

Introduction: Some Theoretical Models for Adaptation Studies

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There seems to be an obsession with retellings of well-known stories in the last decades. In the cinema industry, the current landscape is abundant with adaptations from different media sources, not to mention the countless remakes, reboots, prequels, sequels and spin-offs. From 2005 to 2014, for instance, 61% of top movies released were adapted from a preceding source material.¹ Yet, more than just novel and cinema, adaptations may involve a myriad of other media such as comics, TV series, video games, songs, plays, operas, paintings and even theme parks, as Linda Hutcheon reminds us.²

As common as adaptations may seem, it is not unusual to come across reviews that unabashedly compare the adaptation with the adapted material on the same basis. The search for equivalents, both in elements of the plot as in technical aspects of the media involved, often leads to superficial and clichéd conclusions, such as “the novel is better than the film”.

Adaptations, however, deserve better than that. As we provide perspectives that consider adaptations by their own merit or that suggest other criteria to examine them, more interesting questions can be posed, for example: “What motivates an adaptation?”, “Why was this changed (or kept)?”, or “How to measure the success of an adaptation?”.

¹ FOLLOWS. *How original are Hollywood movies?*

² HUTCHEON. *A Theory of Adaptation*.

Aiming to offer tools to answer these and other relevant questions and thus think about adaptations more critically, the analyses that compose this volume have relied upon seven groundbreaking theoretical texts that can be divided into two groups: those that describe a broad field of Intermediality or broader intermedial practices, and those which characterize the adaptive phenomenon more specifically. The first group is composed by the texts of Irina O. Rajewsky and Lars Elleström.

In the seminal "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality", Irina O. Rajewsky presents a useful categorization for the myriad of phenomena that have been examined under the umbrella-term *Intermediality*: media combination (and its sub-categories), intermedial reference and medial transposition.³

Media combination considers the mixture of "at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of articulation"⁴ within a certain text. Most cultural products nowadays are composite forms resulting from media combination and, depending on the way the signs are combined, they can be considered *multimedia*, *mixmedia* or *intermedia* texts.

Films, for instance, are considered multimedia (some also say plurimedia) texts, because they combine coherent and separable texts formed by different media. In other words, the film medium is able to unite several other media in itself. Although the media within a motion picture can be separated – we can read the script, observe movies stills, listen to the soundtrack etc., and come to know what the story is about –, it is obvious that the access to all the media involved in a film offers a better understanding of it. Comics, on the other hand, is considered a mixmedia text because it "contains complex signs in different media that would not reach coherence or self-sufficiency outside that context."⁵ Therefore, texts and images must work together to create meaning; when either

³ As Rajewsky also explains, one single medial configuration can fulfill the criteria of two or even three intermedial categories. For instance, *Sin City* (2005), by Robert Rodriguez, is at the same time a multimedia text (film), a transposition of Frank Miller's homonymous graphic novel series, and a work which uses digital technology to imitate not only the aesthetics of a medium (the generic drawn quality of comics) but an individual product in the comics medium (Miller's black and white high-contrast drawing style).

⁴ RAJEWSKY. *Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality*, p. 52.

⁵ CLÜVER. *Inter textus/Inter artes/Inter media*, p. 19.

one is missing, the meaning is lost. Finally, as in some business logos or in Apollinaire's famous calligrammes, "two or more sign systems and/or media are so closely combined that the visual and/or musical, verbal, kinetic and performative aspects of its signs are inseparable,"⁶ which characterize them as intermedia texts.

Intermedial references denote the intertextual relations between different media, a phenomenon that can be used for a variety of reasons and objectives and that grows especially well in pop culture. Generally, an intermedial reference is a way to pay homage to a particular work or to create an "illusion-forming quality" inherent to the techniques of a certain medium. In intermedial references, a text of one medium can evoke or imitate: (a) an individual work produced in another medium; (b) a specific medial subsystem (such as a certain film genre); (c) or generic qualities of another medium.

