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# Adapted into multiple media: what happens when adaptations meet transmedial franchises

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- 1 There seems to be an obsession with retellings of well-known stories in the last decades. In the cinema and streaming industries, the current landscape is awash with adaptations, not to mention countless remakes and reboots. In the book market, versions of classics are always among the top-selling titles: graphic novels and illustrated books adapting novels, remixes and mashups of classic literature, to name just a few examples. Among these retellings, there are cases that transcend a dualistic logic of a one-to-one-medium type of adaptation, that is, one target text (a media product) becoming an adaptation of one source text (a media product in a distinct medium). My focus in this paper is to propose an examination of a non-traditional type of adaptation in which one or more previous texts are adapted into a group of media products that are each developed to tell a different part of the story, in other words, a transmedial franchise.
- 2 Over the last decades, the terms transmedia, transmedia storytelling, and transmediality have been used in a variety of ways, designating different types of phenomena and allowing distinct approaches towards diverse objects of study. Influenced by media and communication studies, the most widespread notion of transmedia is the one popularized by Henry Jenkins in his book *Convergence Culture* (2006) and subsequent blog posts and books. A result of the media convergence forces at play, especially since the late 1970s, transmedia storytelling refers to the use of various media platforms that converge to tell a story, each of them contributing with a piece of the overall narrative, in a coherent and coordinated effort. In the case of an ideal transmedial franchise, there is no redundancy of information. Each medium offers new levels of revelation, which come together to form the complete version of the story.

- 3 Later, mainly in his blog, *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, Jenkins moved beyond the notion of transmedia storytelling as a pre-conceived coordinated project to discuss several different aspects of the phenomenon, and in particular, the idea of an expansive storyworld. To some scholars, such as Mark Wolf, the expansion of the storyworld, or world building, is another aspect of transmedia, so imaginary worlds can also be transmedially constructed, with hardly any advance in the narrative (3). A broad notion of transmedia, therefore, would account not only for a coherent, coordinated narrative, but also for a consistent storyworld.
- 4 Besides the “balanced”<sup>1</sup> projects proposed earlier by Jenkins, there are several different types of transmedia projects or transmedial franchises. Actually, as several experiments have already demonstrated, those balanced types might perhaps be seen as exceptions. One could distinguish, for example, micro- from big-budget projects; those that are web-driven from those that employ analogical media; those that are restricted to canonical storylines from those that include unofficial productions; and projects that develop within the same medium type (intramedia) from those that make use of distinct medium types (transmedia storytelling) (Harvey, 2015).
- 5 Concerning the structure or interaction among media products involved in a franchise, one could refer to the four types illustrated by Jens Eder (2015): multiple exploitation, supplementation, integration and participation. Jason Mittell (2012-13) uses the terms centrifugal and centripetal storytelling to respectively describe transmedial elements that expand the narrative outward or that make the narrative more intricate. Christy Dena (2009) identifies cases in which the transmedial quality lies within a single work, such as alternate reality games (ARGs), as intracompositional, while projects that are transmedial because of their relation to other works, a multi-platform project, are intercompositional. Likewise, Dena differentiates four types of transmedia writing: “a collection of mono-medium stories”; “a collection of media that tells one story”; “the transmedial expansion of an existing project”; and “projects that are designed to be transmedia from the beginning” (2011, 1-4). Elsewhere, I have identified transmedial projects with an emphasis on artistic and collaborative work (2018), and those that promote different levels of engagement (2022, forthcoming).
- 6 Although not nearly as extensive as the field of research dealing with transmedia storytelling and franchises, investigations into the transmedial phenomenon from the point of view of intermediality<sup>2</sup> have mainly focused on explaining the presence of certain medial traits across platforms. Transmediality, as used by Irina O. Rajewsky (2002), designates the presence of a certain motif, aesthetic or discourse across media. For Werner Wolf, transmedial phenomena are not specific to individual media, but they appear “on the level of ahistorical formal devices and ways of organizing semiotic complexes, such as repetition of motifs and thematic variation (e.g., in music and literature), metalepsis (in fiction, film, painting etc.), and narrativity” (252-53). This notion of the transmedial phenomenon, therefore, does not refer to a media product in particular but to certain medial traits or structures within one medium that will “travel” across other qualified media.
- 7 Considering, however, the case in which narrative events of a complete story appear across other media, one would probably refer to Kate Newell’s concept of adaptive networks. Adaptive networks describe a situation in which “a single source can inspire so many subsequent adaptations across media that it becomes a cultural phenomenon with wide-ranging impact” (2), as is the case with *The Wizard of Oz*, mentioned by

