer & McDonald, 1998). The Dyerian review of stars covers many ideas, and some are already a matter of discussion in self-adaptation studies. The work tackles many factors that go into creating and consuming a star. For Dyer, stars are images that form a part of media texts (similar to viewing a star as a text), and they are thus inherently a part of the capitalistic system and practices of a Hollywood production. (Dyer & McDonald, 1998, p. 10) While considering the economic factors of this image, such as

capital, investment, outlay, and the market, Dyer theorizes the star as a marketed image manufactured by those in charge of the delivery of these stars, such as producers and production companies. He expresses that “Production and consumption are differentially determining forces in the creation of stars (producers always having more power over commodities than consumers), but both are always mediated by and in ideology.” (Dyer & McDonald, 1998, p. 20) Stars thus become mediated images of consumption that are reflections of the ways consumers should be or, in a sense, want to be. The element of “want to be” is rooted in the mentioned study of ideology where Dyer argues that star systems are made of stars that represent culturally common or dominant values enabling in a reinforcement of specific values the “manufacturer” inflicts on the star. For Dyer, this is not an organic process but one constructed through creating the star's image. In the most basic sense, the star, from the Dyerian perspective, is a blank canvas product built to fulfill the consumer's current and dominant desires and needs. Based on his analysis of the dominant Western system, the star system is manufactured.

Dyer's arguments and theories regarding the stars being consumable have been proven in an extensive number of ways and carry varying degrees of validity. However, in the context of self-adaptation self-adaptation, Dyer's arguments do not as readily apply. The key point to distinguish is that unlike in the conventional star system and film/music industries, self-adaptation allows for the stars to manufacture themselves. What this means is, as the case studies in the thesis have shown, that when an artist and a star create based on their own work, they can maintain primary control over how they

“manufacture” themselves and their image. The idea that they represent what is culturally dominant can still be true. For example, in Byrne’s *American Utopia* (Byrne, 2020), he incorporates of the current American political and social circumstances with his music from the 80s that carries the themes of that particular period. The practice of self-adaptation allows Byrne to adapt his art and his image as the star to fit the context of the time and what he wants to achieve with his new work. By doing so, he manufactures himself as the socially aware (amongst other types) star. Additionally, he extends this persona through collaboration and creates an interconnection with other artists and stars. For instance, Byrne submits his own vision to Spike Lee, an auteur with a vision in his own right. This combination creates an evolved permutation of Byrne’s stardom as well as for Lee as a director.

Lastly, in relation to Dyer's theories, the star paradox, which for Dyer is the paradox of how stars are both ordinary and extraordinary, is prevalent in self-adaptation but in a different way. While Dyer points out that stars are ordinary to the point of relatability, he also asserts that they are extraordinary simultaneously, meaning that they are highly visible individuals with unique markers that make them stand out as not relatable but “stars.” The idea of “typicality” is what makes them special. Each star is the idealized form of a set of traits that society recognizes as a “type,” which makes them useful for creating narratives. Dyer asserts that

Finally, stars represent what are taken to be people typical of this society; yet the types of people we assume characterise our society may nevertheless be singularly absent from our actual day-to-day experience of society; the specialness of stars may be then that they are the only ones around who are ordinary! (Dyer & McDonald, 1998, p. 42)

The theory here is that stars come with contradictory dualities. They are societal, ordinary images that mean something familiar to the consumer but also exist in a distinctive realm of allusivity that creates a loop of interest towards them. However, similar to how manufacturing in self-adaptation occurs via the star, the duality mentioned above is created purposefully by the star. In fact, it can be argued that it is not even a “paradox” but mutually exclusive.

A final point should be made in connection with this analysis of the ordinary and the extraordinary. Like many of the examples in this literature review and this review itself, Dyer also plays off of different theorists to create his own understanding of the artificial and produced star. A significant name he assesses is American historian Daniel J. Boorstin by using a quote from his work *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America* (Boorstin, 1962), Dyer examines Boorstin’s idea, which states,

According to Boorstin, stars, like so much of contemporary culture, are pseudo-events. That is, they appear to be meaningful but are in fact, empty of meaning. Thus, a star is well-known for her/his well-knownness, and not for any talent or specific quality. They are an example of the 'celebrity', marketed on the strength of trivial differences of appearance. Stars do not have a 'strong character, but a definable, publicizable personality: a figure which can become a nationally-advertised trademark' (p. 162). 'The qualities which now commonly make a man or woman into a "nationally advertised" brand are in fact a new category of human emptiness' (p. 58). (Dyer & McDonald, 1998, p. 13)

For self-adaptation as practice, this argument, one that asserts that the star is an appearance rather than an in-depth text with its markers and internal qualities, is not entirely valid. Dyer, who is critical of this idea, points out that the star has content to be examined and thus cannot be treated as “empty.” For him, appearance does not equate

to superficiality, but it is something that should be assessed in the context of how the star is presented, for example, in the cinematic sense. (Dyer & McDonald, 1998, p. 14) However, this is not enough in the context of self-adaptation. It has been stated above that one element that should occur in self-adaptation readings is for the star to be seen as text. This means that the star is not simply a collection of appearances and a “star image” but, with the self-adaptive work that almost reinvents and reproduces them as stars, they become tools and texts that represent something other than their own stardom.

Considering the elements of Dyer’s theories that are critical for the field of star studies, it is essential to consider names that further develop his work to create theories and arguments that not only help make the star a text but also present viable perspectives for the stars in self-adaptation. One such name is Martin Shingler and his book *Star Studies: A Critical Guide* (2012). In its essence, the text is almost an extensive literature review that assesses many theorists’ perspectives on star studies from the Hollywood, European, and Bollywood viewpoints. While going through these works, Shingler presents an expansion of the field. Having established that historically, there have been a multitude of ways in which the star can be read, he asserts, by referencing Edgar Morin, that,

For the public at large, stars offer ‘patterns of culture’ that ‘give shape to the total human process that has produced them’ (ibid.: 147). Whatever their precise role within the film industry, their importance, Morin insists, lies beyond that industry, in the wider culture in which stars are consumed and adopted as role models by all kinds of people (...).

Shingler argues that specific circumstances must be achieved for a star to become a star. The tricky element here is that these circumstances are dynamic. However, the idea that applies to the star text is that, generally, stars tend to become objects of identification and a projection of needs. (Shingler, 2012, p.19) To consider how this happens, two new considerations have shaped the new literature on stardom since Dyer established his ideas. The First is the audience's importance to stardom and the industrial process, (Shingler, 2012, p. 23) continuation of this review which will be explained in detail in the upcoming headings, Shingler points to Gledhill's *Stars: Industry of Desire* (Gledhill, 1991) as an example of the works he utilizes in order to come up with a cumulative and historical perspective on stardom that establishes the star as a text.

Shingler also delves into the ways of analyzing screen performances that make up part of the star's star image. He discusses the establishment of "signature styles" (a vital part of the star text in self-adaptation) as a driving force in "becoming the star." While he does not directly use the word "text," Shingler again treats the star as a text to read and assess the gestures developed by the star both on and off screen contribute to the character in the film and the persona that the star reflects onto the real world. (Shingler, 2012, p. 45)

Moving further into the concept of the star as a text, Shingler presents one interesting way of analysis where he almost mechanizes the star to explain its production. Shingler expresses that the commodity element of the star cannot directly be taken out of star readings and that star status is correlated with proven popularity. (Shingler, 2012, p.95)

While the early twentieth century proved that the importance of star and studio relations fueled star power, the contemporary star yields higher degrees of freedom outside a centralized studio system. While Shingler mainly assesses the film star side of this point, it directly applies to the stars who preform self-adaptation. One key feature of the self-adapting star is that they are placed in the driver's seat with not only the work they produce but also with how they produce themselves. When this thesis argues that the stars should be seen as texts, it also argues that the stars contribute to this textualization through self-adaptation of their works and themselves. They are vehicles in this sense. To present the audience with degrees of consistency when it comes to the star image while also introducing new elements to it. (Shingler, 2012, p. 113) A critical argument Shingler makes that is directly linked to self-adaptation is the possibility of stars driving their vehicles. While the traditional cinema star can have more control by creating relationships with other members in the industry, like a star-director association (like Leonardo Dicaprio and Martin Scorsese), and even more so by becoming the director or producer, self-adaptation offers this use of the vehicle as a core trait of the practice. (Shingler, 2012, p.117) While big names such as Bradley Cooper, Angelina Jolie, Orson Wells, and Buster Keaton create their vehicles to enhance and establish their star images, Byrne, Cave, and Young all use the cinematic medium and approach with their original music to enhance the use of the vehicle further, to drive their vehicle into unfamiliar terrain. Here, it is important to address that comparing people primarily known as actors to those known as musicians does differ. However, the point Shingler lays out shares a similar frame with self-adaptation. While one cannot say that the purpose of self-adaptation is to drive the vehicle of stardom, more successful, or at least

well-known examples of self-adaptation show the star text as the driving force behind the productions of both the creative works and the development and maintenance of star image.

Lastly, Shingler discusses star identities and the terms of image and persona. He argues that stars, like stardom, have several identities determined by their characters and the characters they play. (Shingler, 2012, p.121) The reason for their having several identities, Shingler argues, is due to the construction of star identity in multiple media and a variety of platforms such as magazines and the internet. Shingler says that stars are sometimes inseparable from their characters, as if they “transcend” the star. By utilizing some of the theorists this review mentions, such as Richard Dyer and Barry King, Shingler expresses that persona is the projection of the real person. (Shingler, 2012, p. 125) He adds that the publicity and promotion of the already established star image fuel the creation of the star persona, which connects the spectator to the star. Knowing the star, through the consumption of the persona, becomes easier, and consuming the extratextual knowledge is an element of this. (Shingler, 2012, p. 148)

Having laid out the foundational theories of Dyer and Shingler and expressing the significant differences between stars in self-adaptation, P. David Marshall’s, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (1997) adds a multitude of dimensions to the ways of seeing the stars as signs and texts. While he delves into great detail about the tools for analyzing “celebrity” as a form of culture and power, he makes key arguments applicable to self-adaptation. He points out that stars develop as individuals

try to make sense of the social world. Similar to Dyer, he points out that the “making sense” process changes as the dominant culture morphs and adopts different ideals. (Marshall, 1997, p. 51) Again, in self-adaptation, stars can be the tools that deliver the changes in society and culture via their interpretation of their past themes and works. Most critically, however, for Marshall, celebrities can be signs and texts that hold great significance. He highlights that,

The material reality of the celebrity sign that is, the actual person who is at the core of the representation disappears into a cultural formation of meaning. Celebrity signs represent personalities more specifically, personalities that are given heightened cultural significance within the social world. (Marshall, 1997, p. 57)

While there are many ways of applying this idea, in regards to seeing the star as texts and signs, this idea is applicable to self-adaptation. Marshall argues that the tangible form of the celebrity, the person, is less prominent than what they signify. The “cultural formation of meaning” takes center stage and means that society and the consumers give the star a cultural and symbolic meaning. This is true with all of the case studies this thesis has shown. For instance, David Byrne as a star and an image is a selling point of what he is producing; however, with each work of adaptation he puts forth, he reinforces a cultural and creative meaning with markers that indicate this meaning. Contemporary examples like Taylor Swift are also textualized. Her star image and personality become separate from what she means artistically and culturally, naturally impacting the productions' meanings. This is also an example of where personality, persona, image, and text differ.

Marshall further pushes his arguments by connecting the sign to the text, suggesting that when the signs are broken down, it becomes clear that celebrities are a culmination of signs that are read as texts. (Marshall, 1997, p.58) Essentially, celebrities are a broader system of signs. They go beyond the individual traits, which is one of the reasons Marshall suggests analyzing the celebrity both immanent and relationally to understand the functions they carry. He adds,

To interpret the celebrity as a text as opposed to simply as a sign is a fruitful way to extend the insights derived from breaking down the structure of signs. What can be revealed is that the celebrity is composed of a system of signs that includes chains of signification. The chains of signification reveal the layering of connotative meanings that are embedded into each celebrity sign. (Marshall, 1997, p. 58)

Based on this idea, when we treat the star as text, a layered entity, we can break down the celebrity's internal structure to get the connotative meanings behind them.

Additionally, the intertextual signs that the celebrity carries mean that the stars circulation constructs their images through a multitude of media: movies, newspapers, interviews, and even rumors. One reason why Marshall's work meshes well with self-adaptation is its vision of celebrity as multi-media construction. One trait of self-adaptation is its multi-media foundation. Although the types of media for each example can differ, as self-adaptation does not require particular forms of media to be used in order to fit, it does require that there is a range of different media forms where the star is not only presenting creative work based on their themes or styles but also creating a chain of relevancy where they gain the ability to re-distribute "information" as well as add to their star images. Seeing the star as text in self-adaptation thus grants the ability

to understand the functions of the self in the practice and assess what self-adaptation presents and allows the stars themselves.

The textualization of the star is Marshall's most critical argument; argues that the audience, in shaping the meaning of the star, has substantial power because, through consumption, they can shape culture. Through this ability, the power of the audience is directly linked to the influence of the star. (Marshall, 1997, p. 61) Another degree Marshall adds to this is the point that "The celebrity sign, then, contains the audience through positioning the type of identification in terms of individuality." (Marshall, 1997, p. 61) The idea is that the representation of the star, their "celebrity sign," directly influences the audience. The way stars are identified and projected through these signs and them as texts presents the audience with the ability to identify with the stars both in regard to image and ideology. This connection of the audience as text and image, audience and culture, is a prevalent factor in self-adaptation. Even though it would be too strong to suggest that this is mandatory, the case studies in the thesis have shown that self-adaptive works tend to show a cultural understanding on the part of the star. Not only do the stars understand the dominant circumstances that most of their audiences connect to, but they also shape themselves to reflect these changing circumstances within the work and themselves. This is particularly true in the cases of David Byrne and Neil Young.

To continue this point, Marshall suggests that stars describe and embody a type of value made up of culture and what that star represents via their own work and image.

(Marshall, 1997, p. 7) They also embody these values based on what the audience expects from them. While this concept will be thoroughly inspected in the adaptation studies section of this review, one example to explain further this idea connects to fidelity. Stars who perform self-adaptation embody values that span from one point in time to another. This period is substantially long for David Byrne. Throughout this time, regardless of how long it may be, the star represents a value for their audience. When they create another work adapted from their selves, the reading of the star becomes critical. While one cannot be “unfaithful” to their past works in the scope of this discourse, an expectation of what they mean as the individual does form and expand with each new self-adaptation entry. Naturally, culture, changing times, society, and an endless list of factors impact the star. However, the idea remains: the audience is central to the definition of the star, and in self-adaptive works, the star's meanings are also formed by the cycle of recreation. (Marshall, 1997, p. 8) While there can also be a discussion of the difference between “star” and “artists” as the introductory paragraph for this section argued, the idea of the star as texts, signs, and culturally driven images, is not a reason to distinguish significantly between the two. The types of media and the creative works produced are a more considerable consideration. For instance, Marshall uses examples from films. He points out that in films, star images are read, due to different cinematic techniques; for example, close-ups and a degree of intimacy between the star or character and the audience member is created. (Marshall, 1997, p. 13)

Intimacy in works is a foundational element of self-adaptation as is “re-intimacy”. In a sense, it is not too critical whether David Byrne is a star or an artist generally, both are true. The way in which he presents himself to different media is the key. Additionally, with each entry and reintroduction, he furthers the level of intimacy he has with audiences and viewers by building upon the already intimate image he has developed in previous works. For instance, *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986), Byrnes's debut film, increases this intimacy of the self and the audience. While the fourth chapter will highlight in detail how he does this, simply, he achieves this in the film by speaking to the audience as himself, not a constructed film character and by going into topics that his audience was already familiar with by adding an even more personal touch. He utilizes both the cinematic and musical mechanism to achieve this. The point is that the ability of the stars to present themselves appropriately in the media context is crucial for self-adaptation.

Finally, one critical thing Marshall expresses is that the star has different meanings in different forms of media. As the review has discussed, the cinematic star and the popular music celebrity have different apparatus and are read with different markers. However, reading the same star from different points in the media's spectrum is also a function in self-adaptation. According to Marshall, a degree of this is related to intertextuality. He points out that “The impetus behind the development of stardom then was the audience's construction of intertextual continuities.” (Marshall, 1997, p.79) The audience creates intertextual connections by finding continuities. This intertextual continuity means that all of the texts the star is related to, such as movies, interviews,

music videos, TV shows, theater, and many more, all contribute to making connections and maintaining these connections. This theory is pivotal for the study of self-adaptation, which relies on the star as an intertextual text, one that is equally legible across a range of different media forms.

Originally written in 1962 and translated into English in 1972, Francesco Alberoni's essay *The Powerless Elite: Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of the Stars* (1972) presents a sociological study of stardom. Alberoni argues that there will always be individuals who attract universal attention. While these are generally people who influence societies, like Kings and political leaders, stardom is also a phenomenon of large-scale industrial and urbanized societies created in order to fulfill the functions of society. (Alberoni, 1972, para 1-2.) While stars do not necessarily have “real power,” they attract attention and become sources of influence. In other words, Alberoni argues that stars are objects or reflections of the needs of the majority in society. This is a look into the cultural and social forces behind self-adaptation. Many case studies show that the adaptation under this practice tends to add or subtract based on the dominant culture; hence, the star tends to resemble the need they attempt to supplement in their works. If, then, assess from Alberoni's view that stars are figures that fulfill a need, self-adaptation can be presented as a way of doing so with the star. The notion is that stars serve as mirrors reflecting the prevailing societal needs.

Another point Alberoni suggests is that the idea is lacking due to the power dynamic. (Alberoni, 1972, para 6) While this may still apply to the cinematic star or the pop and

rock star, the matter is again different with self-adaptation. Self-adaptation certainly does not promise a closer physical or emotional experience with the star; however, it shows a more heightened level of familiarity for the consumer of the star. Even though the star should be considered as text in its readings, the star always remains the self. It is important to note that this is to varying degrees. While the cinematic star goes between characters and public personas, self-adaption consistently references the self. Like Dyer, Alberoni also assesses the concept of charisma based on Weber's definition and shows how stardom and charisma intersect. He also points out the separation of social roles in preventing the generalization of charisma and the potential transformation of stars into a power elite. (Alberoni, 1972, para 10-12) One essential idea Alberoni presents is the powerless elite; the star is open to evaluation from the whole of society. Thinking of this as spectatorship, when spectators are pleased with the charismatic individual and their behaviors, admiration can become bigger elements fueling the "power" of the star. (Alberoni, 1972, para 17) Alberoni explains how observability functions differently in bigger democracies compared to smaller democratic or non-democratic societies, emphasizing the importance of social distance between stars and the public. The reason for studying Alberoni not only lies within the sociological points but also due to the fact that he expresses that the so-called power comes from the members of society, creating an early argument for the importance of the audience/spectator in star studies. The author discusses the importance of separating social roles in preventing the generalization of charisma and the potential transformation of stars into a power elite. Alberoni suggests that a stable social structure, characterized by pre-established and

internalized roles, acts as a defense against the restructuring of habitual systems of action.

Janet Staiger's term "personality exploitation" describes the development of the star system in the US from a more historical view. She places personality exploitation as a method of sorts. From her view, this exploitation is one of the pinnacles of understanding the inner workings of the star system, going as far back as the 1910s. (Staiger, 1991, p. 9) While this system's history is out of this study's scope, "personality" is not. Staiger lays out a foundational premise for self-adaptation because two things come from this perspective. Firstly, it shows the importance of the person and the self, and secondly, it highlights a significant industrial and creative shift. A focus on personality insists that the stars themselves are as crucial as the characters they represent and the works they produce. The second point shows a tremendous contemporary element. While exploitation in the essay is used literally as the excess use and reliance on the star self, in self-adaption, it is the purposeful practice of the star and the self-becoming part of the text and the production. As opposed to exploiting the person, self-adaptation makes the star personality part of the media's narrative. Similar to Dyer's arguments, the star, the self-adaptor, uses their personality to heighten the impact of the work they produce. Not only are they using themselves as creative tools to deliver the reimagined messages that stem from their previous works and themes, but they are also making themselves relevant in different periods and social/cultural circumstances. From this perspective, if we view the stars as having expiration dates, self-adaptation and the use of personality pushes this date back. This particular idea

applies more to the stars from the 70's and 80's but regardless, it presents the industry with a new future with familiar personalities.

Continuing from the point of what the star adds to self-adaptation, Richard Dyer's assessment of charisma is also critical. While originally published in *Stars* (Dyer & McDonald, 1998), the essay which is republished in Gledhill's *Stars: Industry of Desire*. (Gledhill, 1991), push the significance of the social condition. The essay suggests that Max Weber's political theory of charisma can be applied to stardom and film. Dyer assesses that charisma is a marker for the star, which sets them apart from the ordinary individual. (Dyer, 1991, p. 58) He questions how stars become charismatic point out that for a star to be charismatic, their individuality must be connected to an element of human existence and that charismatic appeal in times of instability is more significant and provides a degree of stability. (Dyer, 1991, p. 59) Once again, the importance of the audience is expressed because Dyer makes the argument that during the mentioned times of instability, an intense relationship between the charismatic star and the audience forms. With this, the star offers the audience stable connections constantly fluctuating the social circumstances. (Dyer, 1991, p. 60) The practice of self-adaptation thus acts as a vessel for the star to use to address these "instabilities." This is not a requirement for self-adaptation; however, the case studies in this thesis have shown that this is a common trajectory; specifically, David Byrne, Neil Young, and Taylor Swift present examples of this. Then the question arises: Are more charismatic stars more prone to producing successful works of self-adaptation because of their social roles? While a critical question, the thesis will not go into it in detail however the

close readings will aim to show how the “charismatic” element of the self does impact the outcome of a work and in return audience expectations and receptions.

Jackie Stacey highlights another element of the importance and impact of personality. Stacey, in *Stars: Industry of Desire* (Gledhill, 1991), focuses on the overlooked element of audience engagement with film stars, specifically from the view of women. (Stacey, 1991, p. 145) She argues that the audience and their level of receptiveness towards stars' personalities is not simply a textually analytic matter but requires conceptualizing the audience. Throughout her essay, she uses fan letters, fan clubs, surveys, and audience recollections from women to assess how the audience responds to a star's image and, in return, how they form the concept of identification with the star. It is a psychic process of cultural consumption for her. The element most critical in the scope of the self-adapted star is the idea of “identification.” Stacey assesses that

In film studies more generally, the term ‘identification’ has been widely used to suggest a broader set of processes. Drawing on literary analysis, identification has often been used rather loosely to mean sympathizing or engaging with a character. It has also been used in relation to the idea of ‘point of view’, watching and following the film from a character’s point of view. (Stacey, 1991, p. 151)

With this definition, she argues that identification can often come with escapism and can even go as far as to lead to extra cinematic identification such as pretending, resembling, initiating, and copying. (Stacey, 1991, p. 158) While these practices are done to make the seemingly unattainable star attainable, this is different from the structure of the self-adapted star. When self-adaptation presents the self, it always returns to the original star in a different context and form. The identity they present is

present in each adaptation and media. To some degree, the star and the star text are also reproduced through the audience's manners of identification. While Stacey argues that the audiences make the star through the mentioned practices and make the stars attainable for themselves, in self-adaptation, the star is not generally presented as unattainable to begin with. Their higher degree of attainability comes from repetition, perhaps, they continue to attain a recognizable self, setting the personal bar at a level that evolves only gradually, at a pace that is recognizable and in return attainable by audiences. A wider audience and paratext study concerning self-adaptation can also show that the audience's recreation and imitation of self-adaptation works and stars are factors in the study as a whole.

While considering Stacey's theory, Barry King presents a more complex and detailed argument of how stardom forms as a strategic response to the challenges stars face, specifically film stars. (King, 1991, p.169) One key factor he highlights, which is also a consideration for self-adaptation, is the difference between stage and screen and how this impacts stardom. He says that film acting threatens the actor's ability to control their performances and how they project themselves onto the spectator. This projection is naturally critical due to articulating that person's star image towards the spectator. This matter he talks about as,

More routinely, it leads to the norm of impersonation. This states that in playing any character, the 'real' personality of the actor should disappear into the part or, conversely, that if the range of the actor is limited to parts consonant with his or her personality then this constitutes 'poor' acting. (King, 1991, p. 170)

Considering that in film acting, control over performance is already an issue, the expectation that an actor's own self should be removed from the character and that disappearing equals authenticity makes the expectation of impersonation tricky. However, self-adaptation presents a remedy to this specific argument. It has been shown in the examples of the thesis that the self is never entirely removed from the text, the content, and the media produced. The disappearance King mentions is not literal, of course, and implies the actor's ability to embody the character they are portraying fully. In this sense, self-adaptation becomes crucial as it allows actors and, more so the artist to navigate between their own persona and their artistic image. Self-adaptation involves a delicate balance between maintaining authenticity and fulfilling the demands of a role, whether it be an acting role or a role that a specific media type demands. This “disappearance” never fully happens in works of self-adaptation because its initial creation is based on the self of that artist.

Here, an interesting question about audience perception arises. It is true that there is no set way to distinguish how an audience will perceive a work of self-adaptation. However, there should be an assumption that audiences acknowledge the particular self-involved in the works to the same extent as the artist doing the work acknowledges it. In this sense, a predisposition and an expectation regarding what to expect from the central figure/self in the work develops. The self in the self-adaptation should not be, or more so in most cases, cannot be an impersonation in the sense of introducing another persona because the work relies on the stars own developed persona to become the vehicle of delivery.

While King connects his arguments to the larger topic of the economy and the labor market for actors, this is currently not an immediate focus regarding self-adaptations. Certainly, there may be a point as the practice becomes more prominent where a consideration for this field from a labor market outlook can become necessary; King's arguments about personality and the actor are more critical at this stage. Moving forward, King makes the following suggestion,

First, actors tend to develop a 'personality' for purposes of public interaction, which indicates that they are 'Actors' and suggests to potential employers that they are interesting and energetic people, including in this the entire paraphernalia of body maintenance, grooming and so forth. (1991, p.176)

Here, he says that actors develop distinctive personalities for public interaction, signaling their appeal to potential employers. This implies that actors invest in their images and maintenance beyond their acting skills to enhance their marketability. By cultivating a compelling personality, actors enhance their marketability and prove that they have a presence beyond the confines of screens and scripts. In works of self-adaptations, the ability to be more in control of this factor is present. It is important to note that the difference between actors who follow a script and musicians who follow their own style is well acknowledged. However, the idea is that interest in self-adaptation often depends on the persona of that artist developed outside of traditional roles. In self-adaptations, the artist's persona intertwines with the characters they portray (who are often difficult to distinguish from the self) or the content they create, blurring the lines between the public image and the artistic expression. Moreover, unlike a scripted film, some self-adaptation platforms can actually give the artists the ability to

create based on their established personas which the audience generally expects to be closer to an “actual” self rather than an invented character. By incorporating elements of their own personality into their work, artists can establish a distinct this self and cultivate interest based on this, which resonates with their unique identity. For example, *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020) was consistently referred to and marketed as *David Byrne’s American Utopia*. While this may seem trivial, this use of words very deliberately underlines self-adaptation focus on self-based creation. This is important to keep in mind as not only does this idea of having the “author’s” name in the title have a place in adaptation studies and scholarship but in regards to self-adaptation, it highlights the point of the practice that the author and the adaptor are the same regardless of the other sources of authority and artists of collaboration. From this perspective, the focus and breakdown of the actor’s image and persona help convey how and why self-adaptation is not only a different artistic practice but how differently it serves artists and their abilities.

2.4. Adaptation Studies

In star studies, the different theories and theorists can be connected with each other to create specific theories for the star in self-adaptation, for instance, the textualization of the star. Adaptation studies poses more of a challenge because the literature available for the field has little consensus about its core theoretical underpinnings.