Medial transposition is "the transformation of a given media product (a text, a film etc.) or of its substratum into another medium".⁷ In this category, "the 'original' text, film etc., is the 'source' of the newly formed media product."⁸ Examples of medial transpositions are ekphrasis, musicalization of literature, and all those phenomena designated by the more popular term *adaptation*.

Also examining relations between/among different media in a broad sense is *Media Transformation*, by Lars Elleström. In the book, Elleström proposes a theoretical framework to be applied to communication in general, one that relies on the transfer of media characteristics among media. His method takes into account four media modalities – material, sensorial, spatiotemporal and semiotic – and suggests two axial notions or categories, transmediation (the repeated mediation) of media characteristics among dissimilar media, and media representation (one medium representing another). The idea is to propose a model that fuses existing areas of research such as adaptation and ekphrasis "into a broad

⁶ CLÜVER. *Inter textus/Inter artes/Inter media*, p. 20.

⁷ RAJEWSKY. *Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality*, p. 51.

⁸ RAJEWSKY. *Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality*, p. 51.

conglomerate of transmedial research based on a common understanding of notions such as medium, mediation, transmediation, and representation, and a wide range of other important notions".⁹

In this sense, Elleström's notion of transmediation includes media, processes and products that are not usually called adaptations, as he explains:

For instance, transmediations from written, visual, and symbolic (verbal) text to oral, auditory and symbolic (verbal) text – that is to say, reading aloud of texts – or the other way around, are very seldom referred to as adaptation (however, see Groensteen, 1998: 276-7, and similarly for transmediations from nontemporal to temporal images (as in Dalle Vacche, 1996). Sometimes, not even transmediation from film to literature and from literature to film is called adaptation (Paech, 1997). Overall, adaptation researchers do not seem to agree on the proper delimitation of adaptation and, regardless of how adaptation has been delimited, it has only covered bits and pieces of the area of transmediation. Therefore, applying the general notion of media transformation with its two main types of transmediation and media representation, including several analytical subdistinctions, has good reason.¹⁰

And, although transmediation from printed novel to movie is the classical type of media transformation in Adaptation Studies, Elleström's model makes room not only to those phenomena that involve more unconventional qualified and independent media, such as opera and video games, but also to those that assist in media production and exist (only) to be transmediated, such as *libretti*, scores, scripts, considering all those forms different types of adaptations, yet connected by the concept of transmediation.

The second group of texts in this book examines the specific phenomenon of adaptation. In fact, the study of adaptation within the broad field of Intermediality has only developed in more recent years with the consolidation of the field, a process that initiated in the end of the 1980s in the Germanophone context, from research in literature and *Medienwissenschaft*. Nevertheless, adaptation has established its own place in academic debate since the 1950s, first as a branch of English

⁹ ELLESTRÖM. *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics Among Media*, p. 5.

¹⁰ ELLESTRÖM. *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics Among Media*, p. 27.

literary studies, in a movement designed to offer support to the analysis of film adaptation of classical novels. Nowadays the area known as Adaptation Studies is well-developed, with researchers, conferences and journals circulating worldwide, and to which the works of George Bluestone, Geoffrey Wagner, Brian McFarlane, Robert Stam, Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan, Christine Geraghty, Kamilla Elliott, among others, have largely contributed.

Precisely because of their bordering position between literature and films, adaptations studies have been long neglected in both literary and film studies even though they have been a common phenomenon since the beginnings of cinema. In his article "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory", Thomas Leitch claims that the study of films as adaptations of literary works have been neglected because it is based on fallacious assumptions, such as the idea that literary texts are verbal, while films are visual; the assumption that "novels create more complex characters than movies because they offer more immediate and complete access to characters' psychological states;"¹¹ or perhaps that cinema's visual specification usurps its audience's imagination.