Newell, for instance. This is also the case with Sherlock Holmes, a character that activates a collective memory of certain cultural referents and meanings. As Ashley Polasek explains, “with every new adaptation produced, the web of intertexts becomes more complex and contributes further to the conception of Sherlock Holmes as an amalgamation of visual cues, catch phrases, and Victorian trappings”(41). Of course, one could approach a series of adaptations from a transmedial perspective, observing certain medial traits and themes across them.

- 8 At times, the boundaries between adaptation, transmediality, and transmedia storytelling are not clear-cut, as in cases in which a certain media product may adapt a previous work while at the same time expanding its story (perhaps by repeating a certain aesthetic particular to this work). When questioned about the distinction between adaptation and transmedia storytelling, Henry Jenkins explains in his blog:

While we are making distinctions, we need to distinguish between adaptation, which reproduces the original narrative with minimum changes into a new medium and is essentially redundant to the original work, and extension, which expands our understanding of the original by introducing new elements into the fiction. Of course, this is a matter of degree – since any good adaptation contributes new insights into our understanding of the work and makes additions or omissions which reshape the story in significant ways (“The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn”).

- 9 Later, Jenkins re-elaborates his opinion on the function of adaptations, affirming that it is also possible to acquire new experiences of a given text through adaptation:

Adaptations may be highly literal or deeply transformative. Any adaptation represents an interpretation of the work in question and not simply a reproduction, so all adaptations [sic] to some degree add to the range of meanings attached to a story. [...] It might be better to think of adaptation and extension as part of a continuum in which both poles are only theoretical possibilities and most of the action takes place somewhere in the middle (“Transmedia 202: Further Reflections”).

- 10 Perhaps a more interesting view on the subject is the one that goes beyond the idea of repetition versus expansion to recognize that transmedial practices present a higher degree of cohesion among their media products, in comparison to adaptations. Elizabeth Evans has noted something similar, asserting that transmedial practices are distinguished from other cultural products inasmuch as they possess

a stronger sense of integration and coherence amongst the individual elements. This sense of integration is evident via three characteristics of the transmedia [...]: narrative, authorship and temporality. These three characteristics may appear to varying degrees in different transmedia texts but their combined presence offers the key ways in which texts become transmedia, rather than function as marketing, spin-offs or adaptations (28).

- 11 In this sense, when compared to adaptations, transmedial franchises present a higher degree of cohesion among their media products, which are generally created as part of a project with a coordinated distribution plan. Whether a project is designed as transmedial from the beginning, or has been created as a single medium and later developed as a transmedial franchise, the cohesion of the plot and the storyworld (or narrative, authorship and temporality, as Evans suggests) is a crucial aspect for transmedia.

- 12 This idea of cohesion – the recognition of certain patterns across media – also connects to memory theory, which may be another way to distinguish adaptation from

transmedia storytelling, as suggested by Colin Harvey. According to the author, memory has always been central to crossmedial experiences:

These memories might be articulated through words, still images, audiovisual material, performance or interactivity, or indeed a combination of these different modes. They were the mechanisms by which the “storyworld” was effectively sewn together, helping create a common diegetic space for me – and countless others – to explore (viii).