Professor Kamilla Elliot is one of the leading theorists in the scope of theorization through a robust assessment of the existing discourse of adaptation. Her essay

Theorizing Adaptations/Adapting Theories (Elliot, 2013) presents a discerning contribution to the field and this thesis. One of her significant assessments is that “Personal preferences, snap judgments, isolated instances, and random impressions ... characterize most of the writing in the field.” (Elliot, 2013, p. 21). This matter that she discusses carries an extensive history in which 1950s scholarship critiqued “bad adaptation scholarship” for the stagnant position the field was in, and the perspective shifted in the 1970s when academics became critical of adaptations for “maintaining elitist hierarchies.” (Elliot, 2013, p. 20) She greatly critiques the tendency of scholars to engage in one-sided debates. The one-sided debates produced repetitive arguments and theories that eventually led to a lack of innovation. Similarly, the strong tendency to define or presume adaptation studies as primarily (or even exclusively) a question of literature-to-film transitions is a roadblock against a full consideration of self-adaptation. She points out that “Sarah Cardwell astutely perceives that using adaptations to fight theoretical battles has hampered their theorization: ‘Adaptations are rarely studied for themselves – rarely is interpretation valued as much as theorizing; broader theoretical issues take precedence.’” (Elliot, 2013, p. 22) The idea both Elliot and Cardwell challenge, which is the idea that adaptations are not studies for what they are, that they are studied more for what they are not, is also heightened with the instance on the expectation of fidelity. For Elliot specifically, it is the “bane” of adaptation studies. Fidelity tends to be a significant topic in adaptation studies and holds a critical place in the discourse of self-adaptations, not because it is a requirement in the practice but more so that fidelity is not the initial consideration of discerning good self-adaptations from bad self-adaptations, if a self-adaptation could be assessed as being “bad” in the first

place. The question is much larger in self-adaptations. It becomes counterintuitive that can one can truly be unfaithful to themselves and their own works? Self-adaptation practices show that the answer is no. A unique element of self-adaptation is having the self, the creator of the hypotext being the, normally, more prominent creative figure who performs the adaptation. In that sense, the authority, although it can often be shared, falls to the creator of the hypotext meaning that the decisions made in regards to the structure and creative choices belong to them. From this perspective, the deliberate choice made by the adaptor is no different than any other choice the creator of the hypotext could make because simply put, they are the same person. Elliot points out that fidelity has been challenged greatly and gives the example of George Bluestone. She argues,

He advocates a shift ‘from elucidating a fixed and unchanging reality to arresting a transient one’, opposing ‘familiar polarities’ and challenging ‘obsolete ideals and false ideologies’⁸² – all attitudes and ideas that resonate with the theoretical turn. He does not advocate fidelity, as so many critics have argued erroneously, but stridently attacks the view that ‘the novel is a norm and the film deviates at its peril.’ (Elliot, 2013, p. 29)

The idea of the “norm” that both Bluestone and Elliot question is also one of the manners in which self-adaptation is theorized. Self-adaptation is a field of study directly linked to adaptation studies and the available discourse. However, as Elliot criticizes too, the available theories take the norm of literature to film as the basis and work upon it to theorize adaptation. This norm ignores two essential perspectives. Firstly, it overlooks adaptations many multimedia examples of adaptation. Secondly, it limits the way adaptations can be used. One of the critical functions of self-adaptations is the interpretive element, where loyalty to the original text takes a backseat to creating

culturally/socially relevant works. Following a norm limits the ability to rework foundational sources. Self-adaptation offers an innovative practice because certainly, it has its own markers but it does not have a strict “norm”. Without the limiting factor of attempting to fit into or at least follow a norm, self-adaptation presents as a flexible and relatively free practice for artists.

Elliot also discusses theorists such as Brian McFarlane and Linda Hutcheon and aims to highlight that inclusive and detailed works such as theirs encompass texts, contexts, adapters, audiences, medium specificity, and cultural diversity when theorizing adaptation. (Elliot, 2013, p, 30) This is the essence of the theorization of self-adaptation. In order to consider a work of self-adaptation, each element needs to be assessed in regards to the creative practice it represents, the chosen medium, the star as text and image, and the reworked context reflected culturally and socially. The importance does not solely lie in fidelity, although it is essential to make connections, but it depends on a well-rounded reading of each layer. Elliot adds

If adaptations have taught us how to cross boundaries, they can equally reveal boundaries that we have refused to cross and hierarchical binarisms we have failed to deconstruct. One under-constructed hierarchical binarism in humanities academia affecting everyone and, to my mind, seriously inhibiting the theorization of adaptations is the ancient one between soul and body, mind and matter, abstraction and concretism, philosophy, and empiricism (etc.), which deems the former superior to and more valuable than the latter. (Elliot, 2013, p, 34)

While this review will return to Elliot, it is also critical to understand what she is arguing concerning other theorists and theories. A significant example that connects directly to the theorization of self-adaptation, as well as Elliot's points, is Julie Sanders’

assessment of what adaptation is, more so what it should be. In her book *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Sanders, 2005), Sanders breaks down the nuanced nature of adaptation. Adaptation in her theory is intertextual, and the connection of texts and cultural traditions is essential in the light of postmodernism and postmodern theories. (Sanders, 2005, p. 17) A critical term she uses is “open structuralism.” As she puts it,

(...) adaptation studies often favor a kind of ‘open structuralism’ along the lines proposed by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsests* (1997: ix), readings which are invested not in proving a text’s closure to alternatives, but in celebrating its ongoing interaction with other texts and artistic productions. (Sanders, 2005, p. 18)

The idea is that adaptations have different aims and intentions. As Elliot also suggests, not all adaptations intend to produce a faithful creation of a literary work. Adaptation should be seen as the ongoing and dynamic relationships between different works rather than attempting to establish a definitive interpretation of a particular text. Sanders points out that repetition and the constant reworking in different cultural settings is the creative core of adaptation. This theory is directly applicable to self-adaptation. Unlike the more traditional idea of an adaptation, where one meets to create a work from another author, self-adaptation is the practice and process by which a text is transformed into another medium by its own creator and the said creator has a highly significant role in the works creative authority. Sanders assesses the importance of interplay and points out that adaptation depends on it because, for her, in adaptation as well as self-adaptation, “There is a case to be made that in some instances the process of adaptation starts to move away from simple proximation towards something more culturally loaded.” (Sanders, 2005, p. 19)

Lastly, but most critically, the most prominent theory Sanders argues, and one that all of the case studies in this thesis support, is that adaptations are a way of prolonging pleasure. The first element is that rather than focusing on fidelity and a hierarchical structure for the types of texts, the focus should remain more dominantly on “updating.” As stated above, adaptations carry a great deal of cultural properties, and Sanders argues that the ability to change and rework based on the dominant cultural understandings is how things can stay alive. (Sanders, 2005, p.19) She also points out

In a very suggestive account of film’s impact upon our experience of canonical literature, John Ellis argues that adaptation enables a prolonging or extension of pleasure connected to memory: ‘Adaptation into another medium becomes a means of prolonging the pleasure of the original presentation, and repeating the production of a memory’ (1982: 4–5). (Sanders, 2005, p.24)

The thesis has already mentioned the concept of the “expiration date.” The idea and theory behind it is that by accepting that adaptation are not stagnant works that are chained to the source material but dynamic texts that are open to reformulation. The meaning of the works can be expanded and can reach a wider spectator with its evolution based on time and culture. When we consider the star as part of the adapted text in self-adaptation, we can strongly point out that self-adaptation also extends the star's expiration towards some farther-flung future date. David Byrne is arguably “updated” again in terms of star image due to his adaptations.

It is also important to consider the works of Thomas Leitch. Although Leitch’s theorizations and study of film and literature do not directly apply to self-adaptation like Elliot and Sanders, there are elements to consider. In both his book *Film Adaptation and*

Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ (Leitch, 2007) and his famous essay *Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory* (Leitch, 2003), Leitch draws upon similar ideas. One big idea he discusses most in his book is that the mistake of valuing the text over the adaptation due to fidelity is made. However, for him, all texts and hence adaptations are intertexts. (Leitch, 2007, p.3) He does give a level of credit to fidelity, suggesting that “Fidelity makes sense as a criterion of value only when we can be certain that the model is more valuable than the copy.” (Leitch, 2007, p.6)

From this perspective, self-adaptation becomes far removed from the traditional understanding of fidelity as suggesting that there is a hierarchy between the works created by the same author and star is a challenge because they all should be considered from the point of their creative and cultural meanings as opposed to their faithfulness. What happens when the same person creates the model and copy? Like Sanders, Leitch argues that adaptation demonstrates the need to rewrite the originals when creating a film adaptation. (Leitch, 2007, p.13) However, self-adaptation allows the freedom to rewrite thematic continuities for all media and make the film text an original text that can be adapted for a different medium, at any point in ones future life. Leitch’s focus on film adaptation becomes limiting. An interesting issue Leitch challenges and one that self-adaptation can remedy is the idea that the book, the original, is always better at being itself. He suggests that this is an unfair manner to assess due to the point that the film adaptation does not aim to be better than the source text, nor does it claim to be the same as the mentioned self. Source texts must be rewritten in the form and context of the adaptation in order to make sense. With self-adaptation, the consistent use of the self

means that the criteria for assessing based on who is better at reflecting the self is not a significant concern.

Once again, going back to the matter of fidelity, Leitch argues that instead of asking why some adaptations are not faithful to their sources, we should instead be asking why adaptations strive to make faithful works in the first place. He advocates for the perception that changes in adaptation studies are natural and that changes in film adaptation depend on the involvement of directors, producers, and a changing audience. (Leitch, 2007, p.134) Fidelity generally gets assessed as an element of adaptation to appease the audience of the original text source, and according to Leitch, the promise of fidelity creates hype. This is an interesting theory by Leitch, one that has not been extensively discussed by others; however, the question is also critical in theorizing self-adaptation. Suppose the idea of fidelity and its correlation with interest lies in the promise of consuming something familiar, one related to memory. In that case. In that case, self-adaptation can present this too, as the familiar and faithful aspect of the adaptation is the star. The consistent adaptation of the star image and star text is where fidelity and, more so, the interest formed within the target audience can be assessed in self-adaptation.

To continue with Leitch's essay, he once again asserts that adaptation theory and studies have remained tangential to film studies due to the misconceptions surrounding the work as well as the lack of theoretical rigor. (Leitch, 2003, p. 149) On a similar page to Elliot, Leitch argues that a general theoretical account of adaptation studies is lacking

because adaptation theory is built upon twelve fallacies. While the entirety of the twelve fallacies Leitch studies is not essential for the scope of this study, some generalized ideas apply to self-adaptation. One big argument Leitch presents is that there are general and damaging misconceptions regarding the type of texts and media that get adapted. For instance, the third fallacy he considers challenges the assumption that literary texts are verbal and films are visual. He argues that films have a solid audiovisual element and that film has the technological means to incorporate more than visuals. (Leitch, 2003, p, 153) He challenges the older notion that novels are inherently superior to films, that novels create more complex characters, and that source texts are more original than the adaptation. When we take all of Leitch's fallacies or, more so, criticism, it becomes evident that the theorization of adaptation around these “misconceptions” hinders theorizing or even considering self-adaptation. Since self-adaptation is incredibly dynamic and incorporates all forms of media and all forms of original text, as shown with the case studies, it is thus incorrect to consistently theorize adaptation based on the same stagnant ideas. Precisely, there is the suggestion that adaptations are not as original. (Leitch, 2003, p. 165) In self-adaptation, originality already lies within the choice of a new medium. The primary texts get an original application to another medium. In both works, Leitch underlines what we should not consider when considering adaptations. His theory is that the older discourse of favoring literary text over media and a significant concern for fidelity prevents the progression of the field and additionally hinders self-adaptation potential validity in the field.

Other scholars have not only continued the trend of breaking down the limitations of adaptation studies but have also made more vigorous engagements to present new models of understanding and studying it. While Linda Hutcheon is a crucial name in the field of adaptation with her books, specifically, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Hutcheon, 2006), one of her essays, written alongside biologist Gary R. Bortolotti, “On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and "Success": Biologically” (Bortolotti & Hutcheon, 2007) challenge the manners in which success is assessed in adaptation. Firstly, they consider adaptation in the context of narrative and culture. They create an analogy between adaptation and biological adaptation by applying the term “replication” to create a new model for studying adaptation theory. (Bortolotti & Hutcheon, 2007, p. 446) They argue, “Replicators compete for limited space, time, and attention in a culture. "Success" in this context means "thriving.” (Bortolotti & Hutcheon, 2007, p. 450) Like many scholars mentioned in this thesis, they also critique the fidelity discourse as a tool of assessment and point out that it is a reductive approach. In this sense, adaptation should be assessed based on their own merits. In return, the matter should not be condensed down to fidelity but to seeing the adaptation elements as narrative replicators. For them, adaptation is replication, not repetition. They advocate for a model that questions the reasons for specific adaptations being created in the first place, such as taking into consideration changing environments, both cultural and biological, and that the development of a new model would mean better seeing adaptations as adaptations rather than a vehicle to deliver already produced and used texts in the same manner.

Similarly, Gordon Slethaug, in *Adaptation Theory and Criticism: Postmodern Literature and Cinema in the USA* (2014), advocates for a change in how adaptations are seen in postmodernism. He points out that modernism tends to have solid traditional understandings that limit perceptions of adaptations. (Slethaug, 2014, p.16)

Adaptations, especially film adaptations, were seen as challenging the integrity of these traditions. The stance was that adaptation works tended to reduce “complex” works of literature to fit the medium's constraints. As the adaptor, the originator of the works often uses one work in a different medium to make additions to and complete some elements of the original source. For instance, Byrne directly applies his original source materials of the songs in *Speaking in Tongues* (Byrne, 1983) to *American Utopia* (Byrne, 2020) while adapting to fit social circumstances and adding to the original to heighten its meaning. Slethaug, thus, argues that

Once a text—literary or cultural—has been adapted, the adaptation and originating source/s enter into a complex relationship in which the original cannot be thought to have all the “presence” and value and the adaptation cannot be thought to be the reduced or impoverished text but one that has supplementary features that go beyond the original, forcing the viewer to see the surplus value at work in the new text and to rethink the original in terms of this renewal. (Slethaug, 2014, p.28)

Additionally, in postmodernism, scholars engage with postmodernism to understand the intertextuality of adaptations. Like Hutcheon, Slethaug advocates for adaptations to be seen as necessary and for the works to have repetitions with key variations to remain adaptations. He argues that traditional paradigms should be challenged by embracing a “de-hierarchy” impulse when considering adaptations. This would not only allow adaptations to rid themselves of the constant assessment based on fidelity but also open up valid recognitions for film auteurs to not be simply labeled “adaptors” as they

manage to transcend the limitations of the field through creative discourse. (Slethaug, 2014, p.19)

Before another concept and text is introduced, a subtle look into the matter of postmodernism which is brought up by both Slethaug and Sanders should be addressed. In Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), he presents a detailed analysis of postmodern culture and its relationship to the economic and social conditions of late capitalism. Jameson (1989) delves into postmodernism as a cultural dominant where it is the predominant cultural form that corresponds to the current stage of economic development. While he goes into even more detail regarding the economic implications of postmodernism and capitalism, the element which concerns most self-adaptation is the idea of pastiche. Jameson describes postmodern art and culture as relying heavily on pastiche, which he distinguishes from parody. Unlike parody, which seeks to imitate, pastiche is a neutral practice of mimicry and imitation devoid of any satirical impulse. This reflects a cultural shift where historical styles and references are recycled in a manner that lacks critical engagement. Pastiche from this regard becomes an intertextual practice. Postmodern works frequently employ pastiche and intertextuality, blending styles, genres, and references without a singular. Self-adaptation, definition, reworks previous materials or media formats, blending different sources and influences. There is a crossover with the two. A postmodern reading of self-adaptation thus becomes possible through this idea of pastiche. Certainly, the works studied in this thesis are not pre-postmodern and in a simpler sense, self-adaptation is not necessarily a function of

modernity. However, the relationship between self-adaptation and postmodern pastiche highlights how contemporary narratives and media formats engage in a dialogue with historical and cultural texts. By reworking and reinterpreting previous materials, self-adaptation not only embodies postmodern principles but also reflects the fluidity and multiplicity of identity and meaning in the postmodern era.

This perspective underscores the significance of intertextuality in postmodern self-adaptation, where the boundaries between original and adapted texts become porous. The interplay between pastiche and self-adaptation thus invites a reexamination of authorship, originality, and authenticity in postmodern culture. As narratives and media forms continuously evolve and intersect, the process of self-adaptation becomes a testament to the enduring relevance and transformative potential of past cultural artifacts within the contemporary landscape.

In conclusion, the convergence of self-adaptation and postmodern pastiche offers an insight into the dynamics of contemporary culture. By embracing intertextuality and reworking cultural texts, self-adaptation reveals the fluid and multifaceted nature of postmodern as well as how the practice depends on the contemporary to function further reinforcing the idea of process over time. This synthesis challenges traditional notions of authorship, reflecting the continuous dialogue between the past and present. Self-adaptation fits into this because of the practice nature of being “less conventional” than an adaptation where authorship is not only done by the same self but can also merge different collaborative elements, those that can be an element of the contemporary. As

narratives and media formats evolve, the practice of self-adaptation underscores the transformative potential of cultural artifacts, affirming their relevance in an ever-changing postmodern landscape. This ongoing interplay not only enriches our understanding of postmodernism but also highlights the enduring capacity for creative reinterpretation and renewal within cultural production.

While it was established that self-adaptation is an understudied subject, it would be incorrect to say that it has not been studied. One such case is Alex Symons' *Mel Brooks in the Cultural Industries: Survival and Prolonged Adaptation* (2012), where Symons makes a case for adaptation as a way of survival as well as hinting at self-adaptation practices. He argues that rethinking the abundance of adaptation would help better understand production trends that lead to creation. The abundance he mentions allows for the norm of adaptations as adapted movies can get adapted, and movies can be adapted into books, plays, or even Broadway shows. He says that adaptation has become a form of culture. (Symons, 2012, p. 21) He also argues that constant adaptations have been known to be grouped as capitalizing on presold content and that they aim to be commercially successful. Cultural industries rely for an adaptations ability to sell. (Symons, 2012, p. 22) He then gives essential examples of how, in the convergence culture, a single text gets adapted into different forms of media or even cultural devices to tell a single through multiple means. He refers to *The Matrix* (Wachowski, 1999), where one film was transformed and resold to audiences in different media adaptations, creating a multimedia experience. (Symons, 2012, p.24) He goes on to argue that adaptation is a survival strategy for artists, and to understand it

better, terminology needs to be re-examined. Using the career and works of Mel Brooks to show the historical process of four related terms. The first term is remediation, which means the practice of transferring content from one medium to another and, while doing so, adapting it based on the forms of other media. (Symons, 2012, p.29) Second is hybridization which is combining content from more than one source in order to create a new text. (Symons, 2012, p.31) Third is intermediality, which refers to the results of remediation and hybridization. This means that texts include elements especially formal elements from one medium while being created to circulate in a different medium. Last is synergy, which refers to texts cross-promoting each other to contribute to both audiences. (Symons, 2012, p.33) He breaks down all four of these terminologies to suggest that these new forms and norms of adaptation can be seen as prolonged adaptation, or of repeatedly adapting the same content. These prolonged adaptations are becoming common in cultural industries, and in the case of someone like Mel Brooks, who self-adapts, this work also prolongs their artistic career and images. This argument is similar to that of Sanders and is connected to self-adaptation.

The mention of *The Matrix* (Wachowski, 1999) and the idea of the multimedia experience which Symons (2012) touches upon creates a critical question about transmedia storytelling and more so how it differs from self-adaptation. Simply, transmedia storytelling and self-adaptation are not the same. While there are a few reasons for this, Henry Jenkins and his work *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) aids with giving a clear explanation. In the book Jenkins discusses the concept of transmedia storytelling and defines it as a process where

integral elements of a fiction get dispersed across multiple delivery forms for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. From his perspective, each medium makes a distinct contribution to the larger story being told. Transmedia storytelling is not just about extending a story across different media, but about creating a more engaging narrative. Jenkins (2006) goes into concepts such as expansion of storytelling, multiplicity and diversity, audience participation and the economic and creative implications of transmedia storytelling. In chapter 3 in particular, *Searching for the Origami Unicorn: The Matrix and Transmedia Storytelling* (2006, p. 93), Jenkins provides a detailed case study of transmedia storytelling through the example of *The Matrix* (Wachowski, 1999) franchise. Jenkins illustrates how the film series extends its narrative across various media platforms, including films, animatrixs, video games, and comics. Each component offers a piece of the larger story, making the film an extensive model of transmedia storytelling. Elements of world-building, intertextuality and interactivity, multiplicity and subjectivity and collective intelligence all combine to make models of transmedia storytelling. He shows how this approach creates a more immersive narrative experience by utilizing multiple media platforms to tell different parts of the story. This not only engages audiences more deeply but also leverages the strengths of different media to enhance the overall narrative. Jenkins demonstrates the potential of transmedia storytelling to redefine narrative structures and audience engagement in the digital age.

While Jenkins, in great detail, highlights transmedia storytelling as a standalone practice, it also helps this study in showing how self-adaptation is different. Self-

adaptation gives the work and the creator independence (from the creator's other works) while transmedia storytelling requires more of an attachment to the origin source. To explain, self-adaptation goes beyond familiarity. The new works that arise from self-adaptation can stand alone. While in transmedia storytelling the work does not always make sense without the other media works, for example parts of a story may be told in a comic and other parts of it may be made into a feature film as is the case with many Marvel Cinematic Universe films, self-adaptations entail a de-coupling of media. For instance, *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986) makes perfect sense on its own and can be consumed as a singular work. Having background knowledge of Byrne as a musician and his other works certainly enrich the experience of consuming the film, not having this knowledge does not hinder it at all. Information regarding the works is not lost in other media. Not everyone knows the hypertext and in self-adaptations, they do not have to. The element of time plays a great role also because it makes the works consumable for other people. As mentioned, time goes on and the meaning in self-adaptations happen because of the changes that occur during the periods. This leads audiences and consumers to have works of self-adaptation that make sense to them without prior knowledge because they present a contemporary approach that is linked to something established without requiring any knowledge about the works that came previously. Certainly, adaptations can happen and later become transmedia for example a video game can become a film and later a movie franchise they rely on paratexts and different media to tell the whole story, where watching another installment of the film series would not make sense without consuming the other works produced. Overall, transmedia storytelling and self-adaptation are distinct in their approaches to narrative

and audience engagement. Transmedia storytelling relies on the interconnectedness of various media to create a unified experience, whereas self-adaptation allows for independent, standalone works that do not require prior knowledge of related media. This distinction highlights the flexibility and diverse methods of storytelling in the digital age, emphasizing the evolving nature of narrative structures and audience interactions.

2.5. Film Studies

The texts in which self-adaptation can be performed are extensive and that, unlike a more traditional understanding of adaptation taking place from literature to film, it offers a more flexible manner in which adaptation can be performed. However, it is crucial to consider that one of the most well-recognized commonalities that most examples of adaptations have, and one that is also present in the case studies of this thesis, is that film and cinematic adaptations are a choice of production in both fields. In addition to this, it is also important to note that neither this thesis nor self-adaption is explicitly concerned with film theory. Of course, the traditional film theorists and their influential ideas are a critical concern for any form of film study; however the scope of this thesis is more connected to theories and studies of how film and adaptation practices function together as well as how they can differ from the film adaptations created under the practice of self-adaptation.

Regardless of this separation from traditional film theories, some of the questions in relation to adaptation and self-adaptation remain. French film critic Andre Bazin, is

essential for understanding film adaptation as well as its application to self-adaptation. In *Andre Bazin on Adaptation: Cinema's Literary Imagination* (Bazin, 2022), Bazin presents his essay, *Cinema as Digest*. He argues that adaptations go beyond literature and that adaptation in cinema has been a common practice and ingrained in culture for a substantial time. (Bazin, 2022, p. 49) He argues that the issues taken with cinematic adaptations have already been resolved and defends it by pointing out that there is an innate value in the director's imagination. He views cinematic adaptations as equivalences to the original with the addition of styles. (Bazin, 2022, p. 50) For Bazin, fidelity is an illusion in cinema. Bazin goes on to defend cinematic adaptations, arguing that they must be seen as independent entities that reflect critical elements of the changing sociological landscapes. (Bazin 2022, p, 53) Lastly but most importantly, Bazin very exceptionally lays out the future of the cinematic adaptation. He points out that by allowing adaptations to be valid in the context of film and cinema, a single adaptation gains the potential to be reflected through more than one art form and more than one medium. The hierarchy risk is removed, and an extensive manner of expressing and consuming art and cinema is added. (Bazin, 2022, p. 54) What Bazin is essentially doing is categorization work. Adaptation as works in their own rights are acceptable according to Bazin but he emphasizes an importance towards respecting the hypotext. For a formalist such as Bazin, the importance is not about adaptations being faithful but whether or not they are legible as adaptation as their own category. His concerns are regarding medium specificity, similar to Kamilla Elliot. By suggesting that cinematic adaptations work to culminate into various works, Bazin is highlighting the intertextual nature of both cinematic adaptations and self-adaptations to a degree. While

Bazin's perspective on fidelity and adaptations being their own valid category is certainly relevant for self-adaptations, it is critical to note that self-adaptation steers clear of both fidelity and medium specificity because of its non-limiting nature.

In Deborah Cartmell's *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (Cartmell, 2012), Shelley Cobb considers essential questions of cultural perceptions of authorship, originality, ownership, and auteurship. While considering the ideas of Alfred Hitchcock, François Truffaut, Timothy Corrigan, and others, she considers the concept of "multiple authors." (Cobb, 2012, p. 106) She considers how, in the accepted cultural view, the author of the literary origin piece tends to be the author and the owner while the established director remains the adaptor. In addition, she points out that the matters of fidelity heighten this perception. However, when an auteur such as Hitchcock takes on adaptations, a shift can be seen in the cinematic perception of adaptations. (Cobb, 2012, p.110) When a film director can successfully adapt a literary work considered a "masterpiece," that means they are masters in their fields as auteurs and as auteurs who adapt. Cobb also considers the other side of adaptation films and the fidelity of the auteur to their traits. She argues, "Within an adaptation, the act or moment of unfaithfulness to one's auteur self is when the filmmaker's identification with the author of the adapted text supersedes the auteur's faithfulness to himself." (Cobb, 2012, p.112) This suggests that in an adaptation, when an adaptor's personal identification with the creator of the text becomes more important than staying true to their own artistic vision, it leads to a departure from their usual style or thematic concerns. It highlights a conflict between honoring the source material and maintaining one's own creative integrity. In

self-adaptation this does not play out in such a manner. It comes back to the question of fidelity a little bit in the sense that when the adaptor and the creator of the hypotext is the same, is the artistic vision or the impact of the source truly compromised? Self-adaptation would point to a no. Loyalty is promised to both the text and the auteur adaptor.

The assessment is that the priority becomes the vision of the original literary text author rather than the vision and well-recognized markers of the auteur filmmaker. In self-adaptations, both loyalties can exist at the same time. When the originator of the texts takes on the role of adapting and arguably establishes some altruistic traits through consistency, the visions of both the author, the originator, and the auteur and adaptor are recognized. For instance, Byrne, generally considered a musical auteur, adapts greatly from his original texts, music, and song lyrics into film work such as *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986), which significantly represent the traits and markers that make him an auteur in both senses. Like Sanders's assessment of adaptation prolonging the value of original works, Cobb points out that the texts creators who are no longer present to continue their work depend upon modern filmmakers to bring to life the valued aspects of their works. (Cobb, 2012, p.112)

Another perspective that has been studied but not to the extent of literature to film is the premise of music to film, one placing music as the primary source material. Ian Inglis, in *Music into Movies The Film of the Song* (Inglis, 2012), makes a case for the validity of music and songs to be considered in the manner of literary texts as from his

assessment, not only are there an abundance of examples that highlight it as a practice but also music and lyrics carry the tools to be made into adaptations. (Inglis, 2012, p.312) He assesses the way in which music and the musical star have become the adaptation. He points out that the foundation of this was casting the music stars, such as Frank Sinatra, Bing Cosby, and Elvis Presley, as the movie stars where they played themselves. This led to the transformation of music stars into character actors such as David Bowie, Cher, and Mick Jagger. He points out that though this is not the type of music-to-film adaptation he is talking about, this practice has made a strong case for music, in general, to be considered a legitimate source of adaptation.

There are a few trajectories to how music has gone from vinyl to celluloid. The initial step was the usage of song names as film titles. While these challenges the traditional understandings of adaptation, as the films generally only used the names, it set up the premise for music as an adaptable source. (Inglis, 2012, p. 314) Most critically, for this topic and self-adaptation, came the adaptation of existing albums into full-length films and plays. Inglis adds, “Concept albums are unified by a theme, which can be instrumental, compositional, narrative, or lyrical. In this form, the album changed from a collection of heterogeneous songs into a narrative work with a single theme, in which individual songs segue into one another.” (Inglis, 2012, p. 314) The examples of Byrne, specifically *Speaking in Tongues* (Byrne, 1983) and the album *American Utopia* (Byrne, 2018) are examples of this. While thematically *Speaking in Tongues* (Byrne, 1983) applies the musical themes and lyrics as storylines in *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986) and goes as far as to produce another concept album from this application and film,

True Stories (Byrne, 1986), *American Utopia* (Byrne, 2018) is mirrored in the Broadway show of *American Utopia* (Byrne, 2020) Inglis' assessment that musically driven key texts show similarities with literature to film adaptation is highly essential in regards to self-adaptation. The majority of the case studies in the thesis rely on non-literary forms of primary texts. Lastly, Inglis focuses on critical case studies (both studied in this thesis), such as the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* (Dunning, 1968) and *Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964), to apply these trajectories to real examples. Overall, Inglis advocates for studying and theorizing non-literary text sources as adaptable works, which is also essential for self-adaptation.

2.6. Performance Studies

Before the review for performance studies in relation to the scope of self-adaptation is done, a few clarifications are critical. While performance and performance based self-adaptation is a significant part of the practice, it is not mandatory for a work like this to be performative nor does it need to draw on performance. This happens to be the particular case of David Byrne where he performs self-adaptation in a way that encompasses all of its types but as chapter five will show, this is not a requirement. Nick Cave and Neil Young certainly have prominent examples of self-adaptation that do not carry a strong element of performance.