Another relevant contribution to the area is Julie Sanders', developed in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, which proposes a differentiation between more and less "respectful" transpositions. The author suggests that the adaptive process has an inherently conservative character; its goal is not to challenge the canon, but to preserve it. Although cultural and temporal changes are necessary, adaptations contribute to the revitalization of the canon, reformulating and expanding it to adapt itself to new contexts. In contrast with adaptation, she proposes the term *appropriation* as a process of a more subversive character, whose relation to the source text is less explicit and less respectful. Thus, an appropriation often evokes the original only to challenge it and question its values.

A useful idea also presented by Sanders is that of the movement of "proximation", a strategy that brings the text closer to the personal frame of reference of the public, according to contexts and local audiences.¹²

¹¹ LEITCH. Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory, p. 158.

¹² SANDERS. *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 26.

It is, therefore, a process through which adaptation is modified so that audiences from the most diverse times, places and social aspects can identify with it more easily.

An important – perhaps almost inevitable – question to be discussed in Adaptation Studies has been that of fidelity, or the idea that the adaptation has to bear close similarity with its original or source-text. Although fidelity discourse has been abandoned nowadays, it is still common to find research that mention it, yet most of the times just to propose other approaches to examine adaptations.

In "Dialogizing Adaptation Studies", Jørgen Bruhn claims that any adaptation is always influencing the original work as much as it is influenced by it, an idea that echoes Borges's text on Kafka and its predecessors. Although the author confesses that it is impossible to analyze adaptations without some kind of comparative movement between the two (or more) texts involved, adaptation should be considered a two-way process in which it is impossible for an adaptation to be strictly loyal to the original. And the most efficient way to achieve this is to "de-hierarchize the relation between the primary and the secondary text, the source and the result, in order to make both texts results of each other".¹³

By proposing an analysis of adaptations by means of homology to biology, Bortolotti and Hutcheon also question fidelity discourse in adaptations. In "On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and 'Success' Biologically", the authors suggest that cultural adaptations have a structure similar to those of organisms in evolutionary biology: "Stories, in a manner parallel to genes, replicate; the adaptations of both evolve with changing environments."¹⁴ In this sense, the source-text, more than an original in relation to which adaptation is usually thought to be faithful or unfaithful, must be seen as an ancestor from which it derives by descent.

In another text, Linda Hutcheon continues her de-hierarchizing movement explaining that it is impossible to talk about fidelity when

¹³ BRUHN. *Dialogizing Adaptation Studies: From One-Way Transport to a Dialogic Two-Way Process*, p. 83.

¹⁴ BORTOLOTTI; HUTCHEON. *On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and "Success": Biologically*, p. 444.

there are so many other motives behind adaptations and when adaptations have long transcended both novels and films. The Victorians, for example, adapted “just about everything – and in just about every possible direction”.¹⁵ In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon affirms that adaptations are appealing because they offer the pleasure of “repetition with variation”¹⁶ or, in other words, they bring together “the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty”.¹⁷ Adaptations, therefore, should be appreciated by the different ways they promote audience engagement, not scrutinized in relation to a “sacred original”. That is, in order to be fully appreciated, adaptations should be liberated from pejorative connotations of infidelity and copying, because when there is a change in medium, there are both new constraints and enabling. Also, adaptations should not be conceived as a mere binary exchange between literature and film, because they also involve video games, opera, novelizations, stage plays, machinimas, e-literature, radio plays, installations and many other media.

The theories briefly presented in this introductory chapter have been put into practice in the analyses of some novels from the 19th century, those that tell the stories of popular characters such as Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes*, and *Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw* from Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. Each chapter provides different views and approaches on 19th century literature, based on the aforementioned theoretical apparatuses, which resulted in rich and interesting contributions to the field of Adaptation Studies.

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¹⁵ HUTCHEON. *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. xi.

¹⁶ HUTCHEON. *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 4.

¹⁷ HUTCHEON. *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 173.

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