- 13 Although both adaptation and transmedia storytelling activate memories of something that happened in a previous work, they do it differently. Whereas adaptations invite audiences to compare and contrast the adapted work with an original (a kind of vertical memory, as Harvey calls it), transmedia storytelling establishes a different dialogical relationship with a previous text, one that recalls some of its narrative, aesthetic, and storyworld elements – activating a type of horizontal memory – only to expand them. The notion of temporality is also central in order to distinguish between one phenomenon and the other, in his opinion:

Archetypal adaptation [...] must always seek to replace the temporality of the original text from which the adaptation is derived with a new temporality, a new ordering of events. In comparison, transmedia storytelling seeks either to provide an extension to the originating text’s existing temporality, either through prequels, interquels, sequels or some combination of the three techniques, or to provide a parallel temporality, perhaps telling the stories of other characters or giving alternative perspectives on the same events, as in the case of the Gospels. Where adaptation displaces time, transmedia storytelling *adds* time (90).

- 14 Despite being two of the most popular medial phenomena in contemporary culture, in practice, as I attempted to show in this brief introduction, the distinction between transmedia and adaptations is not always clear, a condition that might foster interesting discussions. There are, in fact, few researchers that put adaptation and transmedia side by side (Bordwell 2009; Dena 2009; Jenkins 2011; Harvey 2015), and these are mainly devoted to explaining their differences, before concluding that the boundaries between them are often blurred. Perhaps because they are still influenced by the repetition vs. expansion discourse, the two phenomena are mostly perceived as being opposing, if not rival, processes. Consequently, what is usually observed in adaptation/intermedial/transmedia studies is that one phenomenon ends up being neglected in relation to the other. This is the case when a media product is only studied as an adaptation of (a) previous text(s), even if it is part of a transmedial franchise; or when a transmedial project is analyzed only for its transmedial character, regardless of whether it adapts a previous work or not.<sup>3</sup>
- 15 In this text, I do not examine adaptation as an isolated process, or transmedial franchises as detached experiments. Rather, my aim is to analyze cases in which a story is adapted by means of multiple integrated media. This type of adaptation that is conceived in the form of a transmedial franchise – in which each franchise’s medium cooperates in order to adapt previous texts in an integrated and cohesive manner – will be referred to here as *transmedial adaptation*.<sup>4</sup> Thus, a transmedial adaptation designates a group of media products organized in the form of a franchise adapting one or more preexisting work(s).
- 16 Although there are multiple possible approaches to transmedial adaptations – economic, legal, cultural –, the aim of this paper is to investigate their dynamics from textual and medial perspectives. In an attempt to understand what happens when adaptations meet transmedial franchises, I will focus on which elements from the

previous texts are adapted and which are chosen to be transmedially expanded, and possible reasons for these choices. In order to do so, I propose an examination of two franchises: the project designed for the BBC TV series *Sherlock* and the one created to adapt the graphic novel *Watchmen*.

## “I don’t work for the BBC”: transmedial adaptation in *Sherlock*

- 17 Premiering in 2010, *Sherlock* is a TV show created by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, produced and broadcast by the BBC, with Benedict Cumberbatch in the role of the famous detective. The show has four seasons of three 90-minute episodes each, plus a special episode. The series, which was nominated for several awards, including BAFTAs, Emmys, and Golden Globes, brings Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories to contemporary Britain, transforming several narrative elements according to the values and cultural norms of our time. The private investigator uses a smartphone and the Internet to solve crimes; he wears a nicotine patch instead of using the curved pipe introduced by William Gillette’s early representations. Together with the use of modern technology, the adaptation also adopts a more irreverent and liberal approach to the source texts than several of its predecessors. While some episodes present narrative events that are more or less similar to Doyle’s, others bear almost no resemblance to them.<sup>5</sup>
- 18 As the title deliberately shows, the series is an adaptation of a group of short stories and novels written by Arthur Conan Doyle between 1887 and 1927, in which the detective Sherlock Holmes is the protagonist. The inspiration for the series, however, is not limited to the literary canon, but is also based on other stories by Doyle in which Holmes is not a character, and on previous film adaptations and illustrations, as openly declared by the producers and the actors of the British show in several interviews. This allows us to include *Sherlock* within the adaptive network of the detective’s revisitations.
- 19 Thus, in *Sherlock*, we observe that Doyle’s texts and the previous adaptations serve as a starting point for a rewriting of Holmes’s stories, a process in which fidelity becomes secondary in favor of adaptive solutions that transpose the narrative to the contemporary period. In addition, elements from previous adaptations are often playfully portrayed by the screenwriters, in a movement that both recognizes the relevance of these adaptations to the Holmesian tradition whilst reaffirming their obsolescence in relation to the present day.
- 20 From a more medial-oriented perspective, however, *Sherlock* is organized in the form of a transmedial franchise, with characters’ blogs and social network profiles as extensions of the TV show. The relation between the show and these transmedial platforms is established by migratory signs that are displayed on screen during the program. These clues or “Easter eggs,” planted in certain scenes, act as triggers for the viewer to move to other media: “To the unaware viewer, the scene would just progress as normal, but to other viewers the website address and phone number are catalytic allusions to other compositions in other distinct media that will reveal more information” (Dena 2009, 310). As Elizabeth Evans reminds us, this initiative of web material serving as transmedial extensions for TV shows is not new for the BBC. She identifies the 2002-2011 series *Spooks* as a previous case that used this format (89-90).