The interesting element of performance studies is that they are layered and sectioned into diverse groups that sometimes seem separate. Although not directly focused on cinematic, theatrical, or musical performance, Erving Goffman and *The Presentation of*

Self in Everyday Life (1956) is critical for self-adaptation. Goffman argues that social interactions are based on an exchange of information. People attempt to analyze the performer by culturally accepted patterns of speech, behavior, and movement. According to Goffman, people are “stage” performers, and the audience is influenced by this performance. Goffman breaks down these performances into different elements; however, he first establishes that people vary in the extent to how much their own performances take them in. He expresses his three main ideas as front, idealization and expressive control. The spectrum goes from complete sincerity to complete cynicism. Fluctuation between these two is common. (Goffman, 1956, p. 12) Goffman established the concept of the front. The front is the fixed and recurring elements of the performance such as props, costumes, and equipment that facilitate a performance. The personal front, on the other are, gestures, mannerisms, and physical appearance that often times match up with and reflect social status and expectation. (Goffman, 1956, p.15) A key argument Goffman makes is that performers tend to adopt fronts that are expected of their performer image. This is essential as in self-adaptation, the front adapted is based on the performance the star has already established in their works. The star develops the front expected by the audience, thus giving them a way to perform as “themselves.”

Goffman discusses the concept of idealization, where performers present an idealized image, confirming the audience's expectations of the performer. (1956, p.22) Each self-adaptive work can be seen as contributing to idealization in self-adaptation. The performances given, especially by Byrne, tend to maintain the image that was

established originally. Additionally, this level of consistency of performance and the presentation of the self in a recognizable form is one of the factors that makes or breaks self-adaptation performances.

Lastly, Goffman highlights the factor of expressive control. (Goffman, 1956, p.33) He argues that the continuation of particular gestures and cues upholds the performance and that audiences will discern what these all mean to assess the performance's quality and genuineness. For example, Byrne implementing the same dance moves from thirty years ago is an example of physical performance that gives him credibility under the scope of adaptation even though it is not a requirement. It shows the control the performer has over their performance.

Diana Taylor and her work *Performance* (Taylor, 2016) takes on various approaches to performance, from seeing the physicality of it to expressing it as an existential condition. She argues, “Performance moves between them as if and the is, between pretend and new constructions of the “real” (Taylor, 2016, p.6) She breaks down performance as a process that does not entirely have an endpoint, saying that,

It is also a thing done, an object or product or accomplishment. In this sense, performance might be experienced or evaluated at some different time. It might be collected by museums, or preserved in archives. Artists, too, may chose to perform in front of an archival image or video of their work to emphasize changes and continuity between then and now. (Taylor, 2016, p.9)

This perspective takes into consideration the duration element of self-adaptation and performance. Often, to assess the new work by a self-adaptor, references to past

performances need to be made to conceptualize the new. By treating performance as evaluable in different periods is an element of self-adaptation. For instance, to consider Byrne, Taylor established that,

(...) we can also think of performance as an ongoing repertoire of gestures and behaviors that get reenacted or reactivated again and again, often without us being aware of them. If we learn and communicate through performed, embodied practice, it's because the acts repeat themselves. We recognize a dance as a dance, even when the moves and rhythms change. In this sense, performance is about past, present, and future. (Taylor, 2016, p. 10)

Based on this, Taylor also highlights the importance of the audience and participants as tools for performing its meaning. The audiences' joint perceptions and evaluations of the performance are key. Another critical way Taylor shapes performance is by seeing it as a transfer of knowledge. She points out, "Performances operate as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated actions." (Taylor, 2016, p. 25) From this point, the performance of self-adaptation can be seen as carrying relative, cultural, and personal information that embodies meanings about the performer as well as the time of the original work and performance. Taylor asserts performance as a transmission realized through the means of the human body. (Taylor, 2016, p. 36)

Taylor goes on to assess the role of the spectator in the meaning of the performance. For example, "Each performance anticipates its ideal response." (Taylor, 2016, p.86) This then suggests that self-adaptation and its performances are self-aware. The adaptation process becomes more than an artistic attempt for relevance. However, it is a practice that reflects the continuation of the performative values a star and their works embody

and can be made to embody in different cultural and social circumstances. Hence Taylor's argument that the performance is not simply a matter of body and show becomes valid, and her assessment of “(...) the performance of “the body,” discursive performance, technological performance, political performance, aesthetic performance: these phenomena work together, interconnected to such a degree that it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand one without the other.” (Taylor, 2016, p.99) In this respect, the performance of Taylor Swift in her older concerts and music videos compared to her Eras Tour performances, as well as Byrne’s performance of the original Talking Heads songs compared with the Broadway reinterpretation, reflect these connections.

Taylor also talks about the durability of the concept of performance. Performances, in their nature, can be recontextualized, challenged, parodied, and re-performed to say something different, and there can be artistic and political interventions to them. (Taylor, 2016, p. 116) The performance, in the scope of self-adaptation, prolongs the performance, performer and the performance. Taylor also uses the term “performativity”. Referring to Judith Butler, who also studies performances in the social and gendered sense, as, is meeting an expectation. (Taylor, 2016, p. 123) Similar Goffman, when Byrne performs as Byrne, and more so when he performs in a work of self-adaptation, he is expected to perform elements of the pre-established self in order to meet the audience expectations of his performativity. Taylor’s approach to performance includes physicality as well as elements of time, culture, and society.

A more specific approach to performance is James Naremore's *Acting in Cinema* (Naremore, 1988). Naremore connects historical, theoretical, and critical elements to lay out the importance of screen acting. He argues that films are communicative models that depend on the meanings communicated by acting and performing. Bodies and expression through the performative use of the body are communication tools. (Naremore, 1988, p. 2) He argues that comedic and dramatic performances rely on different cues that result in different modes of acting. For example, by referencing *Kid Auto Races at Venice* (Lehrman, 1914), he distinguishes between the professional and purposeful forms of acting and the ones that appear as natural everyday ways of being. Acting and accident are the lines he draws. (Naremore, 1988, p. 14) He goes into further detail by suggesting that three discernible ways of being can happen in film: 1. Actors can play theatrical personages, 2. Public figures playing themselves and 3. People being documentary evidence. (Naremore, 1988, p. 15) This is a critical point because in self-adaptation, especially in cinematic works, acting is a crucial element of the work; however, the three modes mentioned above do not generally exist separately again due to the consistent reflection of the self. For instance, Nick Cave in *20,000 Days on Earth* (Forsyth & Pollard, 2014) represents a combination of all three elements. He plays an established character, the character of Nick Cave in the theatrical sense, he is himself, the public figure, and he also exists as a piece of documentary evidence.

Performances in self-adaptation often bridge together specific ways of performing and Naremore's traditional assessments fit contemporary examples. Naremore, asserts that performance and acting, in general, is not simply a one-sided work but a social

interaction with the world that combines theatrical acting, the image of the celebrity, and everyday life. (Naremore, 1988, p.18) Once again, Naremore makes a claim for the manner of performance seen in self-adaptation. Performance in self-adaptation is never simply acting but a combination of the real and the character. The most crucial argument Naremore makes in relation to acting and character is regarding “personation.” He argues that unplotted or unscripted elements can become a part of the performance and of acting. He argues that people like Madonna and Prince develop personas that have “narrative implications”. Even though this is not a requirement in becoming an actor, Naremore presents an argument for the persona carrying elements of performance. As established before, the line between the self, the image, the character and the persona can be tricky to separate in self-adaptation due to the reliance on the self; however, in regards to performances, accepting the persona as a real as well as theatrical element is key.

Lastly, in relation to self-adaptation, Naremore considers the importance of the audience. He argues that when consuming a movie and an acting performance, the relationship between the performer and the audience is closed. Movie performances can be invited to include the audience however, the performer will be unaware if the invite of participation will be taken. Naremore gives an example from the concert film *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984) and suggests that when David Byrne points the microphone at the spectator for a response, that is an act of inclusion that ultimately ends up unresolved as the action of the spectator is unknown to the performer. (Naremore, 1988, p. 26)

It has been mentioned that self-adaptation has a case-by-case nature. There are differences in the ways performances are exhibited and in the way they are received. Considering Naremore's assessment in the scope of sole film makes sense; however, when we consider self-adaptation as a prolonged performance, one that is reestablished in different forms and media over time in the sense that Taylor argues, does the argument still apply? Since the performances in self-adaptations can form familiar markers with its audience, there is potential for closed relationships to be more inclusive due to the manner of performance.

Another perspective on performance is a return Marshall who makes significant arguments regarding the star. He takes the popular music star and music performance and conceptualizes these in a way applicable to the self-adaptation performance. He argues that new advances in popular music directly correlate with music performance. Marshall asserts that the song performer and the song performances are pivotal to the promotion and the spread of the song and music itself. Creating a song and any piece of music is inseparable from its performance because, ultimately, the musical performance gives way to the song being communicated and the star image of the musical performer being articulated. (Marshall, 1997, p. 151) Marshall interestingly points out that while the recording of the actual music performance can be considered the "authentic" representation, the concert performance is a "faithful reproduction". This is a unique idea to consider because while Marshall suggests that the performative element of the concert can highlight the inaccuracies of a performer compared to record to

performance, from some cases of self-adaptation, the stage performance can offer a more genuine example. For instance, there is a difference between watching the live version of a concert and watching a concert film that was recorded live, such as *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984) and *Taylor Swift: Eras Tour* (Wrench, 2023). Watching a live concert provides the immediacy of experiencing the performance in real time, with the spontaneity of the artists' interactions. These elements make up the “work” and present as a one-time consumption of that artists work. On the other hand, watching a concert film offers multiple camera angles, close-ups, and editing, providing a different perspective and potentially enhancing the visual and auditory experience. Additionally, when considered from the practice of self-adaptation, the concert film presents as another media form that can be utilized to re-imagine and re-utilize previous works. Marshall, like Taylor, delves into the physicality of music performance by establishing that there are popular music performance codes.

Stage movements, the acrobatics and the use of props all become codes of sorts. While in rock music, the guitar or Elvis Presley-like dancing are codes, for country music, cowboy hats and a country setting can be seen as such. (Marshall, 1997, p. 158) This is similar to the self-adaptation music performance. In the case of Byrne, his unique dances, his big suit, and use of props are the codes for his musical performance. However, it is important to note that self-adaptation and codes for music performance in self-adaptation seem to be more personalized compared to the general codes of music performance. While the codes mentioned for Byrne are most certainly codes that are consistent, they are codes for him. Marshall also argues that the importance of the

audience is more critical when considering the musical performance. Especially in live performances, the audience is directly addressed through delivery. While in Naremore's assessment, the screen performance offered a closed relationship, the live music performance should be given to the spectator as a personal sentiment expressed through voice and action. (Marshall, 1997, p. 158)

Marshall also addresses how musical performances can be enhanced by breaking the aforementioned codes. Transforming codes into style is how the musical performer and the performance can indicate a difference. The codes Byrne establishes for himself become his style, which consistently reoccurs in his self-adaptations as a means of artistic continuity and solidarity toward a loyal audience. This case is similar to Taylor Swift and Lady Gaga and the way they develop new styles over time without losing the essence of "the original." (Marshall, 1997, p. 162)

Lastly, a direct account of experience and knowledge of performance comes from David Byrne in his book *How Music Works* (Byrne, 2012). Byrne assesses the concept of performance and audience through his real-life experiences as a musician and performer. Byrne asserts that regarding music, having it performed is a key factor in shaping its final form. From this regard, Byrne highlights that performance is a way of communicating the art, a manner of speaking another language and entering the conversation of art, music, and performance. (Byrne, 2012, p. 32) He also acknowledges the factor of persona in performance. Through the performative persona, one can mix different elements, usually not directly present in the music or the recorded

work, and add a level of sincerity. He additionally argues that pre-existing performative models can sometimes create artistic invalidity due to the point of being “taken.”

(Byrne, 2012, p. 39) Byrne is not making a case for originality but more theorizing performance as a means artists should employ to express their true artistic forms freely.

One key consideration Byrne has is the use of signatures in performance. These differ from markers and codes in the sense that signatures, in Byrnes's usage, are that of fashion and their cultural implications. He argues that these signatures create possibilities for statements in performance. (Byrne, 2012, p. 42) He also asserts that contemporary performances that appeal to a wide range of audiences can reflect traditional forms of theatre. Performances are “presentational” and allow for eccentricities and freedom of expression. The thesis will return to Byrne and his reflection on performance; however, his theory of performance is directly linked to transparency and applies to self-adaptation cases.

2.7. Music Video Studies

As mentioned previously, a crucial audiovisual medium for self-adaptation is the music video. This does not necessarily equate to the notion that music videos must be included to perform self-adaptation, but as the thesis has shown, many examples stem from it. It is a foundational example of the different media used in this practice. For the purpose of fully expressing the specific formulas that significantly contribute to not only music videos in general but to the music videos that the thesis will do a close reading of, it is pivotal to extensively lay out the theory established in *Experiencing Music Video*:

Aesthetics and Cultural Context (Vernallis, 2004). Vernallis comprehensively dissects music videos to show how every single element, from lyrics to editing, space, and texture, creates the whole we consume. As stated previously, self-adaptation lacks a substantial ground of direct literature but Vernallis' establishment of the structure of the music video is applicable to the case studies this thesis will go over but applies to an extensive assemblage of singular examples of artists who perform self-adaptation.

While the other review of the fields in this literature review contains a multitude of scholars and field experts, this review of the music video will focus on only Vernallis and her argument regarding the non-narrative. The reason for this is not due to a lack of music video scholars. Important names such as Diane Railton, Paul Watson, Will Straw, David Shumway, and Melissa Click all have substantial bodies of work that inspect the functions of the music video and how these videos shed light on cultural, social, and political dimensions. Will Straw, in particular, is an influential and critical figure in understanding the music video as a cultural exchange, and arguing that music videos can transcend boundaries, facilitating the spread of musical styles, fashion trends, and cultural practices across different regions. He also argues that music videos can shape cultural identities and how music videos can construct images of race, gender, sex and other cultural identities. These are all elements that can fall under the scope of self-adaptation. However, the reason that Straw and other theories are not going to be examined in the review is because to establishing a base theory of self-adaptation and explore its markers with practical examples, these important details take a backseat. For example, Straw, while being a prominent scholar in understanding the music video,

focuses more on the medium rather than the artists and the medium together. While he is very concern with the cultural representations through music video, he is less so with the music video's ability and structure that is for self-representation. This is a factor that cannot be taken out of the discussion of self-adaptation as the music video presents a medium which shows the transfer of texts across media. It is more critical to see what element of the music video is important for analyzing the examples of self-adaptation in this thesis.

In its most crucial form, the quality of the music videos she labels "non-narratives" (Vernallis, 2004, p.4) is the foundation of the field. The non-narrative separates the music video's formulation from traditional understandings of creating a story, most commonly the ones in full-length films. There is variety from video to video; however, the principal idea is that the narrative is not a visual concern but a verbal and auditory one, meaning that lyrics paired with music are the narrative of focus. (Vernallis, 2004, p. 7) While there is the point that this allows a degree of flexibility in the sense that creative liberties that remove themselves from the frame of traditional filmmaking can be taken (to be discussed in the Editing chapter), it also creates a space for the audience to immerse themselves in the video and lyrics to piece together the "narrative."

Vernallis establishes the reason for the non-narrative style of music videos as:

Music videos avoid Aristotelian narratives and fully drawn stories for several reasons: (1) the genre's multimedia nature, (2) the lack of appropriateness and applicability of narrative film devices, and (3) the necessity of foregrounding the song's form (in order to sell the song). (Vernallis, 2004, p. 13)

There is a clear suggestion of a story, of a narrative, yet this is not done in the manner of creating a plot but more so creating visual segments that the viewer connects with the lyrics and the identity of the star, the focal point, in order to create the story. From this perspective, music videos become fragments of the song through their lack of concrete narrative.

Along with the idea of non-narratives comes what can be classified as non-characters. In the music video the idea is that in classical narrative stories, the characters become focal points not only visually but also in terms of communicating the narrative is dismantled. While in film, the star portrays a character and makes the qualities of the character the focal point, the music video “character” is simply the star, the musician, and predominantly presents the qualities of their star and artist image. Vernallis (2004) suggests that “To understand the elusive qualities of a character in a music video is to accept a music video as a short, almost mute form whose purpose is to showcase the star, highlight the lyrics, and underscore the music.” (p.16). This is a critical element in not only music video theory but self-adaptation studies as well. To clarify, there are many examples of self-adaptation in which this is critical however, like the idea of performance, it is not mandatory. For example, Marjane Satrapi’s *Poulet aux Prunes* (2011) is a work of self-adaptation as not only did she write the comic book which the movie is based on, she is also credited as the director of the film along with Vincent Paronnaud. In this case, there is no direct connection to Satrapi herself, only with representatives that she draws on the page or for the screen. As the thesis will show in the presented case studies, there is a direct connection with the “star” and them

representing their own artistic styles and general themes they create. In a sense, this idea of accepting the music video as a short and a focus on the “self-adaptor,” the star, presents music videos as part of their narrative. For instance, David Byrne, by expanding his work to different media such as film, gives himself the ability to continue what he is saying in smaller forms, such as his music videos. He expands the narrative and themes he creates in *Speaking in Tongues* (Byrne, 1983) to the music videos for the songs on the album and finishes the non-narrative stories he creates in them by reworking them into his feature-length film *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986). From the consideration of both these respects, having the non-narrative and the “non-characters” or the non-figures, a music video becomes more than an artistic work but a creative challenge for the maker and the viewer. Trying to read them is as critical as trying to make them, as the music video is an intersection of the visual and the auditory and presents a non-linear story. Not only is music video a sensory experience but also a communicative tool that conveys the story of the lyrics and the music through fragments of visual elements that are unique to that particular song and artist. (Vernallis, 2004, p. 25-26)

Another theory of the music video essential to understanding it comes from editing, space, and time. Vernallis argues that it is important to consider the editing of music videos separate from the editing of cinematic films, as the main focus of editing in music videos is expressing the relationship between song and image. For example, continuity is much less a concern in music videos. Disjunctive editing is favored due to the fact that it allows the images to follow the changes in the song. (Vernallis, 2004, p.

28) Editing, then, directly influences the way meaning is created in a music video. Music videos present discontinuous images that unfold a sense of time unpredictably and reveal spaces slowly. Unlike a Hollywood film, music videos rely on discontinuity to connect to the lyrics as well as for the audience to connect the images for themselves. (Vernallis, 2004, p. 38) For example, she argues, “In music video, adjacent shots often relate but loosely; when separated by dramatic edits, each image will seem enclosed within its own semantic realm. Even paired shots of figures often withhold something.” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 41) meaning that music video purposefully leaves room for interpretations by not directly revealing information. The sense of separation within the shots creates an engagement where meanings have to be derived with a combination of lyrics, music, editing, and the video as a whole.

Vernallis goes into great detail regarding the technical elements of the music video, such as considering cinematic techniques like close-ups, but many of these are tangential to this initial study of self-adaptation. What this review of the music video from Vernallis is trying to establish is that music videos, in the scope of self-adaptation have a different role from that of the film or other filmed media because of their particular limitations as well as unique structure that stems from the non-narrative (generally). The interesting question which the consideration of the music video raises and this thesis attempts to answer is that “Can music videos be self-adaptations?” The answer is double sided and can be yes in the case of Byrne but turns into another matter when someone like Jim Jarmusch is considered. When he filmed the Talking Heads music video for *The Lady Don't Mind* (Jarmusch, 1985) was this a non-narrative which

stemmed from Jarmusch's own attempt to self-adapt or was it a work which reflected the Talking Head's artistic style? Chapter three and five will delve into this question but ultimately need Vernallis' argument of the non-narrative to be answered.



CHAPTER III

PREDECESSORS

3.1. Entertainment

Entertainment and to a different degree, information play important roles in self-adaptation. Entertainment provides a good basis for engagement. Meanwhile, information provides substance and knowledge for informed decision-making. Balancing both in self-adaptation and an artist's approach can impact the overall work. Separate from the theories of self-adaptation and the study of it as a practice, the matter of entertainment is important and does not have clear-cut borders because it is tricky to find and further express the distinctions. However, when one studies and questions works of self-adaptation, entertainment can provide a useful spectrum that can often combine both to highlight a cross-section. There are a few initial differences when the individual definitions of entertainment and information are considered. While information poses the idea that the audience or the consumer is consuming something "knowledge-based," one that may provide knowledge and facts and that can contain opinions, data, or rather

literally something informative to educate/inform an audience, entertainment includes a broader range of elements where the level of escapism becomes a consideration, and the role of entertainment in different forms of media is assessed. While information is important and can have a vital role in adaptations and self-adaptation, especially if the medium being considered is a documentary, it is currently larger than the scope of this thesis and will not be covered in detail.

In Richard Dyer's book *Only Entertainment* (Dyer, 2002), he presents *Entertainment and Utopia* originally written as an essay in 1977. While he aims to highlight a core of what entertainment means and its relation to escapism and the idea of utopia. Entertainment is in the business of creating forms not things, individual texts as Dyer asserts. Self-adaptation frames the self as the critical entertainment form, in multiple and in a sense limitless iteration regardless of the medium. In the context of self-adaptation, the self is the core form of entertainment. Each artist embodies their unique identity more so persona, experiences, and potential for growth, akin to a constantly evolving story or performance. This self, with its infinite possibilities and variations, serves as the central focus of entertainment regardless of the medium used to convey it. He argues that musicals are a vital example of seeing entertainment as entertainment and separating it from concerns such as economics and politics. (Dyer, 2002, p.19) Entertainment in this regard is defined by the entertainers yes, but to differing degrees, it is defined by perception. To clarify here, not only is the meaning of entertainment not this simple, it is also not the only type of entertainment Dyer mentions. Firstly, Dyer mentions nighttime TV broadcasts as entertainment even though their mechanism is on the informative side.

Secondly, especially keeping in mind the possibility of seemingly informative vehicles being considered entertainment, the possibility of the two being blurred does have an impact on their individual functions. When we apply this to the markers of self-adaptation, it can be argued that the practice of self-adaptation revolves around the self-adaptor, the “star.” In the case of Byrne, he is placed as the figure of authority regarding the context of the works and the delivery of the entertainment elements. This happens as mentioned because of the quality of the work but because to a significant degree, the self-delivers the information. Perhaps not information in the sense of facts but in the sense that the self-delivers what needs to be known about the practice in play and the what needs to be known is supported by the artist’s work, the end result.

While continuing his argument, Dyer points out entertainment's cultural and historical specificity and argues that when we consider entertainment, the conscious aim of providing pleasure is critical. (Dyer, 2002, p.19) Naturally, there is a tendency for specific social groups to define a particular mode of entertainment. In the case of the musical, as Dyer discusses, marginalized communities, women, Blacks and other groups such as the LGBTQ+ (Dyer, 2002, p.20) and their engagement are defining factors. They represent particular cultural, social, economic, and political struggles and turn genre especially, music into a form of escapism. In return, musicals often engage in a nuanced relationship with these struggles, and rather than producing solutions, they create a utopia through representational and non-representational signs.

This code uses both representational and, importantly, non-representational signs. There is a tendency to concentrate on the former, and clearly it would be wrong to overlook them stars are nicer than we are, characters more straightforward than people we know, situations more soluble than those we

encounter. All this we recognize through representational signs. However, we also recognize qualities in non-representational signs, colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, and camerawork, although we are much less used to talking about them. The nature of non-representational signs is not, however, so different from that of representational. Both are, in Peirce's terminology, largely iconic; but whereas the relationship between signifier and signified in a representational icon is one of resemblance between their appearance, their look, the relationship in the case of the non-representational icon is one of resemblance at the level of basic structuration. (Dyer, 2002, p.20-21)

The passage above breaks down the relationship between Dyer's terms

“representational” and “non-representational.” Representational signs embody real-life things and concepts we are familiar with in real life, while non-representational signs are more responsible for conveying meaning and feeling. These two points have an iconic relationship where there is a physical resemblance between the signifier (the sign) and the signified (what the sign represents). In semiotics, signs can have different types of relationships with what they represent, and one of these types is the iconic relationship. The signs' structures have to do with their genre as well. Certainly, as musicals and nighttime TV broadcasts are different types of entertainment, different genres expect different structures. The cues come together like representational materials such as performing. Calling self-adaptation, its own genre or would not be apt as there needs to be more study and development in the practice however, a similar idea is in play. The self-adapting artists develop their practice of self-adaptation based on what cues make sense and create a representation and non-representational work of entertainment with the addition of using themselves as the delivery tool of information.

We can consider David Byrne's *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020) from this perspective.

The work is a mix of genres such as musical, concert film and documentary, a mix of

entertainment. Byrne and Lee in a collaborative effort take cues from all of these genres and create representational and non-representational signs. Representational signs are Byrne and the non-representational here are conveyed rather literally through movement, color and the performance Byrne and his band give with their emotionally charged performances, almost like setting up the emotional texture of the work. The element of documentary in a more abstract sense not only lies with the way the film is filmed but with the idea of information. This brings us back to the mix of information and entertainment and them crossing in self-adaptations. Here, Byrne is combined with the representational and non-representational elements and ultimately, the practice of self-adaptation lends itself for this to be possible because of the focus on the self.

When we consider Dyer's exploration of entertainment and its components of representation and non-representation, it becomes clear that the interplay between these elements extends beyond categorization within self-adaptation. As entertainment evolves in response to societal dynamics and technological advancements, the mix of information and escapism becomes more pronounced. The "star" role in self-adaptation takes on new meaning in this context. Beyond defining the entertainment elements, these figures influence the informational content embedded within adaptations. Their involvement attracts audiences and lends meaning to the messages conveyed.

3.2. Adaptations and Reliance on Textuality

There is a simple rule when it comes to self-adaptation. It is not even a rule but a expectation when considering works that can fall under any category of adaptation. It is

the point that there must be something to be adapted in order to recognize a work as adaptation. There needs to be a set and established work or even a body of works from which clear connections arise to consider something as self-adaptation. As studied in the literature review, Thomas Leitch relies on this particular idea in order to develop his arguments, but in addition to this, Linda Hutcheon, in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), argues that all adaptations are informed by their source materials and that adaptation cannot exist in isolation from their source materials. Additionally, Robert Stam and Robert Burgoyne both argue that there is a complex relationship between the adaptation and the source material and that, ultimately, this engagement is pivotal to the process of adaptation.

Not only is textuality critical in order to produce other texts, but it is also one of the cores of the practice of self-adaptation as it emphasizes the relationship between dual presence and chronology. When there is a text, one that goes through the process of self-adaptation, there is a dual function. Not only is it an individual work that can establish the style, themes, and recognizable markers of a particular artist, but it also becomes the basis for the possibility of performing self-adaption. This is an establishing requirement for the practice and is evident in all of the case studies present in this thesis.

For Byrne, Cave, and Young, the reliance on textuality starts with albums and their music, it acts as the establishing text and in these particular cases, the following texts are all feature length film. This means that they depend on an auditory medium where

they develop a few key factors as artists. Firstly, they are developing their styles and themes, ones that become what they are known for. Secondly, they develop their artistic image and persona, which are often in line with the themes they focus on as musicians. Lastly, and most likely unintentionally, they are paving the way for future adaptation and self-adaptations to be possible with the development of these markers. In the case of Jim Jarmusch, his earlier directing and screenwriting act as “the text.” or the established style that he later uses for his self-adaptation by delving into a different medium. For instance, his music and audiovisuals come before the auditory in his case. Although chapter five will examine this further, Jarmusch also shows what is not self-adaptation even though it may carry some of its markers.

What has to happen before self-adaptation can become a practice of consideration for an artist is textuality. Ultimately, self-adaptation represents a chain of themes, works, and styles that function as “re-valuation,” “re-evaluation,” and “re-imaging” from one text to another. The main text or the hypotext gets reused in a different time period and, naturally, in a new social and cultural atmosphere. It receives a re-evaluation where the elements that will be adapted are established. With all of this performed, a re-imaging happens where a work of self-adaptation is put forth that combines the old and the new one that presents the familiar styles and themes of a particular artist under a modern or relevant scope. With this process, chronology is also critical to consider. In typical adaptations, time is a critical consideration. Certainly, directors can make an adaptation of a novel if they please (certainly it is not as simple as many factors can impact the choice such as social and cultural conditions as well as those related to the business side

of film making), but adaptation can happen if there is source material from which to adapt. The hypotext and hypertext distinction is important when considering adaptations. Many examples of self-adaptation depend on chronology for this reason. The hypotext, or source material, serves as the foundation upon which the hypertext, or adapted work, is built. Through self-adaptation, artists engage in a process of reinterpretation and re-contextualization, reutilizing familiar themes and motifs. This is particularly true in the case of Byrne, who establishes themes and personas, star images, and markers that evolve over time and with self-adaptation. For example, Byrne, with his work with the Talking Heads, establishes his themes. Chapter four will go into significant detail regarding these themes, but musically, Byrne develops key subjects that become his focus when songwriting. For example, many of his songs tackle the themes of individuality and human nature. Although there are many more themes, this theme, for example, comes across in most of Byrnes's self-adaptations. He, in return, builds upon the theme with *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), which shows how Byrne adapts his musical to another medium, furthering his use of established themes as well as developing his artistic image and persona. He continually adds to this re-evaluation of the familiar based on the social atmosphere which he presented with *American Utopia* (Byrne, 2020). The reliance on textuality is foundational for self-adaptation as a practice. While the case studies will explain this, the basic idea is that themes or the “source text” become intertwined with the self. More so, the source becomes the self, especially after many adaptive iterations. Artists or the self, through self-adaptation, grow a strong connection to subject matters and image markers, and the

self begins to become the expected vessel (expected from the audience) to deliver these themes via the self.

3.3. Moments of Self-Adaptation

The previous chapter, with the extensive application of different fields and theories, highlighted how self-adaptation is more of a practice than a well-defined and set genre with clear-cut markers. While examples such as Byrne present a well-rounded and extensive example of a career that has revolved around self-adaptation and makes it seem genre-like, this often is not the case for a great deal of examples. There can be levels of self-adaptation, more so moments that can be considered self-adaptation, even if most of the artist's works generally do not rely on self-adaptation. As argued earlier, self-adaptation tends to have a case-by-case nature, whereas artists like Nick Cave and Neil Young, who have extensive works that encompass self-adaptation, also have a body of work separate from this. In considering what “moments” should be examined in regard to their degree of self-adaptation, a few aspects are substantial. For example, cameos, interviews, and roles in documentaries are important factors. Arguing that stars in interviews and the way they present themselves is self-adaptation is difficult to assess, there have been specific examples that have played into the form of a media text that aims to use interviews and the star itself as a form of self-adaptation.

A famous example is that of Joaquin Phoenix, who conducted interviews aimed at promoting the 2010 mockumentary comedy/drama *I'm Still Here* (Affleck, 2010). Phoenix plays himself in the film, or a version of himself who retires from acting in

order to achieve a career as a hip-hop artist, which was ultimately revealed to be done for “artistic purposes.” To clarify, most self-adaptations are done for artistic purposes as well, but there is a difference between self-adaptation and performance art. In performance art, there are certain actions in which the artist performs, and how they are performed varies certainly, but the idea is that these actions create the artwork. The self as the text or the vessel is important to consider in regard to performance art because the involvement of the self-impacts the audience services the work. Performance art raises the question of whether performance art can be considered self-adaptation. It may indeed be self-adaptation, but this is not the case every time. For instance, it would be tricky to consider Phoenix’s performance a self-adaptation because the self-involved is not his self to a certain degree. It is one constructed for that particular work, and although having Phoenix deliver the constructed “self” presents an interesting challenge for the audience and impacts their interpretation of what they are seeing, the work is not necessarily adaptation at play. In the interviews that promoted the film, Phoenix acted as that constructed performance art self. He displayed behavior that was unfamiliar and separate from the initially established star image of Phoenix. He used the character, a mixture of the real and the written, in a new format in the scope of interviews. While the line between self-adaptation, the star, and the work becomes blurry when the delivery of adaptation is done through the physical artists rather than the text, the paratextual work of interviews has a role to play in both playing “the self” in the context of a met-performance and in the process of self-adaptation.

Cameos also present an interesting consideration with hard-to-distinguish lines. One of the trickier elements of considering both these points is these “potential” moments existing within broader texts, which are not always created by the artists performing the self-adaptation. One of the biggest examples of this can be seen with The Beatles, both as a band and as individual members. While the Beatles have movies that revolve around some of their hit songs, such as *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester, 1964) and *Help!* (Lester, 1965), which they had direct creative input in. There are examples where the source material is originally theirs; however, their physical presence is reduced to short cameos, as was the case with the animated feature film *Yellow Submarine* (Dunning, 1968). This presents an interesting struggle with assessing what can or cannot be considered self-adaptation. In this example, the film is composed of Beatles songs from the studio album of the same name and features animated versions of the members voiced by actors. The members themselves appear at the end of the film to make a live-action cameo, presenting the idea that this work is as related to the Beatles as any other of their work, even without their direct input. More interestingly, however, the Beatles made a form of a musical cameo by allowing the use of two unrealized songs to be a part of the film. When one considers the general markers for a work to be considered self-adaptation, this example meets some critical expectations. A text is being adapted into a film as a different medium, and the original creators of the work are involved and use material they previously created to build upon the original text, in this case, by using the film as a way to add on the original discography of the album *Yellow Submarine* (1969). However, the direct presence and essential input of the original creators is, in fact, in cameo form.

Not every cameo can be or should be considered self-adaptation, as the case-by-case nature of the practice is once again critical. The Beatles, in regard to their practice, present a unique argument and foundation for which some cameos can fit the markers. In a sense, the fragmented moments of self-adaptation are a factor that pushes it toward being defined as a practice rather than a genre because, as with the examples given above and will be given below, a generally applicable rule remains highly variable across many bodies of work.

3.4. Music Videos as Self-Adaptation

While music videos are a crucial part of both adaptation and self-adaptation, they can sometimes present a challenge in theorizing self-adaptation. This is applicable to adaptation in general also. Adaptation scholarship does not tend to deal with music video as adaptation however any video could be one. Music video is a form that is highly compliant to self-adaptation. While music albums, movies, Broadway shows, and musicals present a more direct connection that shows self-adaptation and its functions, a case of it either is or is not, music videos tend to be separate from this. As Vernallis established, music videos are “non-narrative” (Vernallis, 2004, p.4). The non-narrative separates the music video's formulation from traditional story creation understandings. When we consider self-adaptation under the scope of the music video, narrative becomes a consideration. The reason for this is that they have limited time to reflect on a multitude of elements, such as the director's vision, the image, and the vision of the artist/s, stories, or images related to the song and lyrics themselves. More critically, however, is the

challenge that can arise from two different sources of authority. While a music video can have a director and writer who have a example of self-adaptation as well as styles and themes they have established in their fields, such as Martin Scorsese and Jim Jarmusch, they might perform self-adaptation in the scope of music videos because of the matter of artistic vision. In its essence, music video can be a great medium to perform self-adaptation or establish the markers that will later become adapted but it can also be a challenge to reflect one's own artistic vision if the video is being made for another artist that also has an established vision.

While the director may have the established style mentioned, it is challenging to embed it into another artist's vision. For example, Martin Scorsese, who has very recognizable themes and styles, directed Michael Jackson's *Bad* (Scorsese, 1987) music video, and while there are clear signs of Scorsese in the video, such as the gang fight-inspired set-up, it remains above all a Michael Jackson video with elaborate costumes, antics, and dancing. A similar case arises with Jim Jarmusch. He directed and later co-directed two Talking Heads music videos, first for *The Lady Don't Mind* (Jarmusch, 1986) and then *Storytelling Giant* (Byrne & Jarmusch, 1988). While a detailed analysis of one of the videos will be performed in the case study, it is essential to note that these cannot be considered self-adaptations for Jarmusch. For Byrne, *Storytelling Giant* (1988) is because he takes from not only, he established works but follows a narrative and style similar to his cinematic work with *True Stories* (1986) Even with the video in which he was the solo director, Jarmusch draws out a recognizable audiovisual that is linked with Byrne and the Talking Heads. The inability to present a work that is fully Jarmusch

stems from the nature of the music video as well as the responsibility of the co-presence of authority and collaboration. Certainly, collaborations can be self-adaptations, as the case study will show Byrne has many works of collaboration that are self-adaptations; the music video is a different undertaking when it comes to artistic vision.

While music videos present a more in-depth consideration, this does not equate to music videos being removed from the practice of self-adaptation. A significant number of the artists in the case studies have examples of self-adaptation through music videos. David Byrne, Taylor Swift, Nick Cave, and Neil Young have all directed music videos for their own songs and, specifically, Byrne has used the medium to further his practice of self-adaptation many of the elements, dances, and imagery in his videos were later used by him in *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984) and *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020) and present a re-imagining from the original videos. Taylor Swift presents a similar practice, especially with her new Eras tour concert and concert film. The popular artists reapply what they have established and re-imagine based on what they want to communicate with the music video. The critical consideration for music videos to be an element of self-adaptation is the re-applying and re-imagining element because often, music videos directed by the artists who perform the songs do not fall under that category. Often, videos are used as one-time vessels that tell the story of the song and are later left unutilized to differing degrees. Music video presents a unique medium study that goes hand in hand with the case-by-case element of the practice. The analysis chapter of the thesis will highlight this further.

3.5. Music to Movie, Movie to Music

While this thesis has already established that there is a specific set of expectations when it comes to regarding work as self-adaptation and an artist as performing self-adaptation, it is essential to note that there is a case-by-case nature of self-adaptation. For instance, one work may appear to fit the defining elements of self-adaptation; however, a deep dive into the details, such as writers/screenwriters, directors, adaptors, and the power of authority, can bring to light where the work may differ from a work of self-adaptation. This can be seen in the study of music videos under this scope. In this regard, taking into account singular examples of self-adaptation or potential self-adaptation helps to dissect the functional parameters of self-adaptation as a theory. The examples below aim to demonstrate examples of self-adaptation on a singular basis and how the seemingly fitting elements may instead suggest another practice or theory.

3.6. The Who: *Tommy* (Russell, 1975)

The 1975 film *Tommy* (Russell, 1975) is a fantasy drama that follows the story of Tommy, a psychosomatically deaf, mute, and blind boy who aims to become a pinball champion. (IMDb, n.d.) *Tommy* (Russell, 1975) is directly based on The Who album *Tommy* (Townshend, 1968) regarding the power of authority and creative input, soundtrack, and star image. By assessing markers alone, these works present a highly conventional example of self-adaptation. Firstly, the album-to-film adaptation is the foundation. Pete Townshend, the primary songwriter for The Who, conceived the album

as a narrative piece, with each song contributing to the overall storyline. The film adaptation takes the core narrative and characters from the album and translates them into a visual medium. As mentioned, this is not just a direct adaptation of auditory to visual; it is a re-evaluation and re-imaging of the original songs, which are mixed with director Ken Russell's directorial style. Secondly, the power of authority and creative input is very clear in this case, as the creators of the original text, the members of The Who, have critical roles in the film. While front man Roger Daltrey is the titular role, main composer Peter Townshend is the film's musical director, and each The Who member has screenwriting credits. Lastly, the film expands the previous narrative and style of the original album text. The change in medium is a natural factor; however, the film builds upon the soundtrack to expand Tommy's story.

Another critical element that *Tommy* (Russell, 1975) highlights is the question of authority and whether the position the star is in impacts self-adaptation. The album and, specifically, the film show how self-adaptation can still be practiced even if the creator of the original text, "the star," is not in the "main position." The prominent positions vary from medium to medium however, the core is that in film, the director or screenwriter is prominent; in the music video, the musician and the director; and in music, the songwriter and the performer. Members of The Who in the film version of *Tommy* (Russell, 1975) are placed in the position of having writing credits. Instead, they manage to expand upon the original text and re-imagine their image and character development. While the film is, in relation to position, a Ken Russell film, both works combined, and the subsequent textual and intertextual elements place The Who as the

artistic authority and ultimately make the works a practice of self-adaptation for the group.

3.7. *Pink Floyd: The Wall* (Parker, 1982)

The years that followed *Tommy* (Russell, 1975) saw several other album-to-film adaptations looking to replicate its success. One example that resembles the type of self-adaptation practiced by *Tommy* is Pink Floyd's *The Wall* (Waters, 1979) album and the following film, *Pink Floyd The Wall* (Parker, 1982). Like *Tommy*, *The Wall* (Waters, 1979), conceived by Roger Waters, is a concept album with a main character, Pink, who, throughout the songs, has a psychological breakdown and builds a metaphorical wall around himself to isolate himself from the outside world. Naturally, the film adaptation follows the same plot by employing the same soundtrack with the members of Pink Floyd placed as creative authorities. While the film is an Alan Parker film and some of his established stylistic approaches are present in the film, for example, his reliance on non-linear storytelling and experimental editing, as well social themes he is known for exploring mainly it ultimately has a similar fate to *Tommy* as the central creativity authority behind the adapted work is Pink Floyd. One prominent difference to consider is that the screenplay of *Pink Floyd's The Wall* (Parker, 1982) is solely from Roger Waters, Pink Floyd bassist and main composer of *The Wall* (Waters, 1979). This then becomes two different examples of self-adaptation in which firstly, the band's image and their member's musical personas go through self-adaptation by their creative authority, but also it is an example of a single authority figure self-adaptation because Roger Waters, by taking on the writing of the screenplay, has shown how he expands

upon original work. Critically, Waters performs self-adaptation with the 2014 concert film and documentary *Roger Waters: The Wall* (Evans & Waters, 2014), where he is once again the screenwriter with the additional role of director as he adapts from both *The Wall* (Waters, 1979) and *Pink Floyd The Wall* (Parker, 1982).

3.8. *Purple Rain* (Magnoli, 1984)

Purple Rain (Magnoli, 1984) presents the most intriguing and challenging limited case study as the example appears to fit the expected markers of self-adaptation perfectly; however, the detailed breakdown of each marker draws out the struggle of labeling a work as self-adaptation. The first question to consider with this example is the one of simultaneous release. Unlike the works discussed above and the case studies the thesis will focus on, *Purple Rain* is the only example to have a simultaneous release where both works were intended to be reflected as a package deal. The studio album *Purple Rain* (Prince, 1984) was conceived of and written by Prince before the conceptualization of the feature film. The feature film *Purple Rain* (Magnoli, 1984) was contextualized by Prince, making him a creative collaborator and, to a degree, one of the creative authorities for both works. However, when the adaptation is considered, Prince is not credited nor works as a power of authority. He is the star of the film, playing The Kid, but rather than using the medium to adapt his previously established image, he uses it to almost re-enforce the image he presented in his previous musical work. The role becomes highly autobiographical when the plot is added into this consideration. The story closely resembles Prince's personal struggles and rise to fame, even going as far as casting members of his real-life band.

Both *Purple Rain* works have a tremendous impact on Prince's star image and artistic style as the works reinforce who he was as a musician at the time. However, these works are companion pieces and complementary in a way that advances the meaning for both and, as mentioned, advances the star image of Prince. However, they are not entirely self-adaptations nor adaptations of each other. There is an advantage of simultaneous release both in the industrial sense and creative sense as they give insight into the deeper meanings behind the music and the star image. Yet, the disadvantage of simultaneous release becomes that the time needed to "re-value," "re-evaluate," and "re-imagine" simply does not occur. For self-adaptation outside developmental factors such as industrial, social, cultural, political, and positional changes must impact the urge to and the ultimate end product of self-adaptation. Chapter five will show that in some rare cases, simultaneous releases can become a work of self-adaptation but this is not the case for the majority of simultaneous releases. Thus, *Purple Rain* becomes a highly significant companion work disguised as self-adaptation. Perhaps this can even be considered a case of extreme fidelity due to this lack of evolution regardless of the medium change.

3.9. Concert Films as Genre

Concert films are a very viable genre by all accepted and common markers in regards to considering something a genre, such as common themes, shared conventions, audience expectations, repetition, and overall historical context. However, the way they function under self-adaptation and in their extensive field of adaptation needs some further

exploration. Concert films are highly intertextual and a significant example of multi-media. They embody subgenres ranging from documentary to musical performances and overall present a platform for a lot of creative and personal expression. This begs the question, can concert films be self-adaptations or perhaps adaptations in general? This presents a tricky yes and no answer. Concert films are almost dualities within themselves as they aim to reflect the real or at least something real in an artistic manner.

Similar to Richard Dyer, J.P. Telotte, in his essay *Scorsese's "The Last Waltz" and the Concert Genre* (Telotte, 1980), argues that the evolution of the American musical has brought out the tension between reality and the fantasy element that musicals are adamant on pursuing. (Telotte, 1980, p.9) He points out that the tension between musicals' struggles to balance the suspension of disbelief and the audience's desire to experience something "more real" spawned concert films as a response. He argues, "One way of dealing more effectively with those thematic and structural tensions was apparently found in the concert film which, by its documentary-like treatment of the expressive elements, allowed us to have our music and reality too." (Telotte, 1980, p.9)

A unique trait, one that was new, was that concert films did not focus on nor did they need extraneous stories and plots. Telotte points out that,

One of the main attractions of the concert film obviously is its capacity to concentrate our attentions on the music, pure and simple, unencumbered by those extraneous features of plot and characterization which, by their very improbability or stodginess, often weighed down the traditional musical--and frequently detracted from the music itself. (Telotte, 1980, p.10)

This argument, as well as the nature of the concert film, asserts that the music, hence the musician, is in the position of delivering both the reality and the art. Additionally, as

is the case with *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020) a concert film and documentary. The documentary element naturally combines reality and art by its nature. Additionally, Dyer and his arguments of the two types of signs, both the concert film and documentary as well as a mix of the two genres carry these and the genre choice influences the cues. So, are concert films a genre where self-adaptation can be practiced? In this regard, yes. Telotte very critically observes that concert films are a response to and a reflection of what is happening in the real world, negative or positive, somewhat similar to a documentary. The examples in this thesis as well as the examples of concert films from particular points in concert film history such as *Woodstock* (Wadleigh, 1970), *Gimmie Shelter* (Maysles & Mayles & Zwerin, 1970) *The Last Waltz* (Scorsese, 1978), *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), and *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé* (Beyonce, 2023) all embody the element of responding to real-life circumstances and atmospheres within the context of a musical concert. While each approaches the matter differently, incorporating “the real” is pressing. Self-adaptation occurs in cases where the artist embodies the real, re-evaluates their image songs, and presents a re-imagined version of it in a contextually relevant manner through the familiar and introduces an evolved star image. The real can be delivered through the self like information. For example, in *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020), Byrne is not creating a remake concert film of *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984). He takes the social and political circumstances of the United States and re-imagines the way he presents them by making additions that ultimately reflect reality but also present the message he aims to adopt with his star image. This will be expanded on in chapter four; however, the idea here is that the factors mentioned, which are Byrne as an

artist/persona and the American reality, have changed over time. This change impacts not only the markers of continuity in general when considering the work as a work of self-adaptation, but it also raises the question of how duration works a dual shift in these works, firstly impacting the reality and, in return, impacting the product, in this case, both the film and Byrne's image. Going as far as *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), Byrne aims to reflect reality and the everyday elements with the manner in which he constructs each song sequence. This will be further expanded in the case studies.

Lastly, one element to consider is the question of the power of authority and creative control. Most concert films tend to have separate directors, whereas the artists are credited with screenwriting. When this is the case, the director, who is not the self-adaptor, is creating a work of adaptation rather than self-adaptation. As established in the literature review, adaptations can arise from many sources, including music and live concerts. The directors of concert films are responsible for shaping, arranging, and presenting the musical performances consistent with the self-adaptor and artist's vision and image and in a way that addresses the tension mentioned by Telotte. This indicates that self-adaptations can often have a collaborative approach to authority.

As his key examples, Telotte examines Martin Scorsese's *The Last Waltz* (Scorsese, 1978), the concert film for The Band. The film was The Band's "farewell concert appearance," and the concert had more than a dozen special guests join the group. According to Telotte, Scorsese creates a hermetic in the film, focusing solely on the musicians and their music. This world is removed from ordinary reality, emphasizing

the expressive energy of the music. Telotte says, "The style of Scorsese's "concert film" is therefore almost a natural outgrowth of that story told by The Band's music and of the director's own difficulties in attempting to translate it into a viable film narrative."

(Telotte, 1980, p.13) The concert film" is closely linked to the narrative conveyed by The Band's music and Scorsese's challenges in adapting that narrative into a coherent film. Despite the difficulties Scorsese encountered, the style of the concert film is described as an "almost natural outgrowth." The style of the film emerged organically from the narrative embedded in the music and Scorsese's creative process of grappling with how to adapt that narrative into a film format. This highlights that self-adaptation and adaptation can happen simultaneously. The Band was responsible for the arrangement of songs performed in the film but was also responsible for choosing the guest musicians and collaborators, ultimately choosing what they would reflect and creating the final star and artist image of The Band, a culmination of their musical career, a self-adaptation. Simultaneously, Scorsese took The Band's past works and songs to create a world in which the image The Band wanted to portray could be represented. For Scorsese, this was a work of adaptation. Overall, concert films are a pivotal genre for self-adaptation but are also essential to create a discussion around theorizing it.

3.10. Importance of Authority

The matter of authority is essential when assessing whether a work can be considered self-adaptation and an artist a self-adaptator. While a discussion of authority and position was mentioned above with the smaller examples, it is critical to highlight the

difference in depth. In general, position can be the role and sometimes rank that one has in the creation of the work, while the authority, implies power and its relative amount. It is essential to note that “authority” is a layered term here. This means that not only is an authority not singular, but it also does not have to be the director as the central authority. The case studies will highlight how Byrne’s work, in particular, has a very collaborative nature and that even though he seems to be the central authority for the works, his claim on authority in different fields, such as directing and screenwriting, enhances the result. Authority in self-adaptations can often be shared or distributed, and the person with whom a work is associated does not always have to be the only person with authority. David Byrne, specifically with *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986) and *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020), practices authority and position, showing how the two can often become entangled in self-adaptation. For *True Stories*, Byrne claims the power of authority through the positions he holds, such as being the film director, screenwriter, star, and sole composer. While self-adaptations do not require that a singular figure have multiple roles in order to become “the authority,” the cases of self-adaptation present in both the thesis and other outside works show that stars and artists who perform self-adaptation (depending on the medium) tend to be placed in one or more of the key and central positions mentioned above. One essential marker for self-adaptation thus becomes authority through creative input as well. This, in return, raises the question of who has and can have authority in works of self-adaptation. When we consider the 1986 film, it is evident that the self-adaptor holds authority in the creative end product. However, the concert film *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020) shows that authority does not simply rely on position. Byrne arguably leaves the position with the

most authority to Spike Lee for this project. Director Lee, a prolific director who has established a specific directorial style and works on critical themes, works not just to present a film of his own reflection but one that reflects Byrne's. While Byrne still holds a central position as a screenwriter, having written the Broadway show in 2019 and the songs used throughout his career, he is not in the position.

Regardless of this, it is evident that even though the inherent "self-adaptor" is not the central figure doing the self-adaptation from a positional perspective, he is the crucial figure of creative authority as the end product shows a reflection of his artistic vision and makes the product a self-adaptation based on the "re-valuation," "re-evaluation," and "re-imaging" marker. Does this imply that regardless of position and a member not being the one who is performing the self-adaptation, they cannot have authority, and it belongs solely to the star who is aiming to create a work of self-adaptation? Certainly not, as positions and star images garner a hierarchy of sorts where the power and authority of the mentioned central positions cannot be dismissed in a creative sense nor an industry sense. To return to *American Utopia*, having a well-known auteur such as Spike Lee creates what he was asked to perform, and used his creative directorial skill to contribute to the work. The detail that should be remembered here is that authority and having it does not mean that it is self-adaptation for everyone who has it, but that authority can be shared to varying degrees in self-adaptations. For Spike Lee, this work is undoubtedly not a self-adaptation. While this web might appear tricky, it highlights the case-by-case nature again but reasserts the importance of self-adaptation and the fact that the commonality revolves around the artist attempting to self-adapt.

CHAPTER IV

THE CASE STUDY OF DAVID BYRNE

4.1. Introduction

While the previous chapters aimed to establish a foundational understanding of how self-adaptation can be theorized this chapter seeks to show how this theory and the mixture of fields have been and can be practiced. To achieve this goal, his chapter will present a case study of David Byrne by doing a close reading of his chosen works, more or less in chronological order.

It is important to clarify a few elements of the close reading. While the study will closely examine Byrnes's musical work, specifically the songs he has made with his band Talking Heads, it will do so based on thematic continuity and by analyzing it lyrically, not in regards to an extensive study on musical style or the musicality of the songs themselves. The thesis does not make any claims in regards to the quality or musical features of the studied works. Following this, it will look at the music videos

for these songs, for which Byrne is credited as the director and the story's creator. This part of the thesis aims to establish what Byrne has practiced regarding self-adaptation. The videos themselves will be commented on in order first to explain Byrnes's position other than musician and to consider whether or not music videos establish patterns that later become elements of self-adaptation. In the traditional adaptation sense, these works can be considered original works, meaning hypotexts of the originator that serve as the foundation of Byrne's continuous self-adaptation.

Secondly, Byrne's oeuvre is comprehensive than the works that are examined in this case study. The study will cover his work with Talking Heads, the concert film *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), his debut feature film *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986), his studio album *American Utopia* (Byrne, 2018), followed by the film of his Broadway show *David Byrne's American Utopia* (Lee, 2020). Beyond these selected works his overall discography covers a range of solo and collaborative albums with fellow musicians such as Brian Eno and St. Vincent. In addition to his musical work, Byrne has a long list of works as a composer for films and theater, for instance, his Academy Award-winning work for *The Last Emperor* (Bertolucci, 1987), which he composed with Ryuichi Sakamoto and Cong Su. In addition, there are even more direct examples of Byrne's performing self-adaptation, for instance, with his concept album *Here Lies Love*. (Byrne & Slim), which was later adapted into a rock musical by the same name. (Timbers, 2013) This example, particularly, presents the thematic continuity and self-adaptation apparent in Byrne's works. It can also be a significant work in understanding the concept of self-adaptation as a practice. In addition to these works, Byrne boasts a long list of cameo and acting appearances, which also carry elements of self-adaptation

and further question the element of the self in self-adaptation. While many of these works could easily be substantial parts of this case study, the chosen works mentioned above not only embody the thematic, performative, style-based, and persona-based, but they also highlight a chronological career of practicing self-adaptation that reflects the factor of cultural, societal, and artistic change that impacts this practice.

4.2. Talking Heads, *Fear of Music* (1979), *Remain in Light* (1980), *Speaking in Tongues* (1983)

Being the creative force and front man of the 70's and 80's alternative rock group Talking Heads, which he formed alongside guitarist Jerry Harrison, bassist Tina Weymouth, and drummer Chris Frantz, Byrne was and still is perceived as the prominent persona behind bands the music but also its widely recognizable image. The thesis aims to establish the multi-media nature of self-adaptation, and when it is taken into consideration that all adaptations have a hypotext, Talking Heads and the songs/albums of the band can and specifically in the case of Byrne should be considered the "origin text" for the bulk of his self-adaptive work. The case study will be conducted with this point in mind. Another factor to consider is that, the self in this practice can also get "adapted" and become "material" to read when breaking down how self-adaptation functions.

With this in mind and the general description of self-adaptation, it is now essential to consider the foundations *Fear of Music* (Byrne, 1979), *Remain in Light* (Byrne, 1980), *Speaking in Tongues* (Byrne, 1983), and the work of Talking Heads established before their concert documentary *Stop Making Sense*. (Demme, 1984). The band became

prominent with the release of their first two albums, *Talking Heads: 77* (Byrne, 1977) and *More Songs About Buildings and Food* (Byrne, 1978). While both albums consistently create a thematic structure on which Byrne rests his self-adaptation practice, the albums that follow these two early works show a more direct manner of getting adapted. The most critical way Byrne utilizes these three albums to perform self-adaptation and makes them work in a new medium is thematically.

A clear chain of relations can be established between the majority of the songs present on these three albums. They explore a diverse range of genres, often blending elements of art rock, new wave, funk, and world music. Some of the main themes that emerge are related to human and communal experience exalting the ordinary and appreciating the unconventional. To go into the specifics, these themes are as such: 1. Identity and individuality or the complexities of human relationships 2. Social commentary and a reflection on society 3. Consumerism and urban life 4. Absurdity in daily life 5.

Cultural diversities and critiques 6. Emotional disconnect and irony, and 7. Technology.

While these seem rather broad, they present the basis for the majority of Byrnes's self-adaptive works and performances, as there is consistent and continual usage of the foundation established with these initial works. To go theme by theme, it is critical to show how Byrne and the Talking Heads establish the said themes in song. "Once in a Lifetime" (Byrne, 1980), arguably amongst the band's most recognized songs from the band's fourth studio album *Remain in Light* (Talking Heads, 1980), combines the themes of identity, alienation, and existentialism. The song's lyrics capture the central figure (the every-man embodied by Byrne as the singer and in the music video performance) existential crisis as he grapples with the mundane realities of everyday

life and questions the purpose of his existence. The song carries a sense of alienation and detachment as the figure reflects on his own identity and life. He feels disconnected from his surroundings and struggles to find a sense of belonging or a purpose in his current cycle. This theme of identity crisis is enhanced lyrically by the repetition of the phrase "same as it ever was," (Byrne, 1980), suggesting a cyclical pattern of sameness that leaves the figure feeling adrift as the video visually highlights. The lyrics

And you may find yourself living in a shotgun shack
And you may find yourself in another part of the world
And you may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile
And you may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife
And you may ask yourself, "Well, how did I get here?" (Byrne, 1980)

highlights how the figure in the song is at a crossroads of crisis where he has to consider and face the unpredictability's of a seemingly "ordinary" life, one that includes a house, a car, and a wife. The lyrics also critique contemporary society, materialism, and conformity. The figure's disillusionment with consumer culture is evident in

You may ask yourself, "What is that beautiful house?"
You may ask yourself, "Where does that highway go to?"
And you may ask yourself, "Am I right? Am I wrong?"
And you may say to yourself, "My God! What have I done?" (Byrne, 1980)

as the person falls into a loop of questioning the choice in his life and the general structure of life and society by realizing the gaps in modern life. The lyrics capture a solid connection to the personal that resonates with the listener. Thematically, the song invites the listener into this loop of questions, which would later become a Byrne trademark and used in the entirety of his self-adaptive performances.