- 21 In her book *Transmedia Television*, Evans also suggests that web-based material is a common choice for transmedial extensions of TV programs, because of certain specificities of the television medium, such as temporality. Temporality is one of the key elements that influence the kind of transmedial strategies chosen for television compared with those conceived for projects involving other media. Because television has a distribution schedule, the story must remain interesting enough to fill in the gaps between episodes or seasons. The distribution of transmedial extensions cannot be either too sporadic (as the audience may lose interest in the show) or too frequent (as the audience might not be able to follow the story).<sup>6</sup>
- 22 Among all the possible functions, these transmedial artifacts – characters’ blogs and social network profiles – serve two causes in *Sherlock*: a. to reiterate the narrative events of the program, whilst promoting a change in the point of focalization; b. to expand the narrative of the show, providing new information and details that are not or barely mentioned on TV.
- 23 As an example of the first use, one could mention a post in Dr. John Watson’s blog, as he reveals his first impressions about the peculiar fellow, our titular detective:
- The man knew who I was. Somehow he knew everything about me. He knew I’d served in Afghanistan and he knew I’d been invalidated. [...] It’s mad. I think he might be mad. He was certainly arrogant and really quite rude and he looks about 12 and he’s clearly a bit public school and, yes, I definitely think he might be mad but he was also strangely likeable. He was charming. It really was all just a bit strange.  
(THE PERSONAL BLOG)
- 24 In order to illustrate the second function, one could refer to Molly Hooper’s blog post on how she met Jim, her boyfriend. Molly is a coroner who works at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital and nurtures an unrequited passion for Sherlock. During the TV show, in the episode “The Great Game,” Molly introduces Jim to Sherlock, but the series does not explain how Molly and Jim had originally met. The explanation is only made available on the coroner’s blog. In the comments section of the March 25 post, Jim (supposedly a computer technician who works in the same hospital as Molly) writes to invite her over for coffee. On March 30, the conversation between Molly and Jim in the comments section of the blog reveals that the two had already met on two other occasions and were probably getting romantically involved: [Molly:] “Yes!!! You!!! Thanks for lunch!”; [Jim:] “Thank YOU for last night!! Xxx”. (MOLLY HOOPER) So, whereas for the regular viewer of the show, Molly’s relationship had probably come as a surprise, fans who had accessed the blog already knew the coroner was seeing someone, although at that point, nobody knew his true identity – we later find out on the show that Jim was actually Moriarty, Sherlock’s arch-nemesis, who was using Molly to get closer to him.
- 25 The existence of these transmedial extensions outside the television medium reinforces the impression of verisimilitude. Fictional profiles, websites, and emails serve to resituate the real world within the fictional world, making the fictional world more believable and producing a result similar to what Barthes called the *effet de réel* (Dena 2009, 283). Especially when these transmedial platforms allow some interaction with fans, the result is that the boundaries between real life and fictional narrative become blurred. This happened with the official profile of the Irene Adler character on Twitter. On the same day that the episode “A Scandal in Belgravia” was aired, the character interacted with several other profiles: @themannwithaplan, @Juju766, @Madje,

@KateK, @miserablekitty and @codextim. This raised suspicion from other *Sherlock* fans who were not sure if these profiles belonged to a real or a fictional individual:

Figure 1. Fans (?) talk to each other, screenshot of Twitter profile [@thewhiphand] n.d.