To follow the route of thematic analysis, "Life During Wartime" (Byrne, 1979) from *Fear of Music* (Talking Heads, 1979) also captures all of the abovementioned themes.

The song explores themes of survival and identity in an imagined dystopian world, where the figure struggles to maintain a sense of self amidst chaos backed up by an oddly uplifting beat. Considering the time of release for the song, it serves as a sharp critique of contemporary society, reflecting the anxieties and tensions of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In a sense, the dichotomy between the music and the lyrics also presents the themes in the song as a matter of consideration for the listener as the lines “This ain't no party, this ain't no disco. This ain't no fooling around. No time for dancing, or lovey-dovey. I ain't got time for that now.” (Byrne, 1979) challenges listeners with the harsh realities of life in a society on the brink of a form of collapse or decay. It also delves into the theme of urban life and its harsh realities (one that will come into question again in *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986)). For instance, elements of domesticity and how that can change also play a pivotal role in shaping the song's strong thematic purpose. “I got some groceries, some peanut butter. To last a couple of days. But I ain't got no speakers, ain't got no headphones. Ain't got no records to play” (Byrne, 1979) implies a sense of temporality as they prepare to leave behind familiar surroundings and embark on something new. With essentially all of his songs, Byrne plays a balancing game between the familiar and unfamiliar, between the urban and the rural, and between the ordinary and extraordinary and formulates them as experiences, problems, or “moments” a person has or can have. Another critical matter to note with this song is that it highlights Byrne's delving into a contemporary understanding of technology and identity. This is critical because it is an approach that will eventually be something Byrne uses in his self-adaptation works, highlighting how the thematic origin was established in his initial works. For example,

Trouble in transit, got through the roadblock
We blended in with the crowd
We got computers, we're tapping phone lines
I know that that ain't allowed
We dress like students, we dress like housewives
Or in a suit and a tie
I changed my hairstyle so many times now
I don't know what I look like (Byrne, 1979)

shows a flux of themes where Byrne vividly depicts themes of resilience, subversion, and identity fluidity amidst societal upheaval. It is crucial to remember the particular combination of societal change and its resulting effects on identity or the identity/persona Byrne depicts and embodies, as it is a core manner in which he performs self-adaptation.

One of the most essential, if not the most essential, work that has built the foundation for Byrne and the Talking Heads' thematic basis is *Speaking in Tongues* (Talking Heads, 1983). Chronologically, it is the last album before the release of *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), which makes it a direct gateway for the following concert film. While the majority of songs from the album, ranging from "Girlfriend is Better" (Byrne, 1983) to "Slippery People" (Byrne, 1983), present a cohesive narrative of all of the themes mentioned above, a few in particular, due to their lyrics, their recognizability meaning their public success and most importantly their reoccurrence in Byrne's self-adaptations, are critical. "This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody)" (Byrne, 1983) is one of these works. The lyrics explore themes of belonging and emotional connection, with the figure expressing a sense of contentment and belonging in a specific place or with a specific person. "Home is where I want to be. Pick me up and turn me round" (Byrne, 1983) conveys a sense of intimacy and emotional connection that is not only

personal but open to being adapted for the person hearing the words as they carry a sense of universality that is not only a Byrne trait but one that consistently presents itself with the further adaptations. Once again, the themes become recognizable in the songs, making the song into an invitation where this universal question of “home” becomes a bridge for the listener/audience. It challenges and conveys ideas about identity and presents a form of comfort that connects with ordinary daily life. For example

Home - is where I want to be
But I guess I'm already there
I come home - she lifted up her wings
I guess that this must be the place
I can't tell one from another
Did I find you, or you find me? (Byrne, 1983)

not only showcases thematic continuity and recognizability but also reflects existential uncertainty and the blurred boundaries between self and other. This self-examining questioning becomes the style that Byrne consistently adapts from, and more critically, it is this very element that paves the way for him to self-adapt by considering the social circumstances of the time of his works. While this will become clearer with *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020), the general idea is that the use of themes where the self is central allows Byrne to place himself in a relationship with his work and the times, he is in. While this is not a pre-requisite for self-adaptation, it raises and ultimately answers critical questions about the impact of time when creating adaptations.

Lastly, similar to Talking Heads other songs, as well as the ones analyzed above, the lyrics are filled with everyday elements and ultimately become a basis for what Byrnes

later adapts from. By tapping into these universal emotions and experiences, it transcends its individual narrative and becomes for everyone.

As mentioned, most of the band's songs fit the thematic argument, suggesting that Byrne's future self-adapted works are rooted in these lyrics. Another critical song to mention, like "This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody)" (Byrne, 1983) makes numerous comebacks, is "Burning Down the House" (Byrne, 1983). While it may seem distant from the general themes mentioned, the song is essential to assess because it reflects the often absurd and surreal approach that Byrne has. The song presents a chaotic and overwhelming interpretation of everyday life where the figure in the song potentially feels the need to destroy something or liberate themselves from a situation, they are currently in. While, like most Talking Heads songs, the song is open to interpretation, the lyrics, "Watch out, you might get what you're after. Cool, babies – strange but not a stranger. I'm an ordinary guy. Burning down the house." (Byrne, 1983) and "Here's your ticket, pack your bag, it's time for jumping overboard. The transportation is here. Close enough but not too far, maybe you know where you are. Fighting fire with fire, ah" (1983) both suggest a rejection of a particular norm where something is being left behind, where the "house" is being "burnt down" and a preparation for this change and rejection is happening. The sort of lack of detail as to what this is again reinserted the Byrne trait of his application of themes being for everyone as the figure in the song could easily be anyone listening or connecting to it. The song also carries an undertone of social commentary where there is a critique of the thing or structure being rejected. This theme of social commentary reflects the

countercultural element of the new wave movements, which sought to disrupt established norms and pushed the idea of individual autonomy.

The “house” is an individualistic factor here, one that, when we consider the story in the song, becomes a representative of the individual. “My house is out of the ordinary. That’s right, don’t wanna hurt nobody. Some things sure can sweep me off my feet. Burning down the house” (1983) reflects a theme of individuality and uniqueness, where the figure embraces their distinctiveness instead and pushes for this idea to become a norm rather than an acceptance of this “house.” The “out of the ordinary” ideal is again a thematic marker for the push of diversity, whether personal or general, and aligns with traits associated with Talking Heads and David Byrne in particular. This song is a powerful work that explores themes of chaos, transformation, resistance, and social commentary. It is also essential to consider the symbolism of the house. The “house,” in this sense, is a critical symbol in the American ideology, representing the nuclear family, stability, and elements of individualism. Byrne and his attempt to “burn” this house down becomes a commentary on his perception of the normative stability of the 80’s. Here again, Byrne demonstrates another understanding of time.

While this part of the chapter focused on these songs in particular, it is important to emphasize that most songs released before *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984) are responsible for building the foundation for Byrne’s self-adaptation. From *Talking Heads: 77* (Talking Heads, 1977), “Psycho Killer” (Byrne, 1977) handles themes of alienation and a darker manner of human connection, and “Don’t Worry About the Government” (1977) focuses on conformity and the complexities of modern society.

“Thank You For Sending Me an Angel” (1978) and “Found a Job” (1978) from *More Songs About Buildings and Food* (Talking Heads, 1978) deal with communication and human relations, while the entire album is riddled with imagery stemming from Byrne’s interest in architecture and technology. “Cities” (1979) from *Fear of Music* (Talking Heads, 1979) is a direct literal and figurative commentary on urban life and the diverse relations of identity connected to urban life. Lastly, from *Remain in Light* (Talking Heads, 1980), songs such as “Crosseyed and Painless” (Byrne, 1980) and “House in Motion” (1980) combine the themes of social commentary, identity, and human nature. Essentially, Byrne, via his work with the Talking Heads, has created a pool of continuous and consistent themes that he has made the cornerstone of his solo career, where he reutilizes them for new media and for new times.

Lastly, it is essential to discuss the positions that Byrne held other than musician, singer, and songwriter during the initial years of Talking Heads. Out of the 15 music videos the band has produced, Byrne himself is credited as the director for 8 of them, and he has writing and songwriting credits for all of them. It is important to differentiate that the music videos Byrne has directed and the ones discussed below are not necessarily self-adaptations, but they play a similar role to the songs in developing and enhancing the thematic and stylistic foundation Byrne relies on to later self-adapt.

While it is not wholly correct to suggest that Byrne is an “auteur director” based on his music videos and *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986), it is valid to say that Byrne creates markers as a director that prompts the viewer to see continuity that later benefits his self-adaptive work. His videos, specifically the ones he has directed himself, contain

many elements of visual experimentation. He opts to use unconventional visual techniques that create his trademark conceptual storytelling. From the videos, viewers can consistently gather thematic arcs regarding the lyrics as the use of surreal and symbolic visuals tells the story. Carol Vernallis, in *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (Vernallis, 2004), points out that the majority of music videos are “non-narratives” where the visuals are not as concerned with telling the story as much as the relation between music and lyric (Vernallis, 2004, p. 7), Byrne’s style goes against this grain because of the interest in visual and literal storytelling.

Byrne’s interest in storytelling is further enhanced by his skill as a performance artist skill. The consistent focus on dynamic choreography, innovative staging, and expressive performance not only drives the narrative but also builds Byrne’s image and persona, which becomes the pinnacle of his self-adaptation. These, paired with Byrne’s cinematic influences where he mixes the avant-garde with the surreal, make his style widely recognizable and, in a sense, adaptable.

To present a concise analysis, the videos for “Once in a Lifetime” (Byrne, 1980) and “Burning Down the House” (Byrne, 1983) will be shortly analyzed. Most notably, the centrality of Byrne as not only the frontman but also as the narrator and director is instantly apparent as he is the main focus of the videos. The band, which consists of Tina Weymouth, Jerry Harrison, and Chris Frantz, is represented as a single backing character, not even appearing in “Once in a Lifetime” (Byrne, 1980). He is consistently placed as “the man” who almost always wears a suit (another Byrne trait) and is the one to watch and listen to.



Figure 1. David Byrne's centrality as a persona takes center stage in the "Once in a Lifetime" music video. It is accompanied by his stylistic dancing, which becomes a marker for him and his self-adaptation.

The video, as shown in Figure 1, takes its roots in Byrnes's performative style. His dynamic physicality and expressive gestures amplify the emotion and energy of the music. While the dance, choreographed by Toni Basil, does not solely convey the story, it is one of the first instances of Byrnes's theatrics when it comes to establishing a style.

Using "literal imagery" is a massive part of the videos and Byrnes's style. When he sings, "Let the water hold me down," the backdrop is him floating on water. As seen in the figures below, Byrne depends on abstract visuals and imagery as a whole to create a sense of disorientation. This, paired with his jerky movements, presents an existential question he asks with the song.



Figure 2&3. David Byrne at the opening of the music video as an example of the use of literal imagery with the water ripple backdrop.



Figure 4. This shows Byrnes' use of a green screen as he stands behind a video that shows a tribe of women continually making the same motion as he mimics them. The repetition highlights the lyrical idea of “same as it ever was”

Figure 4 supports the argument of Byrnes's reliance on imagery and highlights his persistent use of greenscreen in music videos. The markers are similar for the music video of “Burning Down the House” (Byrne, 1983). When he sings, “Burning down the house,” his face is projected onto a house as he moves around flames, as seen in Figures 5 and 6. This video further works to emphasize Byrne’s distinguishable style as a director. The video and its imagery combine surreal and whimsical images to reflect the exaggerated nature of the set as well as the lyrics. This, paired with the band's dynamic performance, reflects the highly expressive nature of this style.



Figures 5 & 6. Reflects Byrne's use of literal and surreal imagery to convey lyrics and express the song's style and meaning, establishing his directorial style in *Burning Down The House* (1983).

Lastly, this video, in particular, is critical due to it being almost a foundation for the band's concert film *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984). Primarily, staging and the utilization of the members are things that Byrne and Demme directly play upon in the film.

Byrne's multifaceted approach to self-adaptation is rooted in his initial work in The Talking Heads, which is also a testament to his creative and innovative style as an artist. By exploring thematic continuity across albums like *Fear of Music* (Talking Heads, 1979), *Remain in Light* (1980), and *Speaking in Tongues* (1983), Byrne established a rich foundation for his later solo endeavors. Themes of identity, societal commentary, urban life, and existentialism permeate his lyrics and invite listeners to visualize the narrative he is trying to convey. Moreover, Byrne's role as a director in many of Talking Heads' music videos further solidifies his unique aesthetic, blending surreal imagery with dynamic choreography to enhance storytelling.

4.3. *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984)

While Byrne's establishment of themes and styles as a musician took its roots in the earlier years of Talking Heads, one of his most prominent works carries a critical duality. The concert film *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), directed by Academy Award-winning director Jonathan Demme, is significant not only because it is one of the first examples of Byrne's self-adaptation but it is also one where he further establishes his artistic style and persona.

While many reasons make the groundbreaking concert film unique, there are also as many reasons that point to the film being a significant work of self-adaptation. The analysis of the film raises matters of authority, collaborative efforts in self-adaptation, thematic continuity, performative and persona-based adaptation, and adaptation of directorial/creative style. To give a short background on the work, the film was shot

over four nights, meaning the film is a collage of four consecutive nights of performance. The shows took place at Hollywood Pantages Theatre and were promotional concerts for their then-upcoming album *Speaking in Tongues* (Talking Heads, 1983). For the concert film itself, the band is credited with having raised the entire budget (1.200.000-estimated). The film proved to be a huge success, making over 12 million dollars worldwide upon release according to Box Office Mojo, and having a cult following that has only increased with A24 releasing a remastered version of the film in 2023.

One unique aspect of the film is that Byrne's practice of self-adaptation began before the film was released. Prior to the December 1984 release of the film, the band created a promotional video that only featured Byrne both as himself and as various interviewers. While the video is truly promotional in the sense that the interview revolves around questions such as "Why did you call the movie *Stop Making Sense*?" questions about the big suit, which Byrne famously answers as "I wanted my head to appear smaller and the easiest way to do that was make my body bigger", the video is certainly not just marketing but is used by Byrne as a base for future works. It is humorous and matches Byrne's quirky and colorful artistic style. It relies on Byrne's interest and focus on "other people" as he makes himself into these other people, as seen in Figure 7. While these people do not directly reference a figure mentioned in his songs, the connection is there regarding thematic adaptation, where Byrne continues to express his style and focus in new formats. One pivotal moment in the video prepares for another example of Byrnes's self-adaptation, where one character asks him about what he will do next, and

he responds by saying that he will do a film about true stories he has read in newspapers, which is what is now known as *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986) To add to this, the bottom character in Figure 7 is a character that Byrne will later adapt as a movie character in the 1986 film. These details are not only critical for the concert film but essential in regard to assessing self-adaptation because these are not simply traits or a style but are purposeful choices made by Byrne which, combined with past and future works, create markers of recognizability in which for instance Byrne takes a story or figure or even idea he creates in song format and adapts it into a physical form whether it be a character, or film or even both. The promotional video, in particular, demonstrates how Byrne self-adapts his image and persona. He brings the everyday figures who are in and under different situations and circumstances in his musical works to life in the visual realm via himself as the delivery vessel.



Figure 7. David Byrne is acting as different interviewers in the promotional video for *Stop Making Sense*.

Before the study continues with the analysis of the concert film, it must inspect the question of the director. While Byrne, as the power of authority appears predominantly in the majority of Talking Heads' works, *Stop Making Sense* (1984) places acclaimed director Jonathan Demme in the director's seat for all four nights. According to Byrne himself, he wanted to use a director like Demme for various reasons, one being that Byrne admired his work and the other being that he knew what he was doing more, so "He knew what not to do." (Antonio Silva, 2007, 1:28) What makes Byrne and his work with collaborators interesting is that the collaborators often bring their own skills and styles that ultimately enhance Byrne's self-adaptation in various ways. Demme comes through in a multitude of ways in the film, both in ways that speak volumes to his directing ability and directorial understanding and in ways that drive Byrne's artistic intentions.

Across all four sessions, Demme employs heavy use of different shots and camera movements. The film is filled with long takes, close-ups, and dynamic camera movements that focus on Byrne, the band, and the audience, depending on the narrative established through a relationship between the lyrics, the staging, and Byrne's performance. Demme's skill, paired with his work with cinematographer Jordon Cronenworth, shows a consistent directorial work that captures energy, immediacy, and intimacy, coming through as if the viewer were present in the live concert atmosphere. Another element where Demme, as a director, becomes present is when the concert is considered from the narrative perspective. Clearly, through the way Byrne lined up the songs and chose to utilize the set, the band is building up his narrative, and Demme, with the balance of focusing on performance, set, and performer, is capturing narrative

storytelling. Figure 8, for instance, shows Demme's use of close-ups to consistently and meaningfully go between the bigger picture and the details of Byrne and the band to capture movement and expression.



Figure 8. Demme captures all narrative elements for each song, including this one from “This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody)”

Figure 9, which is a continuation of Figure 8, shows how Demme's framing and the interchange between capturing expression, movement, interaction, and set aid Byrne in at self-adapting as both the physical structure as well as the filming of the music video for “This Must be the Place” (Byrne, 1983) where the group along with the same back-up singers, Lynn Mabry and Ednah Holt, are in a familial situation that is also depicted in the song and video.



Figure 9. The band performing “This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody).”

Many other details, such as Demme working alongside editor Lisa Day in creating rhythmic precision in the way the film is put together, also contribute to Demme and his style; still, all of these critical elements combine to enhance Byrne. David Byrne's self-adaptation extends beyond music to encompass visual and theatrical elements of the performance, and it is through Demme's ability to capture and sequence the details that the adaptation becomes visible. Lastly, it is essential to note that this project also allowed Demme to develop a consistent style for filming concert films as he demonstrates similar traits in *Neil Young: Heart of Gold* (Demme, 2006), which follows a similar structure and carries glimpses of Young performing self-adaptation which will be discussed in chapter five.

Following this, Byrne's self-adaptation in the film has degrees. While they all contribute to the larger sum, a small grouping to concisely highlight how he does so. The film shows Byrne adapting from his previously established works and styles in two

ways: firstly, with his directorial style coming through in set design and overall production and, secondly, with a performative and image-based adaptation.

Since self-adaptation is so heavily dependent on the self, the elements mentioned above revolve around understanding how Byrne, in particular, is using what he played around with in the early days of Talking Heads on a much bigger and different platform. Byrne has an easily recognizable directorial style that depends on the use of set, props, and performance. The set often carries importance in his videos and adds to what is trying to be conveyed in the song, either literally or regarding its feeling. This is no different in *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984). Byrne, who was the lead in creating the look of the concert film, adds a familiar element that shows an adaptation for the stage. He relies heavily on one or two props. For example, as seen in Figures 10 and 11, Byrne is center stage with an object. He uses the lamp and the stereo along with others to create a dynamic relationship with himself, his performance and the stage design to convey the song but also to convey continuity that becomes self-adaptation. For instance, the lamp is a reference to the domestic and familial element that he brought to the music video of “This Must Be the Place” (Byrne, 1983), meaning there is a utilization of creating markers that the audience can pinpoint the origin and as a result see how or even why it is being adapted to the stage. The idea of the stereo is similar. Although “Psycho Killer” (Talking Heads, 1977) does not have a music video, the way Byrne utilizes it is emotional and lyrical, whereas, in the concert film, the song is performed by just Byrne and the stereo next to him. This element of alienation and media saturation, rather literally, he is left alone with the stereo, reflects the song’s nature of alienation,

paranoia, and the changing nature of the world he is living in. This is further emphasized by Byrne's physicality, which widens his eyes, and he acts slightly uncomfortable while singing the lyrics. He takes the song lyrically and makes the auditory into visual via props and performance.



Figure 10. Byrne dancing with the lamp while performing “This Must be the Place. (Naive Melody)”



Figure 11. Byrne performing “Psycho Killer” alone with his stereo.

Another way he utilizes props and their presence on stage is by creating adapted markers with costumes and himself. As established previously, in self-adaptation, the self trumps the form of media in the manner of assessing the form and extent the of adaptation. While using costumes or small props may be difficult to comment on in regards to being adapted from music video/interview to concert film because these elements are not inherently “media-based,” the essence is that the self, in this case, Byrne, is the one shaping the media by mixing said media’s own structure with himself and his traits. For example, in Figure 12 Byrne uses the same glasses and an almost identical suit from the “Once in a Lifetime” (Byrne, 1980) music video directed by Byrne (see Figure 2). He is taking the image and feeling of the “every-man” he created with his music, particularly this song, and bringing it onto a physical stage and recorded media.



Figure 12. David Byrne performing “Once in a Lifetime” with a similar costume to the music video of the same song.

Not only is he self-adapting for his style and traits to continue in new platforms and formats, he is also preparing for future works in the sense of establishing specific moments of self-adaptation, and the best example of this is the segue into the performative element of Byrne's self-adaptation is regarding the Big Suit. In the promotional video discussed above and Figure 13, Byrne is wearing the now iconic and easily recognizable big suit. The video lays the foundation for the big suit to become solidified as an irreplaceable part of Byrne and his work.



Figure 13. David Byrne interviewing himself in the promotional video for the concert film while wearing his famous Big Suit.

In Figure 14, he is wearing the suit and performing in his trademark manner (highly energetic, erratic, and unique) to “Girlfriend is Better” (Talking Heads, 1983). The exaggerated size of the suit enhances Byrne's movements and creates a surreal visual moment, adding layers of meaning to the performance. Once more, he is building upon

the markers he put down before this concert film, the ones in music videos where he uses exaggeration as a mechanism to develop his style and convey his stories.



Figure 14. Byrne dancing in the big suit to “Girlfriend is Better.”

The suit also carries symbolic meanings in regards to representing Byrne’s themes, such as conformity, alienation, and identity. Not only does the suit become an inherit Byrne trait, but it also shows the impact of time in relation to self-adaptation because, not only does the suit remain a constant regardless of the media changes it also is an example of the performative element of self-adaptation.

Lastly, elements in the concert film highlight how Byrne applies both his directorial and performative styles to the new platform. He, along with Demme, structures all four nights of filming in a manner that mimics the music videos and the structure of the band. Simply put, Byrne is consistently placed in the center, literally and figuratively, and the band is the accompanying element.

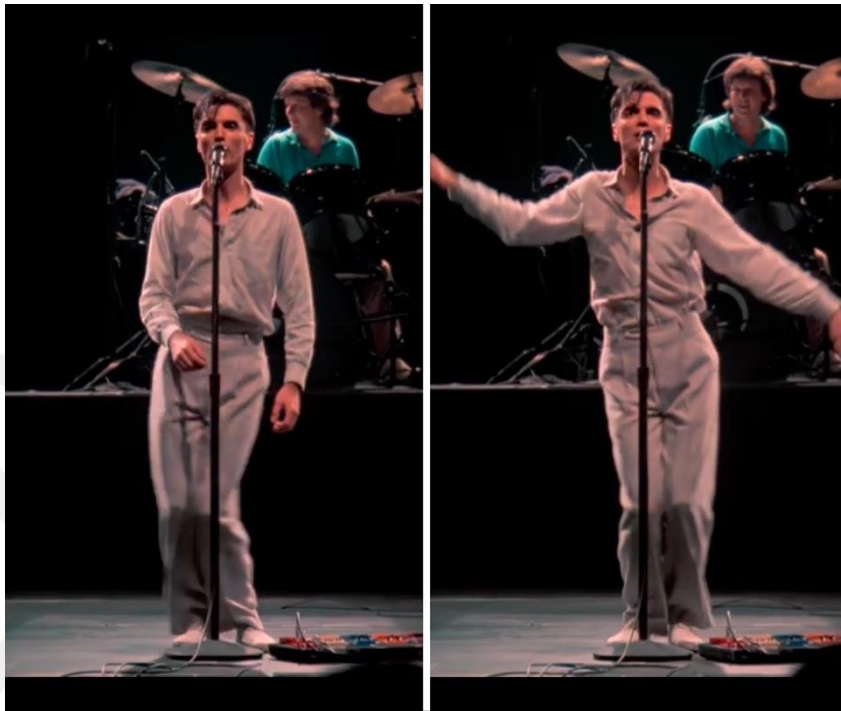


Figure 15. David Byrne performing and dancing to “Life During Wartime”.

In Figure 15, Byrne, while performing “Life During Wartime” (Talking Heads, 1979), is on center stage, and the cinematography and the set design are done to support this balance. The song and its performance revolve around Byrne's delivery and have particular points in which the cuts remind the audience watching that the band is the accompanying factor. For instance, in Figure 16, the continuation of the song performance adds the band to the performance. There is a clear line of distinction between the band and Byrne. It is important to note that these are not coincidental elements as the film was curated from four nights of performances, resulting in the choices to sequence footage in this manner is deliberate and works to create the said distinction where Byrne stands out not necessarily as the “front man” but as an

individual artist.



Figure 16. The opening credits for Stop Making Sense.

Even the film's credits give direct authority to Byrne, as seen in Figure 16. This distinction, almost a separation, achieves a few things. Firstly, the self becomes more identifiable and singular, and the factors attributed to the band become more deeply rooted in Byrne. Secondly, by changing the media in which he is doing this, he gives himself more control to evolve his performance and gradually introduce new elements that enhance the experience and reflect the music's and the performer's progression. Lastly, he is preparing for a future body of works and performances that will become self-adaptations, some of which will be adapted from this particular work. Essentially, *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984) acts as a turning point for Byrne by arguably being the first extensive work of self-adaptation encompassing various sides of self-adaptation, such as directorial, performative, and thematic.

4.4. *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986)

In 1986, Byrne released *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986), his first and currently only narrative feature film. Byrne takes on the director, co-writer (with Stephen Tobolowsky and Beth Henley), actor, and composer roles, making the authority apparent. The film takes place in the fictional town of Virgil, Texas. It follows a group of eccentric characters as they prepare for the town's "Celebration of Specialness" to commemorate the state's sesquicentennial. The main character, played by Byrne himself, is a nameless narrator who drives around the town observing the peculiarities of its inhabitants. These characters include Louis Fyne, a bachelor looking for love through a personal ad; the Culvers, a family of religious fundamentalists; the Lazy Woman, who refuses to get out of bed; and the Lying Woman, who cannot seem to stop lying. The film combines elements of comedy, musical numbers, and social commentary; as the celebration approaches, the town becomes increasingly chaotic, culminating in an equally chaotic parade featuring floats and performances.

The work represents a multitude of ways Byrne employs self-adaptation. The most prominent manner is thematic, as the subjects he delves into from start to finish reflect continuity from his lyrical work in *Talking Heads*. He later expanded and adopted these themes in other works, such as *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020).

Self-adaptation is apparent in the most fundamental sense as Byrne takes his already established themes and applies them to a new medium, film. Rather literally, he shifts from song to film in a multi-disciplinary manner, combining documentary-style filmmaking, fictional narrative film, and musical film to create *True Stories* (Byrne,

1986). He applies himself and his themes to create a work where he is the prominent authority both creatively and concerning image/persona.

However, Byrne manages to add to his self-adaptation by involving more people, stories, and characters that reflect this adaptation. As mentioned above, this work's most prominent self-adaptation occurs through thematic adaptation. The themes are those of his original works and songs, where he presents cultural observations regarding consumerism, human relations, suburban life, technology, the “meaning of life,” etc. In order to present a detailed yet concise reading of this particular work, the case study will aim to go mostly chronologically and by grouping the specific themes/arguments. The film, similar to the majority of Byrne’s works, reflects this idea of looking at America and American society from the outside. Byrne, the quintessential stranger and everyman places himself as that in the story.

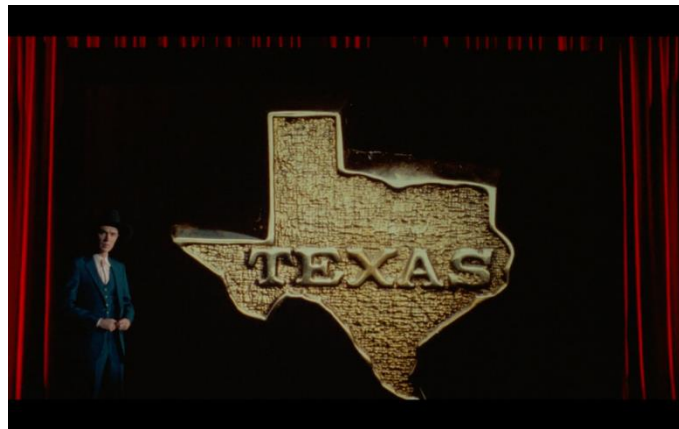


Figure 17. Byrne at the start of the film as the narrator who is explaining the town of Virgil and how it came to be with a detailed speech on American history.

Figure 17 shows Byrne as the narrator of the film, giving a quick history lesson about the fictional town of Virgil by going over elements of American history that range from the present day all the way back to the Mesozoic Era. This initial introduction to the story in a fourth wall break, documentary-like manner that places Byrne as the central story-teller already resembles the form and the type of adaptation he performed in *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984). While other figures certainly support the thematic element of self-adaptation, as was the case in the concert film where the band was that supporting element, the tone and set-up are clear in the opening scenes. Additionally, the focus on American culture and society is also a foreshadowing for future works, mainly *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020)



Figure 18. Byrnes character, the narrator, explaining what he came to see in Virgil, Texas.

One of Byrne's primary focuses as an artist and lyricist is in relation to the human experience, their relationships, their emotions, and their unique selves, as was established with the analysis of song lyrics. This film not only centers the story on this theme but it also visualizes it in various manners. As seen in Figure 18, the film is built

on anticipation for the upcoming “celebration of specialness,” where the idea is that the inhabitants of Virgil will come together to celebrate the town and themselves by being themselves. Byrne, with the story, creates this structure of “a movie/story for people by people” when the start, almost as if he were visualizing and, in return, telling the stories of the “figures” mentioned in his musical work. This narrative complexity, where Byrne brings together his past works into a new medium, is the prominent way self-adaptation is practiced via this work. Integration of intertexts, the intertextuality of the film, becomes the backbone in assessing the self-adaptation as well as the story itself because it depends upon a reinterpretation and later re-expression of what Byrne established as a musical figure, his persona. Most certainly, additional information is not a pre-requisite for enjoying the work; however, the references Byrne makes related to himself and his works become the touchstone of this work, becoming one of self-adaptation.



Figure 19. “Computer Guy” expressing the importance of technology and computers.

Indeed, he plays around with making more direct and less prominent references, yet essentially, the film is built upon a return and addition to his themes. For instance,

Byrne displays an understanding of the changing times in relation to culture, society, and technology, a subject matter in which he has shown interest. Figure 19 occurs after Byrne's character is given a tour of the local factory by the character "computer guy," who understands that the world is changing and that the factory has a different kind of attitude towards these changes by embracing them. He also goes as far as to compare computers claiming music and that they are both so deep in their functions and meanings that they are equally challenging to understand. The quote in Figure 19 reflects Byrne's perception of the impact of technology and its importance and place in that period's society. Byrne, who has already shown an interest in this topic with songs such as "Life During Wartime" (Talking Heads, 1979), does so again and will do so again with *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020) as well as more personal works such as his non-fiction book *How Music Works* (Byrne, 2012) where he has dedicated chapters to how technology has influenced him as a person and musician.

Figure 19 is a more subtle example of how Byrne places references in the story. While Byrne delivered the self-adaptation through his directorial style, his image, or his themes, due to the nature of this medium as well as Byrne's attempt to involve more "people," he makes other characters/people the "every-man" he had embodied. The most critical figure in this is Louis Fyne, played by John Goodman. Fyne is the traditional average Joe who works nine to five and has a dream of falling in love and finding a wife.



Figure 20. An introduction to Louis Fyne.



Figure 21. Louis Fyne's house with a "Wife Wanted" sign outside.

This figure, previously embodied by Byrne, has now changed vehicles. Figure 20 and Figure 21 show the set-up of Louis's character. He works in the factory that Byrne visits, is aware of the changing times, has dreams, and has attempts to achieve those dreams. At his core, Louis is the exact every man Byrne carved out with his songs and

had previously represented himself. He represents Byrne's own exploration and identity, the way he established it both lyrically and publicly. The themes Byrne is known for, such as isolation, alienation, search for meaning, and emotional connections, come through with Louis's character. There is also the image that Byrne has cultivated publicly and its connection to Louis. Byrnes's image and persona are eccentric and quirky and reflect creatively on non-conformity by his sheer existence and compared to the majority of the citizens of Virgil, Louis is exactly that. He displays emotional depth through his desires, something generally lacking from the citizens of Virgil, as well as being artistic and creative by singing the song "People Like Us" (Byrne & Harrison, 1986), originally written by David Byrne and Jerry Harrison, but was written by Fyne in the story. This delicate balance between the integration of the quotidian and the extraordinary that Louis is structured to embody is not only Byrne's but also Byrnes's works, and the multilayered nature that one figure conveys the story is inherently David Byrne's. This is most certainly not a coincidental occurrence as not only are the markers clearly present in the story and in the character, but Byrne makes a deliberate effort for his character and Louis to be placed side-by-side in the story to have discussion based on the particular themes.

Another critical matter about Byrne and the persona he expresses in the film comes with the question of the Talking Heads. His previous musical work, *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), establishes the band as secondary but pivotal. They are elements of Byrne as an individual and are part of what he is adapting from. However, this work sees a different form of separation from this idea. Indeed, he is not dissociating himself from his band, nor is he ridding himself of the band front man persona. He is

developing the self in not only another medium and moving the established self to that medium. Essentially, Byrne is not getting rid of his musical identity and is integrating it into a more fictional scope.



Figure 22. Both the actors and the band perform “Wild Wild Life” in the film.

A critical scene where this reassurance of Byrne’s identity as a musician happens in Figure 22. A few days before the Celebration of Specialness, the town gets together in the local bar, and a karaoke show ensues. The scene has particular markers that reflect elements of Byrne's specific self-adaptation. Firstly, even before the analysis of the scene, the song, and the related music video, it is important to highlight that the character Byrne places solely in this scene, is credited as “Lip-Syncer,” is the one that

he used and portrayed in the promotional video for *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), seen in Figure 7. Although very specific and arguably more challenging to distinguish, it is a strong marker of Byrne's self-awareness while performing self-adaptation.

Going back to the film and the utilization of the band, the members other than Byrne are not the “Talking Heads” but are characters for the film. Jerry Harrison, Chris Frantz, and Tina Weymouth are all credited as Lip-syncers and appear in only two scenes essentially as musicians. Even though the band has no pervasive presence in the film as characters or figures of authority, they are critical because they act as a bridge for Byrne’s evolution of performance from the perspective of engaging with audiences in a new manner. The band is the focal factor for comparing Byrne’s roots and what he is evolving into. The presence of the band and the music is the connection to Byrnes's foundation, which is music and as a musician, but his separation from them during the film and in regards to the story as a whole reflects a direction in which he is adapting.



Figure 23. Talking Heads music video for “Love on Sale” playing on the TV.

Figure 23 is the second instance in which the band plays a critical role in the film. In the scene, the character of The Lazy Woman is watching television and passes through the channels where we see an abundance of American commercials and the occasional “Love for Sale” (Talking Heads, 1986) music video playing in between them. The video that plays on the television in this scene is the exact one the band released as a music video, including the mentioned commercials, minus the scene where the Lazy Woman makes comments. Compared to Figure 23, this is a more direct reference to Byrne as an element of Talking Heads. He does not act as the narrator or the creator of the film, he is simply David Byrne of the Talking Heads, and the music video of which he is the director is playing as a part of his story and film. The dual relationship between these two figures points to a critical marker of self-adaptation in general: the necessity for the hypotext(s) to be visible and understandable. Byrne does not attempt to create a fully new and

separate work/identity from his origins, he aims to and then achieves the evolution, the adaptation. This combats concerns of whether or not something is an artistic direction change or self-adaptation. Certainly, Byrne is changing but doing so in ways and to degrees that are compatible his established foundation.

Byrne, in a more subtle manner compared to the character of Louis, is expanding his image and performance onto other figures as an attempt to sprinkle in the markers that lead to a work of self-adaptation. In Figure 24, the average Joe-type man in the grey suit who does an eccentric dance reminds the audience of Byrne in performative style. The suit becomes a critical element to examine here because not only is it a grey suit, something utilized in *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984) and later in *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020), it is also a suit worn by an unmade figure that dances in the manner of Byrne, a direct visual and thematic reference to Byrne's songs and performances. If anything, Byrne builds the structure of self-adaptation that can often be detail-oriented and one that really pushes forth the self in self-adaptation.



Figure 24. Man in a grey suit dancing in secret

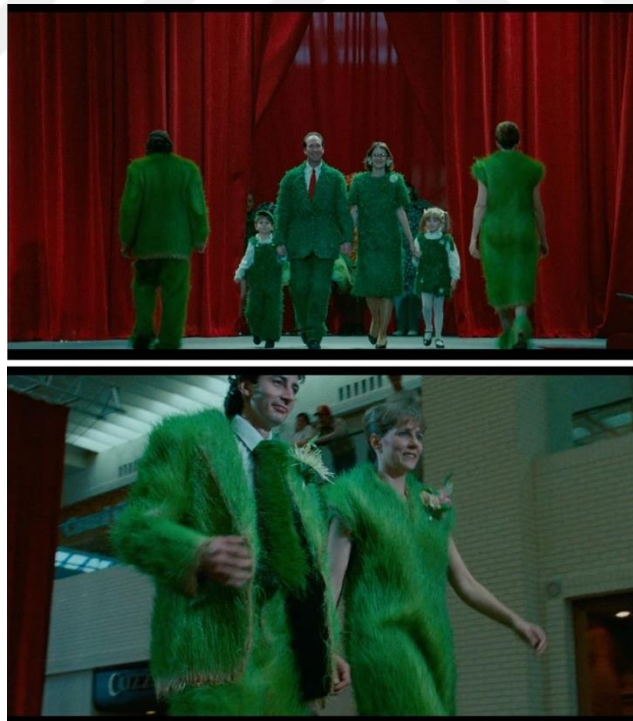


Figure 25. Characters from the fashion show scene in grass, leaf and greenery suits.

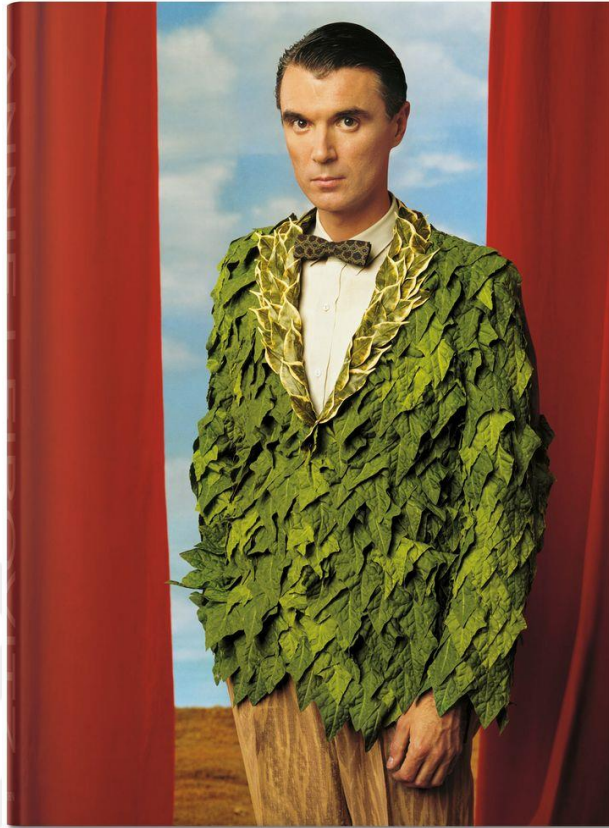


Figure 26. Byrne, wearing an ivy jacket designed by Adelle Lutz for “True Stories,”. Photographed by Annie Leibovitz for Vanity Fair’s October 1986 issue.

He continues this reference point regarding suits, as seen in Figure 25. While the scene in Figure 25 has similar and signature grey suits as well, these particular suits carry another importance because they directly reference Byrne's self-image and celebrity persona.

Figure 26, a photograph taken by Annie Leibovitz in Los Angeles for Vanity Fair’s October 1986 issue, shows Byrne in a leaf-laced and detailed suit designed by Adelle Lutz (Byrne’s wife at the time).¹This particular suit does not appear in the film, although it has been recorded that it was designed for Byrne to wear in the film. The idea is a self-

¹ <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/annie-leibovitz-david-byrne-los-angeles-1986-signed-numbered-and-framed-chromaluxe-aluminum-print-with-accompanying-book>

adaptation, hence the continuation of image which is directly associated with Byrne. An element of self-adaptation is an association where the audience, listener or viewer, can see the links between the artist, there past, present, and future works. With each subdivision of *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986) manages to do so, where the starting and ending points are him.



Figure 27. Byrne narrating an introduction for the Lazy Woman



Figure 28. The Lazy Woman explaining her perspective on food prices.

To focus again, more on the thematic portion of the study, a prominent theme that Byrne has showcased from the beginning of his career is a subtle discussion around changing times and how it impacts distinctive parts of life. Specifically, he delves into themes of American culture, consumer culture, new society and people, similar to the topics he had covered with “Once in a Lifetime” (Talking Heads, 1980) and “Life During Wartime” (Talking Heads, 1979). He once again depends upon the Lazy Women to give the most direct delivery of these elements.

The lazy woman embodies a certain attitude towards life, one characterized by a lack of urgency yet with concrete opinions about how things should be. Figure 28 shows her in bed with an automated machine that flips her magazine pages for her because she is too lazy to do it herself. She is the embodiment of the “unique” but also real characters that Byrne has taken an interest in throughout his career. The idea that she has regarding the hot dogs and the logical and economical retaliation of this is not only humorous but also an observation by Byrne that displays a real state of people and society. While he tackles how consumer culture was in the mid-80s setting in West, he also continues and visualizing his source material, which are literally true stories.



Figure 29. The commercials that play as the Lazy Woman watches television.

Figure 29 demonstrates how the woman uses her time, energy, and resources. Byrne sketches an intriguing character that not only resembles the figures mentioned in his lyrical work but also once directly related to the element of culture Byrne is trying to convey. The fact that character is highly familiar with the consumer culture prevailing in that time in society. The food commercials, along with other product-related commercials, highlight the relation between the individual and the circumstance, regardless of what that circumstance may be. Interestingly, the character has an element of duality regarding her laziness where she represents Byrne's interest in non-conformity. The people of Virgil all share the trait that they are very active and involved not just in the community but also have an enthusiastic relationship with life, whereas the Lazy woman goes against the grain. She can be perceived as a multifaceted figure who challenges conventional notions of living and fulfillment within consumer culture and American society.

To add on to the thematic continuation of consumer culture and its impression on society, Byrne attempts to create a more visual look at the themes of his music.

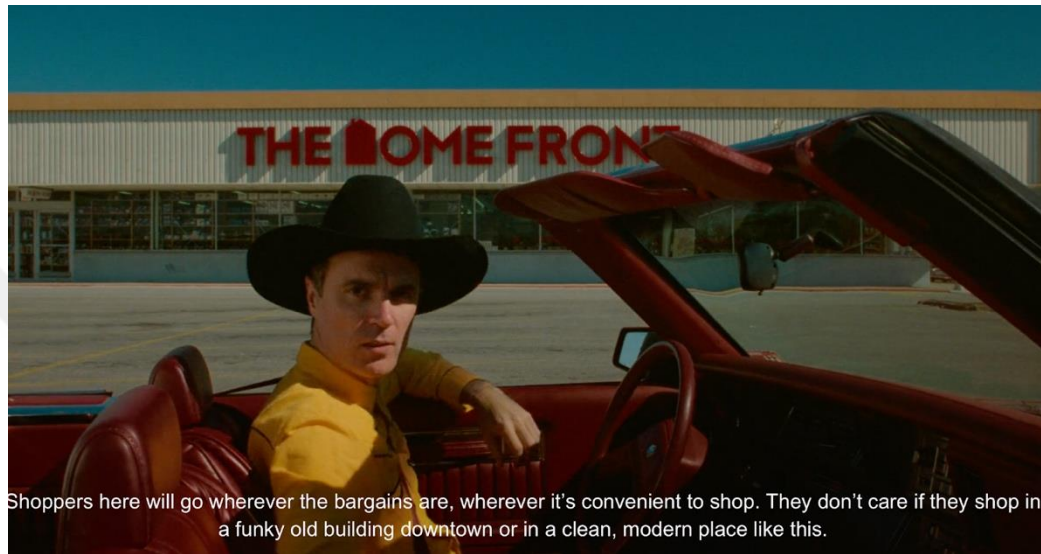


Figure 30. Byrne as the narrator explaining mall and shopping culture.

Figure 30 is just one of the film's many frames and moments, reflecting an observation and assessment of the current state of people and society. Taking into consideration the time the film was made and the structure of society in connection with consumer culture where the '80s saw a growing interest in malls, Byrne is taking his lyrical focus, evolving it and creating a self-adaptation of his themes that are not only in a new medium but one that directly reflects the element of time that shapes a self-adaptation.

Figure 31 captures this manner of self-adaptation, going even further with the use of the Culver family. The Culver family is already an interesting evolution on Byrne's themes. As stated previously, Byrne concentrates on human relations greatly but usually from a more positive perspective, at least one where the relations he is trying to communicate

are simply rooted in an emotional connection. The Culver family, which consists of Kay and Earl Culver, played by Annie McEnroe and Spalding Grey, respectively and their two children, reflect a shift away from this emotion-fueled relationship. The couple, who appear to be the town's golden couple, do not speak a word to each other and only communicate through their children or other guests. While this can be interpreted in many ways, perhaps as Byrne's somewhat sarcastic perspective on the current state of relationships, the critical matter is that he is changing his own approach to this theme with the consideration of the current state of life, this "new society." In addition to this, Earl Culver's comment in the figure regarding how business is changing and how it fuels the premise that change is the prominent player in Byrnes self-adaptation.



Figure 31. The Culver family having dinner with the narrator.

He sees the changes and shifts. Without abandoning his previously cultivated image and thematic/lyrical focus, he tackles it in a rather literally “true” way by taking headlines he had read in newspapers and making them into reality. It is also important to note that the film does not solely perform thematic self-adaptation but also utilizes Byrne’s stage and directorial style, as even the bottom shot in Figure 31 is very prop-filled and depicts one other interest Byrne which is food.



Figure 32. Byrne roaming around and assessing one of the many malls of Virgil.

Ultimately, Byrne creates a story of human connections, regardless of their quality, and presents it visually, almost as if he were visualizing his lyrics. Figure 32 shows another example of Byrne's people-focused outlook. His assessment of people changing and, in return, life-changing is not only on track with his general style but also shows that he is not necessarily “making up” stories or events for songs but taking his themes and laying them another foundation.



Figure 33. Byrne is often driving in this film and consistently comments on the structures, buildings and highways.



Figure 34. Byrne once again driving around the town to comment on buildings and having a conversation with Earl Culver about what they mean.

Another aspect of the lyrical analysis is that Byrne extensively focuses on architecture and its relation to humans. This story is no different from that. Figures 33 and 34 give prominence to the specific focus that Byrne has. Architecture is reflected in the visual composition of the film. He captures the essence of the unique architectural styles in the town, representing America on a larger scale. Through his exploration of architecture and highways, Byrne provides a cultural commentary on American society where he examines how these elements shape people's lives and interactions, offering insights into the complexities of the American landscape, both architecture and society. For example, in the top frame in Figure 34, Byrne holds a remotely sarcastic tone while making the assessment, but he aims to accentuate the idea of how houses or structures build people and how that, in return, shapes American society. The assessment becomes an exploration similar to that of his songs. This is deeply intertwined with his own artistic evolution, as it has also impacted his later works. While there are different ways of approaching this, the last studio album from Talking Heads, entitled *Naked* (1988), which came out after the album of *True Stories* (1986), really mimics the story Byrne tells with his focus on architecture, urban life, and structures in this film. The song “(Nothing But) Flowers” (Talking Heads, 1988), in particular, captures a reversal of themes for example, chorus one is as follows,

There was a factory
Now there are mountains and rivers
You've got it, you've got it
We caught a rattlesnake
Now we've got something for dinner
You've got it, you've got it
There was a shopping mall
Now it's all covered with flowers
You've got it, you've got it (Byrne, 1988)

The song personifies the observations Byrne makes in the film and continues to reflect his self-adaptation, where he holds on to his roots but works upon them, in this case, working on performing self-adaptation by taking from his movie. In the song, the figure finds themselves in a world where urbanization and modern civilization, similar to that of Virgil, have been taken over by nature. It is a reversal of what we see in the film and perfectly depicts the interplay Byrne has amongst his own intertexts. Here, Byrne is very clearly self-adapting from his self-adaptations. Additionally, it carries a strong sense of change. This change might have also been literal signaling the change for the band, as they disbanded soon after, and Byrne began a prominent solo career that expanded on these themes. While Byrne uses irony and satire to “act” as if this return to nature is inherently distressing, he expects the listener to catch the tone and understand the positive in the matter. He does this in the film by calling a beige brick one-story home “beautiful” and matching that with a shot of the same house over and over again. The juxtapositions in the lyrics which contrast images of civilization with nature, highlight the tensions between progress and nature. This is similar to the tone of the film where certainly “progress” is evident by from Byrne’s outlook, the question remains, is it really that good? Byrne continues to adapt from the thought-provoking perspective, utilized in all of his works, and the transition from film to lyric in relation to self-adaptation is direct. The lyrics resonate with the film’s themes, and both end up as explorations of the social and cultural states.

While there is an extensive list of approaches Byrne has towards practicing self-adaptation just with this film alone, the notable and prominent one is indeed the

thematic self-adaptation Byrne displays where *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986) stands as a testament to his prowess as a multi-dimensional artist, transitioning from music to film while maintaining thematic coherence. Through this analysis, Byrne's practice of self-adaptation is displayed in his thematic continuity, visual motifs, character representations, and references to his own artistic evolution. The work is an arch between Byrne's past and future works, connecting his music with Talking Heads and subsequent solo endeavors. The film embodies Byrne's creative evolution while remaining rooted in his distinctive style and thematic preoccupations. The film's last line ultimately sums up Byrne and the connection between the past, present, and future in a balanced way.



Figure 35. The last line of the film Byrne narrates while he is leaving Virgil.

Figure 35 incorporates the majority of Byrnes's themes, such as the idea of alienation, life, human connections, and the self in connection to all of these factors. Through

Byrne's distinct narrative style, the viewer is immersed in a inherently Byrne-esque world, where every element, from the characters to the setting, resonates with his creative blueprint. Figure 35 serves as a culmination of Byrne's thematic exploration in *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986), offering a poignant reflection on the human condition and the intricacies of our shared experience, which is the pinnacle of the self-adaptation being practiced here. The line itself encapsulates a significant observation about human perception and the ability to adapt as humans to the changing world. The initial stage of being introduced to the new is a profound experience according to Byrne's quote. The awareness in the initial stages comes from a place of excitement and sensitivity, prompted by this introduction to the unfamiliar. It is important to note that the things Byrne mentions as noticing are the elements of simplicity, which he finds significantly extraordinary in his lyrics. As the unfamiliar becomes the familiar, one becomes habituated in a way that breeds disregard for the elements that makes something what it is, what makes it unique. The novelty wears off and one no longer reflects on small details in a profound manner. Forgetting for Byrne is the remedy. When one forgets the perceptions and judgements they made about a certain place or something, they can again see it for what it truly is. Forgetting allows us to shed the layers of habit and perception that obscure our vision, enabling us to reencounter, reexperience and reimagine, things from a fresh perspective. By acknowledging the value of forgetting, Byrne's character emphasizes the importance of maintaining a sense of curiosity and wonder about the world.

Although this most likely was not the case when Byrne constructed the line and idea, notion that forgetting can bring new insights how self-adaptation functions. A work is made, experienced for the first time and appreciated with all of its details. Through time which brings social, cultural and structural changes, a work may not fade into the background but through an artist's other works, overtime it can be reutilized, be remember again, but with a fresh adapted form that takes these inescapable changes into consideration.

4.5. *American Utopia* (Byrne, 2018) and *David Byrne's American Utopia* (Lee, 2020)

While the three studies above were much closer in terms of their release dates, *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020) holds a great deal of the elements which Byrne uses to perform self-adaptation. While Byrne has certainly created and has taken part in various projects ranging from film to becoming an author, the Broadway show, later filmed and released as *David Byrne's American Utopia* (Lee, 2020), stands in a unique position.

Originally, the title hails from Byrne's eighth solo studio album, released in 2018. The album was a part of a larger project created by Byrne called "Reason to Be Cheerful" started in 2016, where he collected good news and gave presentations in New York as a form of therapy. The project, much like the show and film written by Byrne, showed considerable awareness of culture, society and the passage of time from his lyrical work although the way to the production of this show, considering current concerns regarding diversity, the environmental crisis, and political strife.

The studio album, which had similar aims, influenced Byrne to write the Broadway show *American Utopia* (Byrne, 2019). The show follows Byrne and a group of artists as they go through a catalog of Byrne songs (both Talking Heads and his solo work), playing their instruments and dancing along with the choreography. While the show does have a script and it follows a consistent order: a song is performed, and Byrne gives a speech or tells a story that paves the way for the upcoming song to be performed. Byrne tackles many topics ranging from himself to political matters and movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement.² While the show and the film version directed by Spike Lee show the same story, the film implements some materials and elements that are allowed by the presence of cinematic techniques as well as having a seasoned director such as Lee. For this reason, the study will analyze the filmed version of the show due to the abundance of discussion points it brings forth compared to the live show as well as the fact that it is more accessible due to the performed show having finished its run.

An integral point that needs to be considered first is the element of having an additional source of authority, in this case, Spike Lee. As with Jonathan Demme and style in *Stop Making Sense* (1984), Lee provides additional foundational elements, which, are visible and of value to the work. Dynamic camera work and the ability to weave footage into narrative skillfully have always been a part of Lee's strongest abilities as a director and

² Byrne's show is in the list of a growing number of "Jukebox Musicals" which add narrative to songs from a single group or artist. These songs have often been around for a significant amount of time and are well known by fans. *Summer: The Donna Summer Musical* (McAnuff, 2018), *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical* (Lloyd, 2018) and *Jagged Little Pill* (Paulus, 2018) are some recent examples of these musicals.

something he has been praised for throughout his career.³ This addition greatly benefits the story due to the capturing of live elements on the recording. However, Lee makes an addition to the political commentary Byrne aims to make with a segment of the performance

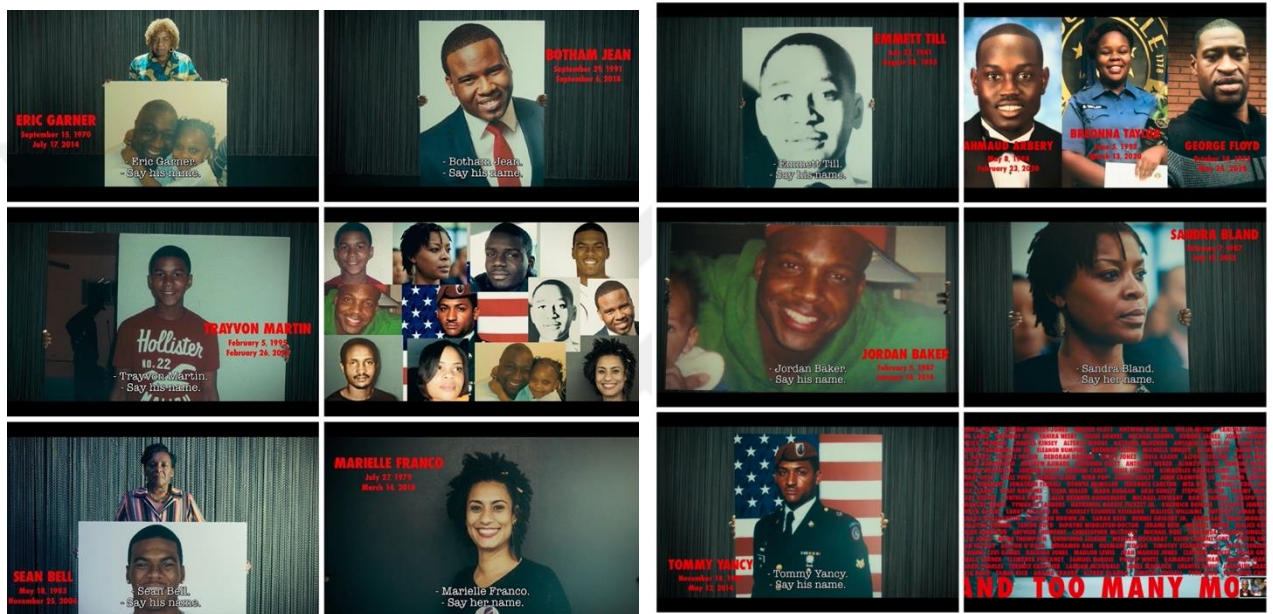


Figure 36 & 37. Frames of and photos with names listing victims of police brutality in (mostly) recent American history that take place during the performance of Janelle Monae's anthem *Hell You Talmbout*.

Figures 36 and 37 come from towards the end of the performance, where Byrne and his musicians are singing *Hell You Talmbout* (Monae, 2015), originally written by musician Janelle Monáe as a protest song against black people who were killed as a result of law enforcement or racial violence. The song lists the names of these individuals in a chant-like manner. The original stage performance of this song only depicts the performance

³ Lee has received notable awards and nominations for his work as a filmmaker, both directing and screenwriting. As of now he has received five Academy Award nominations and has won for Best Adapted Screenplay in 2019 for *BlacKkKlansman* (Lee, 2018).

on stage without any visual additions to the scene. In the filmed version of the work, Lee's addition takes become prominent. Lee is known for tackling heavy subject matter such as racial identity and injustice, cultural heritage, intersectionality, and resilience with films such as *Do the Right Thing* (Lee, 1989), *Malcolm X* (Lee, 1992), and *BlackKkKlansman* (Lee, 2018), brings this out with the additions he makes in Figure 36 and 37. He has added not only the images of these victims but even further incorporated some family members who are seen holding up their relative's images. Not only does this achieve an undeniably direct touch from Lee that melds perfectly with Byrne's aim, but it also highlights how when self-adaptation has collaboration such as these, the collaborators can contribute their own signature aesthetic synergistically. Lee, who also relies significantly on music in his films, connects with Byrne, who is modeling his foundational work by tackling contemporary and racial subject matters such as the one in "Hell You Talmbout" (Monae, 2015). The continuation of the case study will return to Monae and the importance of her work for Byrne's work. The three artists' visions meet, and Byrne is able to make additions to his self-adaptation through this creative collaboration.

Having established the element of another creative influence in Byrne's self-adaptation, it is equally essential to clarify the choice to use *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020) as one of the biggest texts in this case study. This work, in particular, is a 360-degree look at not just Byrne as an artist but also how self-adaptation has involved in a manner that covers all of the grounds mentioned in this study. The work holds various elements of Byrne's

directorial, image-based, thematic, and time-related self-adaptations in, and this encompassment of all of these factors results in a multifaceted work of self-adaptation.

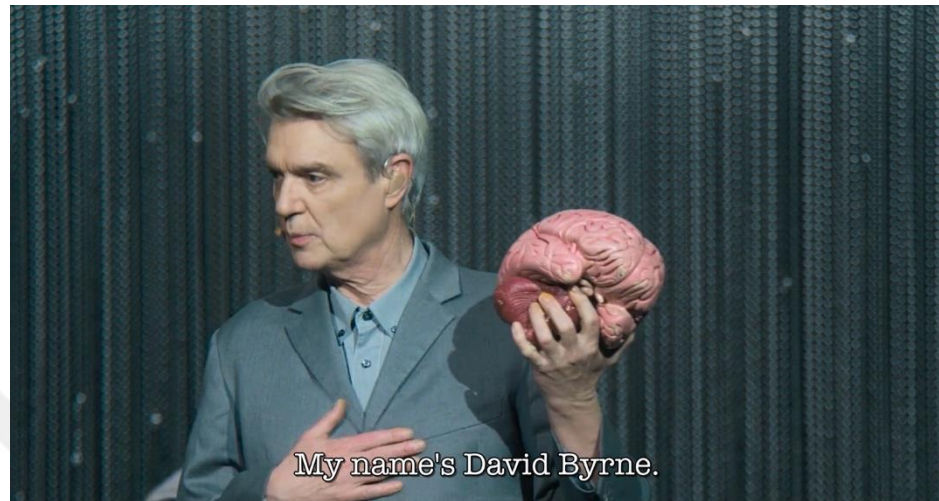


Figure 38. Byrne introducing the show and himself after the opening song is performed.

To go in order, the first thing that becomes clear is that this work is indeed a Byrne self-adaptation regardless of its collaborative nature. Figure 38 is one of the first sentences spoken in the show after the first song “Here” (Byrne, 2018). Byrne not only set the stage for the show to be about his reflections as an artist but also prepared the audience to show that the pinnacle of the show is indeed Byrne. He brings the center of his songs and music videos, his reflections on others and life, to the physical stage in interaction with the musicians and the audience. He adds to this Byrne style and Byrne-centered approach with clever and innovative staging. The chapter has established that Byrne, in both his music videos and *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), has a recognizable style in terms of staging and use of space, which very prominently comes through in the show.



Figure 39. Byrne and his musicians on stage with matching grey suits, fully immersed with the staging.

Figure 39 is a direct depiction of Byrne's style coming to life. One of the most striking aspects of the show is its innovative staging and use of multimedia. It holds a minimalist setup, with all the musicians mobile and unimpeded by equipment. This allows for seamless movement and interaction on stage, much like that of *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984). To break it down, Byrne implements himself onto the stage and its setup with the addition of technological elements such as a unique lighting system in which the performers had sensors connected to the shoulders of their suits, allowing the light system to follow each individual as they moved. The show and this set-up genuinely engage with the space and current state of multimedia and technology and underline Byrne's ability to adapt and evolve his style to a different medium and, more specifically, a different physical space that requires its own formatting. Additionally, the grey suit marker makes its appearance again, this time in a more unisex and subtle style to fit every member on stage in a harmonious manner. The unique and intelligent use of physical space and props allows Byrne to carry his work and style in front of a

live but contemporary audience. He is not simply mimicking past work; he is expanding it.

Like the majority of the works examined here, this work also shows thematic self-adaptation from Byrne. This work heavily focuses on the human-based interaction Byrne has with themes. The adaptation here comes with the manner of interaction he employs while adapting this theme. Naturally, the live audience presents a new opportunity, which Byrne entirely takes advantage of.



Figure 40 & Figure 41 Byrne speaking about people and their relationships while directly addressing and interacting with his audience.

Figures 40 and 41 demonstrate this point. Essentially, Byrne is taking his narrator character and role from *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986), where he consistently breaks the fourth wall to deliver the film's narration and interact with the viewer as if he were switching between his story and the real world. In this sense, the direct connection he aims to make by taking the theme of human relationships and the way he reflects it to his audience becomes the adaptation. He makes this connection by utilizing different elements. Making connections with the audience, interacting with his band are all ways he demonstrates these human relationships. Whether through spoken word interludes, improvised moments, or direct eye contact, Byrne develops his manner of interaction based on the platform he is using, effectively adapting his approach to suit the live performance. In this way, Byrne's thematic self-adaptation extends beyond narrative content to employ the manner in which he engages with his audience, making each performance a unique and immersive experience. In a strange but albeit true sense, Byrne is taking his themes and delivering them through himself this time, not just with his songs or ability to perform and develop a stage/set. How he emphasizes his other themes, such as technology and its place in contemporary society and modernity, is also an element of self-adaptation.



Figure 42 & 43. Byrne interacting with his audience while talking about the importance of technology, mainly the place of contemporary developments such as dating apps.

In figures 42 and 43, Byrne talks about apps, a very contemporary subject, and how they connect people. He displays his engagement with the shifts and changes the world and society may present and uses that under the general theme of technology, one that reflects consistency and an evolution of his interests as an artist. While it may appear small, these details are crucial for considering self-adaptation as a practice. Byrne has built a foundation on the topic of technology in the majority of his works, but the primary example is the song “Life During Wartime” (Byrne, 1979), which examines the challenges of navigating life in a technologically driven world, and implements it again,

in a new medium, with a new perspective because society has evolved with him. By framing the theme within the context of contemporary technology culture, Byrne demonstrates his capacity to adapt his artistic expression to reflect the evolving landscape of society. To a degree, Byrne once again exhibits a commitment to self-adaptation.

While the theme is clear and makes up the foundations for the show in general, he also demonstrates his self-adaptation through performative markers. To tell the small stories very clearly, Byrne makes choices that support what he is conveying, such as his song choice. He presents a mixed list of both Talking Heads and solo work songs, the majority of the solo songs coming from *American Utopia* (2018, Byrne). Naturally, the use of his earliest songs from the period when he was with the band garners a certain level of expectation because that is the backbone that Byrne not only lays his self-adaptation on but also one that has solidified the persona and image he has built. By picking songs that can be adapted into the contemporary context, such as “This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody)” (Byrne, 1983) and “Once in a Lifetime” (Byrne, 1980), he allows himself to reinstate his performative style once again.



Figure 44. Byrne performing “Once in a Lifetime” while dancing like the music video

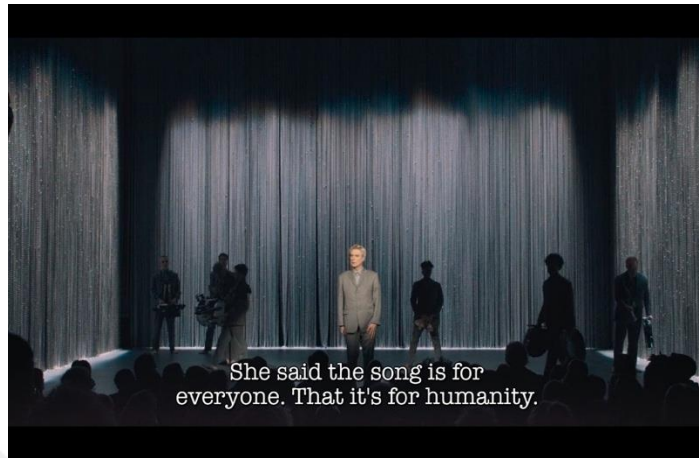


Figure 45. Byrne and his performers performing and dancing to “Road to Nowhere”.

Figure 44 depicts a very close resemblance to the dance seen in Figure 2, where Byrne recreates the dance, he had created with Toni Basil for the music video of “Once in a Lifetime” (Byrne, 1980). By revisiting old performances in this way, Byrne invites audiences to reflect on his artistic journey while also allowing himself to use this previous work to comment on how he perceives that current time and moment. Particularly, “Once in a Lifetime” (Byrne, 1980) carries many relatable elements because it plays around with personal themes such as alienation and identity. This approach allows Byrne to honor his musical legacy while continuing to innovate and push boundaries in his live shows. Not only is he reinforcing his artistic style in a new period, but he is also using a recognizable marker to draw the line of connection that highlights his reinterpretation of his performance. Figure 45 delves into the same matter. The movements the set-up of them placed alongside the initial works from which Byrne is adapting from is a reflection on how self-adaptation not only takes into consideration the matters that have changed with time and culture but how it can, in

certain cases, overcome the challenge of time and, change and be relevant and impactful. Indeed, from the highly enthusiastic responses from the live audience especially, incorporating these older songs with familiar performance style immersed in a new context of delivery work.





Figures 46 to 50. Byrne talking about several relevant and contemporary matters such as immigration, political turmoil and the economic state.

The five figures, from 46 to 50, reflect a variety of these weavings. To go in order, Byrne shows an understanding of current states firstly by addressing the financial situation of the United States in a recent time. Sometimes, he matches his speeches or more so small stories with a song that directly links the subject with himself. For instance, Figure 47, Byrne discusses diversity and immigrants. Not only does he unavoidably depict his own perspective on the topic where he supports cultural diversity and the healthy incorporation of immigrants into American society, he accompanies it

with the song “Everybody’s Coming to My House” (Byrne, 2018) from the album of the same name to drive his point. The song in itself can be assessed as a form of self-adaptation as it takes two of Byrnes's prominent themes, which is diversity and people, and turns the song into an anthem of sorts about inclusivity, community, and the universal human desire for connection. The house in the song serves as a metaphor for society, fueling the idea that despite differences, people share a common level of humanity and can come together to celebrate our diversity, much like Byrne’s take on immigrants. This type of self-adaptation not only allows for Byrne to implement his older work into current conversations but also allows him to show that he and his work can stand the test of time due to self-adaptation because of the adaptability.

The focus on adapting his foundation, which is ultimately the themes he established as a songwriter when he was with the Talking Heads, to fit the times also prevails in the sense that he can perform self-adaptation through collaboration as well. As mentioned previously, the song “Hell You Talmbout” (Monae, 2015) was written by fellow artist Janelle Monae as a protest against racial violence. In figure 49, Byrne talks about asking Monae about the possibility of performing this song and whether or not it would be an issue due to Byrne not being a Black artist. The figure shows Monae's response, giving permission for the message to be shared. Byrne, by adapting himself and his work to fit current and critical narratives also demonstrates how he as an older artist can contribute his own work perspectives on music and themes, in order to situate himself in the modern context by not actually removing himself from what made him David Byrne in the first place. Figure 50 reflects the same type of engagement where Byrne takes an

interest in the real world and presents his take on it with his style, themes, and image as an artist.



Figure 50. Byrne returns to his foundational work in a contemporary context with “This Must be the Place.”

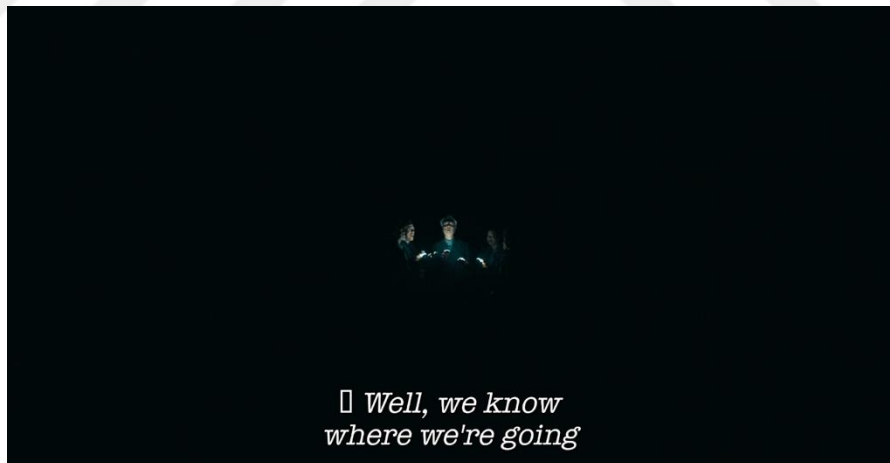


Figure 51. Byrne returns to his foundational work in a contemporary context with “Road to Nowhere.”

Self-adaptation allows for not only a degree of relevancy in a different period but also paves the way for past works to be brought back to be enjoyed by past and new audiences alike. *American Utopia* (Lee, 2020), paired with its counterpart album,

becomes a full circle practice for Byrne as it goes through a journey where every ground is covered en route to his foundations, never taking the Byrne out of the adaptation or more so, the self from the self adaptation. Figure 51 goes back to “This Must Be The Place (Naïve Melody)” (Byrne, 1983), a song that he has not only used in most of his works but one that he uses consistently with the additions and makes in his works. The return and utilization of this song both performatively and thematically reinstated the fact that although Byrne is tackling new themes and cultures, he is doing so from his own established scope. The first section of this chapter performed a lyrical analysis of this song already however a closer look at the title is also important here. To break it down “This”, “Must Be”, “The Place” and “(Naïve Melody)” make up the songs title. What is “this”? The lyrics suggest this is the found place, a place the figure in the song was looking for. “Must be” in return suggests a certainty or a strong sense that whatever was found with “this” is truly what was meant to be found or meant to happen. “The place” suggests a physical or metaphorical location that could refer to the aim of the search, In the song, the search appears to be for the feeling of home through an emotional connection of a loved one. This could practically be any relationship. Lastly, “(Naïve Melody)” suggest that both the melody and the metaphoric suggests a simplicity, a purity of sound and feeling and considering Byrne’s inclination to handling themes such as human emotion and relations, it boils down that whatever the search was, the place was and the found emotion and relation was, it was and most likely is pure, almost naïve. This song in itself is a particular marker for Byrne’s self-adaptation as not only does it consistently come back, it is also consistently re-utilized to fit the

emotional and social atmosphere of the project Byrne is working on. The “place” evolves in a way that, thirty-seven years after it was written, still holds meaning.

Figure 52, the ending song and frame of the show are also critical because to use that song in particular, one that is not only from Byrne's origin texts but one that has an era-defying open-ended, makes suggestions both literally and metaphorically. Byrne could be implying that either he, his work, or the world might not know where they are going with the addition of the metaphoric meaning that comes from the lyrics' open-ended nature. Regardless of what may be true, the ending and the entirety of the work skillfully depict the practice of self-adaptation and how it gives way to a potential future for new works and older ones to be reincorporated.

CHAPTER V

MOMENTS OF SELF-ADAPTATION

5.1. Introduction

Both artistically and as a persona with a prominent image, David Byrne is not only an intriguing figure but one that warrants an extensive study. The previous chapter had presented the argument that Byrne whether as the lead singer of the Talking Heads, a music video and feature film director, or a performer on stage encompassed a career that highlighted how the practice of self-adaptation can be a full-rounded practice that not only appears in each stage of an artist's career but also drives it to keep going. Indeed, this was and still is the case with Byrne, but this does not strictly equate to self-adaptation being a practice that needs to be pursued with such an intention.

Byrne is a rarity when we consider the fact that his most prominent works all show that they are connected to each other not only via their artist but also through self-adaptation as a practice. While other case studies can certainly uncover examples similar to

Byrne's, the current examples of self-adaptation as a practice are those that are either singular or consist of a few works and elements. Regardless of the abundance of works that demonstrate practicing self-adaptation, it allows itself to be utilized in moments; it need not dominate or define an entire work. It can be a bridge between two works that the artist uses to adapt elements of their themes, styles, and persona, or it can be used as a turning point for the artist to make their way into another practice and a new medium.

As Byrne has demonstrated, practicing self-adaptation can become a way for an artist to exist and create in and for a different form of art. Often, the use of the new medium can not only become a platform for evolving in multiple fields but also an artistic space for artistic and persona-based change. Byrne and his works have shown that there was often an interplay between his self-adaptation practices and his image as an artist, as seen in the analysis of *Stop Making Sense* (Demme, 1984), where he employs the practice to evolve and demonstrates a separation from his image as a band front man to a solo artist. This chapter will add to the explanations of the previous chapter and present examples similar to Byrne's to show the practice's viability and clarify the key differences that self-adaptation has from other practices and artist occurrences.

The artists Nick Cave, Neil Young, and Jim Jarmusch are all self-adaptors. They demonstrate how the scale of practicing self-adaptation can differ from artist to artist based on the medium type, the aim of the work, and its contexts. What sets these artists apart as self-adaptors is their ability to evolve and, along the way of practicing, create clear markers visible in multiple works, ultimately serving their creative visions. While

each artist may approach self-adaptation uniquely, they all share a common dedication to pushing boundaries and challenging expectations. In a sense, they tackle different areas of self-adaptation, all of which Byrne also engaged. Thematic self-adaptation, adaptation of directorial style and style overall, and self-adaptation of image/persona prevail in the examples of these artists, albeit in a more limited manner. What they ultimately show, however, is the factors of self-adaptation that allow for the continuation of artistic creation and the survival of their careers. As such, they serve as prime examples of the transformative power of self-adaptation in the creative realm.

5.2. Nick Cave

Australian musician, writer, and composer Nick Cave has displayed an extensive practice of self-adaptation. A key reason for this is Cave's consistent production of creative materials for different media. Due to this fact, it becomes a challenge to assess the specific way Cave practices self-adaptation because, like Byrne he interconnects the practice's significant elements. Elements of thematic, style, and persona/image-based self-adaptation are visible in his works. Still, ultimately, the one that comes through in abundance with Cave's works is his focus on thematic self-adaptation.

Cave's claim to fame came with his post-punk band The Birthday Party (1973-1983). The band's songs and Cave's frontman persona of the band consisted of a bleak, noisy, and over-the-top gothic soundscape, an element which Cave has later evolved into a more profound and poetic image. Their songs explored various dark and intense themes, such as despair, violence, religion, alienation, and the absurdity of life. For example,

their most streamed song (based on the number from Spotify), *Release the Bats* (The Birthday Party, 1982), is as follows,

my baby is a cool machine
she moves to the pulse of her generator
says damn that sex supreme.
she says damn, that horror bat
sex vampire, cool machine (*The Birthday Party*, 1982)

The song speaks to a sense of outsider culture, as it expresses a feeling of being disconnected from mainstream society, having a “baby” that is inherently dark, sexy, and sensual. The lyrics’ direct exploration of chaotic darkness delves into territories of sexuality and alienation, which, as was the case with Byrne, became Cave’s origin for how he developed his current themes.

Like Byrne, Cave often changes his musical identity by being involved in new bands with different musicians. His most prominent musical work is through his band Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, which was formed in 1984 and is still present today. Cave essentially takes the songs and themes he had based his initial thematic structure on with The Birthday Party and develops them a new vessel where he becomes the most prominent self, accompanied by a band of musicians. Cave has already developed his image and artistic persona as a singular artist. This detail is critical when the way he performs self-adaptation is considered.

As mentioned before, Cave embodies self-adaptation as a practice partly because of his ability to explore his own works and established thematic traits with a wide range of multimedia examples. While the small study on Cave will only look at a couple of his

works, mainly to highlight the transfer of themes from music/lyrics to film, he has undoubtedly explored more than these mediums. For instance, before expanding his works into film, Cave had applied his themes and lyrical style to novels. Cave's novels, such as *And the Ass Saw the Angel* (1989), *The Death of Bunny Monroe* (2009), and *The Sick Bag Song* (2015), all demonstrate of lyrical continuity and crossover with his musical work. Not only does Cave match the linguistic styling of his books to his songs, for instance, *And the Ass Saw the Angel* (1989), the story of a mute man named Euchrid born into an abusive family as he experiences a mental breakdown filled with angelic visions that result in his desire for vengeance, carries a great deal of stylistic commonalities with Cave's earlier lyrical work with The Birthday Party and initial albums with the Bad Seeds. In particular, songs such as "From Her to Eternity" (Cave, 1984) and "Your Funeral...My Trial" (Cave, 1986) is expanded in this work as the story takes the ideas the songs represent and applies them to a long narrative form. Thematically, the story embodies Cave's themes of isolation, cruelty, and the search for redemption permeating the narrative as Euchrid grapples with questions of identity and purpose in a society plagued by violence and superstition. This application of familiar themes is also the case in his other novels, as he demonstrates a detailed and dark understanding of the human psyche. His writing as a novelist is characterized by emotional intensity, vivid imagery, and an interest in the darker side of philosophy, making each novel a consistent exploration of the human condition. In a more straightforward sense, Cave takes the thematic style he established as a musician and converts it into a much longer narrative form, not losing the essence of what makes his

songs or works “Nick Cave songs” but also expanding his ability to express his themes by changing the and adapting for a new medium.

Cave’s has also produced a catalog of works as a screenwriter. *Ghosts...of the Civil Dead* (Hillcoat, 1988), *The Proposition* (Hillcoat, 2005), *Lawless* (Hillcoat, 2012), and *20,000 Days on Earth* (Forsyth & Pollard, 2014), all written by Cave and directed by aside from one, John Hillcoat, are all direct examples of thematic self-adaptation. The following analysis will only speak for the first three films mentioned above, and the chapter will later return to an analysis of *20,000 Days on Earth* (Forsyth & Pollard, 2014) as the element of self-adaptation in the work differs from the rest. Violence and its implications for human nature are the core of all of these films thematically, and all of them, with varying additions, tackle the subjects of morality, redemption, alienation, love, and loss. This analysis will only go over *The Proposition* (Hillcoat, 2005) and *20,000 Days on Earth* (Forsyth & Pollard, 2014), as the comments regarding these works apply to the rest of the works.

The Proposition (Hillcoat, 2005), which stars Ray Winstone, Guy Pearce, and Emily Watson, is set in the Australian outback during the late 19th century; the film follows the story of the Burns brothers, Charlie (Guy Pearce), Mike (Richard Wilson), and Arthur (Danny Huston), members of a ruthless gang led by their eldest brother, Arthur. When Captain Stanley (Ray Winstone) captures the two other brothers, he proposes to Charlie that if he can kill Arthur in nine days, he and Mike will be pardoned, and if he cannot manage, he will execute Mike. The film, from the writing to the general

narrative of the story, riddles with Cave's themes. Thematically, the adaptation is apparent as the film is built upon the same foundation. The film delves into the cycle of violence and retribution that consumes the characters and the setting of the Australian Outback. The film, which is heavy on the number of violent scenes, mirrors the violence Cave writes about in his songs with all of his bands and collaborators. He pairs this with another of his most prominent themes, the mix of justice and morality, where characters, specifically the brothers, are forced into an overbearing confrontation with right and wrong and their own actions regarding morality. Charlie, the central figure of these themes, similar to the figures Cave creates in the songs depicting himself and his themes, is written as rather literally going through the thematic struggles Cave holds as an artist. The duality of redemption and forgiveness, paired with isolation and moral ambiguity, are all experienced through Charlie.

Arguably, Cave's work as a screenwriter is one of the most direct practices of self-adaptation that one can study and analysis in contemporary artistry and multi-media work. Based on this foundation, a detailed and extensive study can be conducted on Cave and this film. In order to avoid repetition, this chapter will not go into detail about *Lawless* (Hillcoat, 2012) as not only are the themes very similar to previous film and his works, the manner of practice is also the same where Cave is in the screenwriter's seat. It is thus essential to highlight here that a formula regarding seeing and, in return, analyzing self-adaptation is forming as the markers, such as the transition into other media without losing the essence of a particular self's artistry is something that is identifiable under the consideration of the theory of self-adaptation.

Moving forward from Cave's work, which focuses more on thematic practice, *20,000 Days on Earth* (Forsyth & Pollard, 2014) shows the musicians performing self-adaptation elements related to himself and his image and persona. While distinct from his previous works, this film still embodies Cave's exploration of existential themes, artistic identity, and creative style. The film is a semi-scripted musical and biographical documentary. The film follows Cave for 24 hours and shows his life from a 360-degree look a day before recording the band's album *Push the Sky Away* (Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, 2013). Unlike traditional biographical documentaries, *20,000 Days on Earth* blurs the line between reality and fiction, presenting a stylized version of Cave's life. While some scenes carry elements of being staged, some other scenes depict Cave truly by combining recognizable aspects of his artistic self and private life. Because having a script meant that Cave, along with Forsyth and Pollard, got to construct the way the self was constructed for the screen, the film is a self-adaptation.



Figure 52. Cave is sitting with long-time musical collaborator Warren Ellis in a scripted conversation regarding their works in Ellis' home.



Figure 53. Cave driving long-time friend and musical collaborator Kylie Minogue while they talk about their own collaboration and Cave's songwriting.

Figures 52 and 53 depict the image and persona of Cave, which is concretely related to his music, stage antics, and, in return, thematic interests. Having real musicians such as Ellis and Minogue, whom he has consistently worked with while developing the image of Nick Cave, solidifies the biographical aspect of the film. However, the purposeful choice to present the interactions in scripted moments is an adaptation of his image onto the screen that fits the documentary-like approach. Their discussion too could also make for analysis in the sense that Cave, in a similar way as Byrne's fourth wall breaks in *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986), presents the self as being hyper-self-aware where he is acknowledging what he is doing with his music as well as the film.



Figure 54. Nick Cave and his sons, Arthur and Earl Cave, are in their home enjoying what he calls a typical night at home.

Cave pushes the boundaries of self-adaptation even further by presenting his private persona. Figure 54 shows Cave with his real-life family, sharing a glimpse of his true self, separate from his musical identity and from the more thematic self-adaptations he has done with previous works. This is, even though separate from the musical identity, a self-adaptation of the image. Ultimately, Cave carries his persona to the visual realm by

sharing this personal glimpse. While fans and viewers alike may indeed have a strong understanding of Cave's image and persona, his is re-evaluating and re-contextualizing the image with the addition of the personal. It is important to note that the choice of medium and genre in self-adaptation also connects to the type of self-adaptation performed as this development of the individual image that Cave presents is made more possible with the choice of the documentary.

Cave's varied career showcases a profound practice of self-adaptation across various artistic mediums. From his early days to his ongoing work, he has consistently evolved his thematic explorations while maintaining a distinctive artistic identity. His transition to different media further demonstrates his ability to adapt his themes and style into new narrative forms.

Moreover, his films reveal Cave's artistry at translating his persona and image onto the screen, blurring the lines between media forms and the personal versus the private.

Through these diverse expressions, Cave demonstrates a reflective approach to self-adaptation, continually redefining his artistic self while staying true to his core themes and identity.

5.3. Jim Jarmusch, *SQÜRL* and the Question of the Music Video

The case of Jim Jarmusch, when his larger body of works is considered, introduces an element to this study that has not been discussed in detail yet. Jarmusch is foremost known as a filmmaker, having written and directed over ten feature films and multiple documentaries, music videos, and short films. Across these works, especially with his

narrative films, Jarmusch has developed a consistent webbing of themes that come through in his stories and characters.

Interestingly, Jarmusch and the topics he aims to tackle in his works carry similarities with Byrne's works. Alienation and the concept of the “outsider,” a search for meaning, cultural clashes, and an inspection of time, all dealt with by Jarmusch with humor and colorful storytelling, make up the foundation of Jarmusch’s themes and narratives. For instance, his works such as *Only Lovers Left Alive* (Jarmusch, 2013) and *Night on Earth* (Jarmusch, 1991) depict solitary and isolated characters that grapple with a sense of belonging and disconnection, while *Paterson* (Jarmusch, 2016) and *Dead Man* (Jarmusch, 1995) delve into the existential journeys of their protagonists as they navigate life's uncertainties and complexities. These themes are woven throughout Jarmusch's works, giving his films a platform for exploration and interpretation across different genres and narratives.

A different manner of self-adaptation is seen in Jarmusch’s art, which presents itself with the opposite of Byrne’s self-adaptation. Where Byrne adapted music to film and other visual media, Jarmusch presents a thematic self-adaptation to create music with his band SQÜRL⁴ formed in 2009. Initially, the band was formed with producer Shane Stoneback to record original music for Jarmusch’s film *The Limits of Control* (Jarmusch, 2009). This presents an interconnected approach to film and music making because the music made by Jarmusch for the film has a rooted connection with the

⁴ <https://www.squrlworld.com/about-sqrl>

films' themes (also established by Jarmusch). Furthermore, Jarmusch evolves this relationship with later movies, composing both orchestral or, more so, none-lyrical songs as well as lyrical ones with many different collaborators such as Charlotte Gainsbourg, Madeline Folin, and Anika, as well as using his actors as a part of this such as Adam Driver, Bill Murray, and Chole Sevigny.

Even Jarmusch's consistent, collaborative work with actor and musician Tom Waits entails examples of self-adaptation as their artistic exchange, Waits acting for Jarmusch and Jarmusch directing music videos for Waits, holds robust markers of the practice. While Jarmusch's career and works are filled with moments of self-adaptation, a deeper dive into these works also brings to light what is not self-adaptations. To explain, Jarmusch practices self-adaptation in a few different ways. Firstly, and arguably most prominently, in a thematic sense. A critical question that Jarmusch raises is about the music video.

As established, Jarmusch is a multi-media artist who delves into different media and genres. One very critical example of that is Jarmusch's role as a music video director. While he has directed many, the music video "The Lady Don't Mind" (Jarmusch, 1985) by the Talking Heads will be used to make a clear argument. As discussed in the previous chapters, music videos, at times, can become self-adaptation, such as the example of David Byrne directing the music video for "Wild Wild Life" (Talking Heads, 1986) by adapting shots from *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986) and making additions to fit his musical themes and styles, this is a rarity. As established in the literature

review, Vernallis describes “non-narratives” as a vital part of the construction of the music video. Often, non-narratives tell the story of the song, and maybe the artist is without a concrete narrative that would exist in a feature film. When an outside director, such as Jarmusch, with recognizable themes and styles, becomes the director for other established artists who also have recognizable themes and styles, such as Byrne and the Talking Heads, whose artistic vision is at the forefront



Figure 55. Talking Heads wearing their recognizable suits while performing the song in the music video.



Figure 56. Talking Heads performing a dynamic and elaborate dance (Byrne’s signature) in the music video.

Figures 55 and 56 are from the Jarmusch-directed video where the band is at the center of the non-narrative. When the video is taken and considered, the markers that make this a representation of Byrne and the Talking Heads prevail over Jarmusch and his style and themes. For example, the use of props, the colorful chairs, the motif of the grey suit, and the dynamic dances that make up the video are more easily identifiable with Byrne and the group, especially considering the analysis done in chapter IV, where the style and image Byrne developed for the group and their work was shown. This brings the question back to the music video and if it is a self-adaptation.

Looking at Jarmusch's role as a music video director, it becomes evident that the distinction between self-adaptation and the preservation of an artist's established style is crucial. While Jarmusch's directorial involvement in the music video offers a way for his creative input, the pre-existing artistic identities of the Talking Heads often take precedence, shaping the visual narrative and ultimately the end product and who it is associated with. Byrne's distinctive style, and the video's connection to him overshadow Jarmusch's inputs. While Jarmusch's involvement in music videos undoubtedly constitutes a form of collaboration seen with a significant number of self-adaptations, the extent to which these endeavors represent instances of this practice remains in question. In cases where the established identity of the musician dominates the visual narrative, the distinction between adaptation and the preservation becomes blurred, prompting a case-by-case approach when considering music video under the scope of self-adaptation.

5.4. Neil Young and The Matter of Simultaneous Release

Compared to Jarmusch and Cave, Neil Young has a smaller body of works that demonstrate self-adaptation practice. More so, he has one particular manner of performing self-adaptation rather than a list of experimentations and continuations that have been created with the practice of self-adaptation. This is certainly not to say that Young has yet to delve into several other media to demonstrate his skills as an artist. In fact, Young holds a unique trait (compared to the artists studied in this thesis) about his work as a director and writer who works under the pseudonym Bernard Shakey.

Although it is known that this name belongs to Young and Young often receives credit for his filmmaking work, Bernard Shakey is an extension name for him, almost the bridge between him and the filmmaking world. It can also highlight a desire to separate his musical persona from his filmmaking one, a change based on the medium. While this thesis will not detail pseudonyms, identity, and their connection to self-adaptation, it is important to emphasize their presence in Young's filmmaking career.

Young officially has eleven directing credits from 1973 with *Journey Through the Past* (Young) up until 2022 with *Neil Young: Harvest Time* (2022). Aside from two Young-directed films, *Human Highway* (Young, 1982), and *Greendale* (Young, 2003), his directing credits are all for music and documentary films, often showing his live concerts involving many of his musical collaborators. Regardless of the type of film, Young is relatively consistent in his goals as a director where each project reflects not only music but it is in regards to matters he is personally interested in confronting, such as religious disagreements, political unease, the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, and a general

engagement with time and the things it changes. Other than the two mentioned above, these films are unscripted works that contextually place Young front and center. They can certainly be assessed and analyzed within the scope of self-adaptation as the transition from medium to medium is clear, and there is a vital element of the self in which Young's style and stance as an artist comes through greatly, the 2003 film *Greendale* (Young) raises a critical and currently uncovered question. To clarify, *Human Highway* (Young, 1982) is also a unique work in which Young performs self-adaptation as he directs the film and is responsible for the screenplay and starring in it. the markers are similar to those shown in *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986).

Greendale (Young, 2003) presents as an interesting work to analyze regardless of self-adaptation due to how Young has structured it. While the film is a narrative film in the sense that it has a story that is followed from start to finish with characters, the script is not spoken but sung. The film explores the lives of various people in the fictional Californian town of Greendale, focusing on the Green family. While the family seems peaceful and content with their lives, they all fight personal battles, such as having concerns about the state of the world, struggling with being an artist, and not knowing their place in the world, which is only heightened when Cousin Jed shoots and kills a police officer. The story is apparent and easily understandable, but it is conveyed through song. Instead of having a script of sentences, Young created a script of songs stemming from the same name's studio album, which was also released the same year. The ten-song album is almost like a musical novel and shares the premise with the film, again set in the same fictional town. Both works focus on corruption, time, and issues

regarding media and politics. The initial practice involves the transition of media.

Young applies what he creates as a musician to the screen, adopting the biggest marker of self-adaptation. Secondly and interestingly, Young raises the question of simultaneous release in self-adaptation. The simple answer is sometimes.

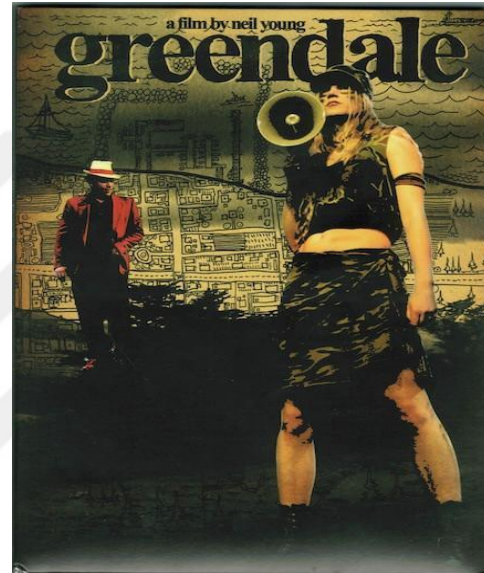
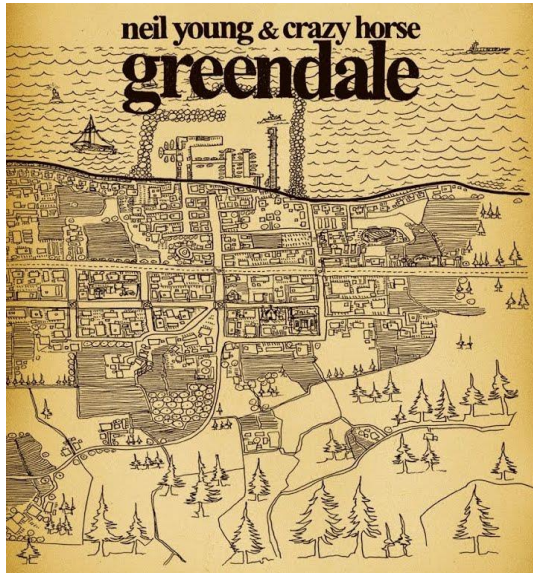


Figure 57. The album cover of *Greendale*. Figure 58. The movie poster for *Greendale*.

The figures above are the images of the cover art for the album and the poster for the film, respectively. Although small, an element of self-adaptation or, more so, the connection between the two works is visible here. A significant number of self-examples rely upon visual markers and connections to highlight the elements of relation and continuation. The map of the fictional town of Greendale, which is the body of the album cover, becomes the backdrop for the film's poster with the additions of two members of the Green family. More importantly and admittedly more original (compared to many self-adaptations). The song lyrics from the album make the film's script. The Green family, in track order established in the album, sings the songs as if

they were reading them to convey the story. This simultaneous release is a self-adaptation in terms of the role the album plays in the film's presence and the role the film plays in the album's presence. While the album becomes the script, the film becomes the extended music video or visual album.

The critical thing to consider here is regarding who sings on the album. The album is not a release of cast recordings or a movie soundtrack; that is, Neil Young and Crazy Horse singing the songs the cast members sing in the film. The self-adaptation here is clear when Young adapts his own musical for other artists to another medium but in a manner where he is the artistic creator and authority (in this case).

This is precisely what David Byrne presents through *True Stories*. Chapter III. discusses the difference between releasing a film soundtrack simultaneously and having the album be an element of self-adaptation. Prince and *Purple Rain*, both the album and film, are examples of albums and films existing together in the sense of paratexts.

Indeed, the change in medium is apparent, as well as the difference between audio and visual; however, it is not necessarily an adaptation performed by Prince.

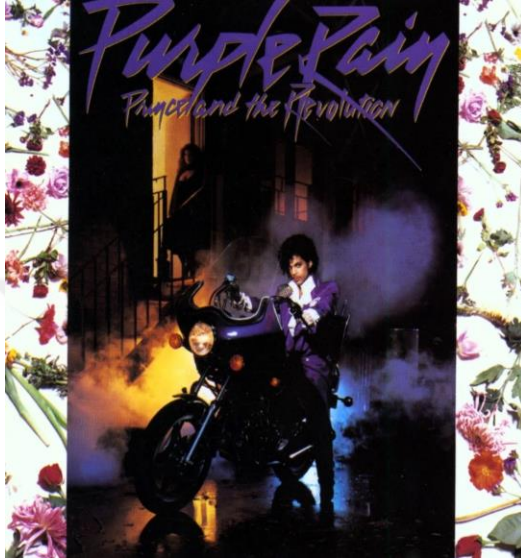


Figure 59. The album cover of *Purple Rain*. Figure 60. The film poster for *Purple Rain*.

The figures above of Prince and *Purple Rain* (1984) depict a similar idea to *Greendale* (Young, 2003), where the visual bridge between the two works is established. However, this certainly does not entail a practice of self-adaptation. The critical difference is that there is direct change between the two. While Young shaped the way the songs were conveyed and by whom they were conveyed from medium to medium, Prince did not practice this. The songs performed in the film are transferred onto the album, precisely by who performed them in the movie. The self, through Prince's authority and artistic vision, is very present and also seen visually with solely the figures above. However, adaptation is not at play.

On the other, Byrne, with *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986), pushed the boundaries even further than Young. Byrne's simultaneous release is a self-adaptation in the manner of Young's. Not only does he adapt the film to the album by changing the artists from the actors to himself, Jerry Harrison, Chris Frantz, and Tina Weymouth, but he also does this separation visually.

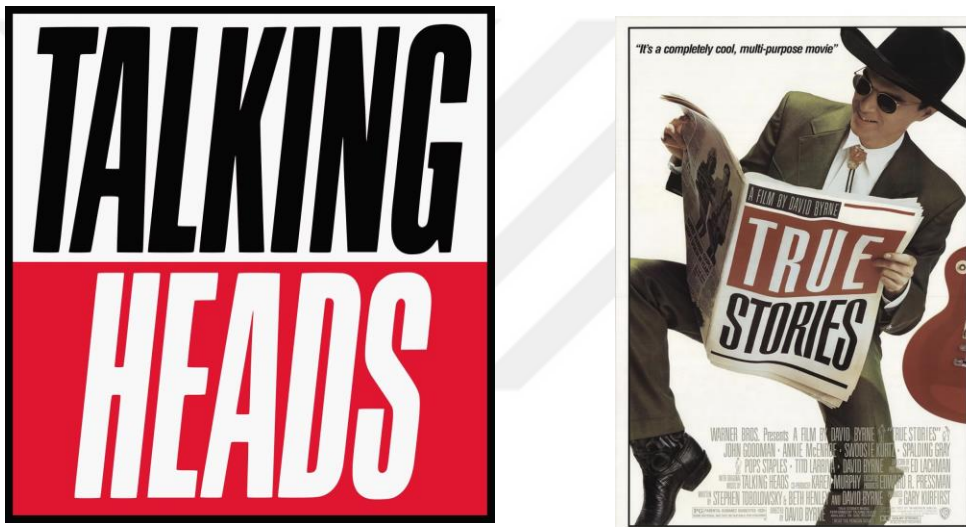


Figure 61. Album cover for *True Stories*. Figure 62. The poster for *True Stories*.

The figures above present an even more visually separate connection between the album and the film. The film poster is explicit about who the film's focus is, which is Byrne. It is a practice of self-adaptation, and, in a sense, acts accordingly. A minor visual connection keeps the musical element of Byrne connected to his directorial work, with the *True Stories* title being in similar forms to the Talking Heads form on the album cover. While the songs in the film are mostly sung by the cast members (Byrne only sings three with Talking Heads), the album is solely presented as a Talking Heads work

where the band performs all of the songs. The adaptation and, more so, the artistic exchange are evident in this context. The simultaneous release in this example and the Young example actually becomes a means to self-adapt because it offers a platform in which artists can take their works, rework them, and ultimately produce a work of self-adaptation. Perhaps, similar to the music video, the question of simultaneous release presents the trickier side of assessing self-adaptations. Even though the needed markers can exist, a deeper look into their context may become necessary to establish if the work truly fits the scope.

5.5. Artistic Change or Self-Adaptation? A Look into the Many Personas of David Bowie

Although self-adaptation, its own practice with identifiable markers, it can raise questions about consistency and change. Some artists and their works may appear to have markers of self-adaptation; however, their lack of clarity can either result in them being hard to distinguish or even going as far as not necessarily beginning self-adaptations but being artistic changes and evolution without fully embracing the “adaptation” element of this. An example of this is David Bowie. While most certainly Bowie has had a career where he has practiced self-adaptation in multiple projects, for example, his self-adaptation of his persona onto the cinematic screen with documentary films such as *Cracked Actor* (Yentob, 1975) and *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (Pennebaker, 1979) as well as feature films like *Labyrinth* (Henson, 1986) and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Roeg, 1976). *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), in particular, holds a great deal of both thematic self-adaptation and an adaptation of

persona. While Bowie is not credited as a screenwriter (originally a 1963 novel of the same name by Walter Tevis) or director for the film, a deep look into the film shows that this story is more than Bowie playing himself. Roeg builds the movie around Bowie's artistic themes, albeit the novel's core fits it very well, to begin with, but having him be the "alien" the stranger is an implication within itself. Bowie, by choosing to make his acting debut with such a character, is an idea of established personas and images being moved into a new realm and different medium, as shown with Byrne. Bowie is no longer the alien stranger in his lyrics, but he is that in a feature film.

The manner in which Bowie self-adapts is an extensive study on its own and, like Byrne, has its conventions that add to the theory of self-adaptation; however, arguably one of the most recognized elements of his artistry highlights how sometimes what

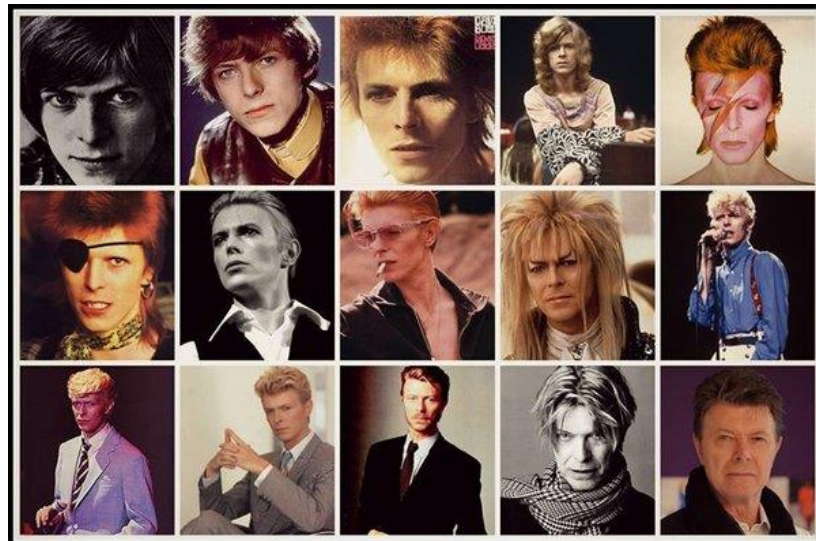


Figure 63. A collage of images shows most of Bowie's eras and personas, starting with his first album and continuing to his last.

appears to be self-adaptation is something else. Bowie, known to be a chameleon when it comes to not only his music but also his appearances, has built his career on an abundance of personas. These personas depict a new era of his musical work. Whatever persona he embodies, the music and the themes of the songs match up with that persona or, to a degree, with the songs' themes. The personas from Ziggy Stardust to The Thin White Duke also reflect Bowie and his evolution as an artist and individual. From this perspective, they are tied to identity. However, evolution, in this case, does not strongly equate to self-adaptation. The analysis of Byrne showed that he includes his image and persona in his self-adaptations. For example, the narrator character in *True Stories* (Byrne, 1986) is Byrne, literally and figuratively, as he not only plays him but has constructed him the way he constructs himself in his songs, the outsider looking in, making observations about human relations and whatever theme he wishes. Indeed, there is an adaptation of persona as he carries his lyrical establishment into a new medium in a way that adds to it. Bowie, on the other, does not do so with his persona changes.

The figure above is a collage highlighting the physical personas Bowie has developed and embraced throughout his music and film career. Even on a solely visual basis, the evolution of the image is clear. The choice of hair, make-up, costume, and demeanor are all markers that provide Bowie with the tools to differentiate between them, resulting in each persona being connected to a new musical period in his career. While this is a revolution and evolution of Bowie, the musicians, and indeed the period of these personas impact how they are constructed, it is difficult to suggest that this part of

Bowie's works and career is directly a self-adaptation. From the more contemporary perspective, Taylor Swift is attempting to do something similar with her Eras tour concept. While this practice is not as in depth as Bowie in the sense that she does not create characters or personas for these different eras, she creates visual factors through especially costumes to separate the periods. In her Eras Tour concerts, Swift changes costumes often and sings the songs accordingly. If she is performing songs from her earlier periods as a musician, she will wear costumes that reference that era's costumes and for example, music videos.



Figure 64. A side-by-side image of David Byrne in his Big Suite from *Stop Making Sense* and the promotional trailer of A24's remastered 2023 concert film release.

The figure above of Byrne is a very physical appearance-based depiction of the image being carried on via the practice of self-adaptation. As chapter four establishes, the left-hand image was already a self-adaptation based on persona. Byrne takes from the style he developed in his music videos as a director and adapts them into a new medium, with the most significant change being this media change. In contrast, Bowie's approach to persona evolution stems more from a creative exploration rather than a deliberate act of

self-adaptation. Each persona Bowie embodies represents not just a shift in appearance but often a complete immersion into a new artistic identity. This distinction becomes more apparent when considering the thematic consistency across Bowie's various personas. Unlike Byrne, whose self-adaptations often directly incorporate his persona and established themes into new mediums, Bowie's personas seem to exist more autonomously from his core identity, not to say personality traits but what is happening in his life, for example, the Berlin Trilogy era and his personas directly referencing his personal struggle and the style and fashion sense of Berlin. From this perspective, Bowie's constant reinvention of his image and sound can be seen as a form of artistic evolution and change rather than self-adaptation. Bowie does not fully attempt to change with the intention of adapting particular factors to fit a specific era, social condition, and, most importantly, medium. His personas serve as vessels for exploring different facets of music and identity and how that connects to the “bigger picture” rather than tools for adaptation to a medium or culture condition-related expectation.

In essence, while David Bowie's career is marked by colorful and influential personas and visual transformations, these changes may not always align with the markers and practices established in this thesis, especially in the case study of David Byrne. This is not to say that the changes he makes in his image and musical style do not fit some conditions of particular periods, especially considering Bowie's affiliation with fashion and culture; this specific manner of evolving does not fully imply practicing self-adaptation.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis has delved into the extensive concept of self-adaptation within artistic and multimedia stardom and expression. Through an exploration of theory and practice, accompanied by a comprehensive case study focusing on the works of David Byrne with contextualized comparison Nick Cave, Neil Young, Jim Jarmusch, and David Bowie, a nuanced understanding of self-adaptation emerges.

This thesis asked the question, “What is self-adaptation?” The lack of a concrete and detailed definition, as well as a lack of defined markers that distinguish a work of self-adaptation from one that is not, was the key force behind the development of the research question and the desire to study the fields of the thesis. While the study did not have a set assumption regarding what conclusion the research would lead to, it was done with the intention of showing that self-adaptation is indeed a practiced phenomenon with a structure of rules of its own and that for a significant number of

artists such as David Byrne, it has been the pinnacle of their career, their image and most importantly their art.

One of the central findings of this research is the role of self-adaptation in fostering resilience among artists. The thesis has highlighted that the adaptation element of self-adaptation often means that artists take their works, evaluate them, and evolve them based on a nuanced understanding of the changing times. By understanding the current social and cultural structure of their audiences and people in general, artists employ self-adaptation as a means of giving their own works and art a more contemporary and relevant meaning without losing the core of it because of the established fact that the self is never removed from these new productions hence the importance of the creator performing the adaptation.

This, in return, points to the essential conclusion that this thesis can offer other than the development of theory. Why is self-adaptation important? Why should it be, and essentially, does it need to be studied? Self-adaptation may not have been the past of many multimedia artists, but the findings and explanations in this thesis point to the trajectory of self-adaptation as the future of multimedia artistry. Indeed, the case studies in this thesis all present substantial contemporary works, but it is important to note that the original works or, more so, the development of these artists' core took place in different decades, all before the 2010s. Some artist who has gotten their start and developed themselves and their persona within the last 25 years are showing signs of

performing self-adaptation and in an objectively successful manner (based on audience reception).

Big-name artists such as Beyonce and Taylor Swift (amongst many other artists) all show strong traits of self-adaptation. Most prominently, Beyonce is doing this through directing. Not only has Beyonce started to develop a visual style by directing many of her music videos, such as *Sorry* (2016), *Jealous* (2013), and *Ego* (2009), but she is very directly taking her music and the directorial style she has developed with this video, for example, the use of color schemes, and is now applying it to filmmaking. The music documentaries *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé* (Beyonce & Burke & Ritchie, 2023), *Homecoming: A Film by Beyoncé* (Beyonce & Burke, 2019) as well as being a writer for the visual album *Black is King* (Adjei & Ake & Bazawule, 2020) all reflect self-adaptation. Not only do they have the marker of taking work, in her case the music, and transferring it to a new medium, but they all highlight artistry that revolves around the self, where Beyonce is clearly reinterpreting her music for the visual sense by adapting the directorial style, she developed in her music videos. This paves the way for Beyonce to expand her multi-media artistry and to, bring back her older work and reflect it to new and old audiences through the contemporary lens.

Taylor Swift presents a similar case. While her self-adaptation does not show itself as potently as Beyonce's, there is a trend from her that shows she is starting to practice it. The most recent and perhaps currently the most significant is her involvement with *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour* (Wrench, 2023). While she does not direct it, the source or,

more so, the self is her, and her involvement as the film's editor shows a strong example of artistic authority when it comes to the adaptation of the self onto another medium. There is an element of taking charge of how the musical themes she has developed, as well as the persona and image that she has developed, are going to be conveyed, and this is, to a certain extent, a maker of self-adaptation. For instance, Swift's directorial and screenwriting work for the short film *All Too Well: The Short Film* (2021) can not only indicate a key point in her work as a multimedia artist where she develops a style as a director/screenwriter but it can also be the point where she applies her themes into a new medium and continues this form of self-adaptation.

While this thesis presents a detailed exploration of self-adaptation, several limitations should be noted. First, the study's focus on a limited number of high-profile artists may not capture the full spectrum of self-adaptation practices across different genres and levels of fame. This is important to note as self-adaptation does not require a particular level of notoriety or recognizability to be practiced. Certainly, having a larger body of works, where a large number of individuals, fans can pinpoint references fuels elements of self-adaptations but it would be incorrect to suggest it cannot be practiced without it.

Secondly, the rapidly changing landscape of multimedia artistry means that some conclusions drawn here may require additions. For example, while the studies in this work can stand alone from this concept, some contemporary examples can become impacted by concepts such as fandoms. While, for example, David Byrne indeed has a very prominent fan base, it differs from the fandom that someone such as Taylor Swift

may have. The manner of consumption and the expectation of the works produce differ. Moreover, the role of fandoms in shaping and influencing self-adaptation is a crucial aspect that warrants further exploration. Fandoms, with their intense and often highly interactive engagement with artists' works, can significantly impact the ways in which artists approach self-adaptation. The expectations and feedback from dedicated fan communities can guide artists in the re-interpretation and evolution of their work, providing a responsive and dynamic environment for artistic growth. Fandoms can create a dialogue between artists and their audiences, fostering a sense of collaboration that influences the direction and style. This interactive process can lead to more personalized self-adaptation, as artists align their creative expressions with the evolving tastes and preferences of their fans.

Finally, the thesis does not extensively explore the impact of technological advancements and digital media on self-adaptation, which could be significant factors in future research. The dynamics of the multimedia evolve, the tools and platforms available to artists for practicing self-adaptation are continuously expanding. The rise of social media, streaming services, and digital platforms provides artists with unprecedented opportunities to reinterpret and recontextualize their work in real-time, engaging with their audiences more directly and interactively than ever before. This can lead to new forms of self-adaptation that were not explored in this thesis due to the historical and technological context of the case studies.

As with many studies, this one also presented the limitations but ultimately there is a key matter that is the pinnacle of self-adaptation as a practice is the relation of intertextuality and the process/progress over time. Intertextuality, the shaping of a text's meaning by another text, is fundamental to understanding self-adaptation. Artists draw from their previous works, referencing and reworking them to create something new yet familiar. This ongoing dialogue with their past work and the broader cultural context enables artists to remain relevant and resonate with both long-time followers and new audiences. Time is simply fundamental.

Self-adaptation is a dynamic process, where the artist's evolution is a continuous journey marked by periods of reflection and innovation. This journey is influenced by various factors, including the artist's personal growth, changes in the socio-cultural landscape, and advancements in technology. As artists navigate these changes, their ability to adapt and reinterpret their work becomes a testament to their resilience and creativity.

The process of self-adaptation also highlights the importance of time in artistic development. Over the years, artists accumulate a rich tapestry of experiences and insights that inform their work. By revisiting and reimagining their past creations, they can infuse them with new layers of meaning, making them relevant to contemporary audiences while preserving their original essence.

By engaging in the iterative process of reimagining their own works across different mediums, artists demonstrate an ability to adapt to changing contexts, technological

advancements, and audience expectations. Self-adaptation serves as a mechanism for artists to navigate through the evolving landscape of the creative industry. Whether it be David Byrne's innovative stage productions, Nick Cave's multidimensional storytelling, Neil Young's experimentation with audiovisual formats, Jim Jarmusch's cinematic work and musical work, or David Bowie's transformative personas, each artist demonstrates resilience through their adaptive practices.



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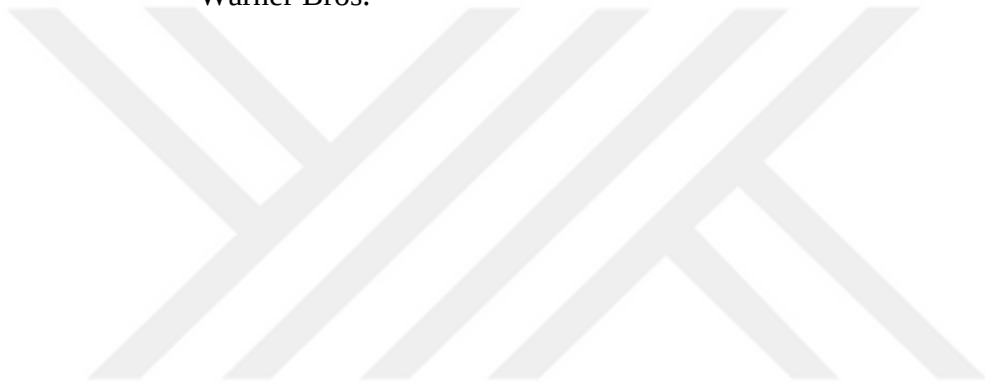
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