©twitter.com/thewhiphand (accessed on 15 Feb. 2022)

- 26 Despite them being web-based media, it is important to mention that these transmedial extensions for *Sherlock* only allowed a very restricted form of participation from the audience: fans could not interact with characters through blog posts and, after that single Twitter “appearance,” Irene Adler did not interact again with other fans. As Stein and Busse explain:

these official transmedia extensions do not encourage (or actually even allow) fan engagement with the characters or story directly, nor do they host a forum to allow for fan engagement with other fans – indeed the web sites function as hermetically sealed transmedia extensions (13).

- 27 Also, as these transmedial extensions found an engaged fandom, producers achieved their goal to have spectators migrate to other media, but they also had to deal with fans creating fake social network profiles to pass off as official transmedial material. At one point, the BBC had to list the official blogs and social network profiles of the franchise:

Other Sherlock related websites

The website you have been looking at is entirely fictional and forms part of the fictional world of Sherlock. [...] Find out more about Sherlock.

The Science of Deduction – <http://www.thescienceofdeduction.co.uk/>

John Watson’s Blog – <http://www.johnwatsonblog.co.uk>

Molly Hooper’s Diary – <http://www.mollyhooper.co.uk>

Connie Prince’s official site – <http://www.connieprince.co.uk>

The websites were written by Joseph Lidster.

The Whip Hand – [twitter.com/#!/thewhiphand](https://twitter.com/#!/thewhiphand)

The Twitter feed was created by Hartswood Films who produce *Sherlock* for the BBC.

This is the definite list of official Sherlock character sites and accounts.

(OTHER SHERLOCK)

- 28 Especially in the case of John Watson’s blog, in which the doctor depicts his point of view on each episode of the series, it is clear that the entries constitute an adaptive attempt to reproduce the effect of Doyle’s stories, narrated in the first person by Watson. As the TV series chooses not to tell the story from his perspective, the literary effect of narration is obtained with the blog posts.

- 29 Another attempt to adapt details of Doyle’s texts is present in *Sherlock*’s blog, *The Science of Deduction*. Among the archived case files are, for instance, “The Confusion of Isadora Persano” and “The Abernatty Family,” two cases that are briefly mentioned in the short stories. As Watson narrates in “The Problem of Thor Bridge”: “A third case



worthy of note is that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a matchbox in front of him which contained a remarkable worm, said to be unknown to science.” And, in “The Adventure of the Six Napoleons,” Holmes reminds Watson of the case with the Abernetty Family<sup>7</sup>: “You will remember, Watson, how the dreadful business of the Abernetty family was first brought to my notice by the depth which the parsley had sunk into the butter upon a hot day.” (THE ARTHUR) These two examples are not mentioned in the TV series, so their mention on Holmes’s blog (with no detailed information available other than their titles) is a way of adapting their existence in the source texts.

- 30 Therefore, examining *Sherlock* not only as an adaptation but also as a transmedial event (that is, one that considers not only the narrative of the TV program but also of its transmedial extensions), I have observed that not only are these transmedial platforms a way to contextualize the stories of the detective in the present day, but they are also a solution to adapt Conan Doyle’s stories to a cultural environment situated in times of media convergence. In this sense, given their medial affordances, each of these ancillary media contributes to adapting some of the information found in the source-texts.
- 31 In the next section we will investigate how a transmedial project was created to adapt a well-known graphic novel.

## When “The End” is not the end: transmedial adaptation in *Watchmen*

- 32 *Watchmen* is a graphic novel created by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, published between 1986 and 1987 in 12 volumes and later compiled into a single edition. It won the Hugo Award in 1988 and was included in *Time Magazine*’s 2005 list of the “100 Best English-Language Novels from 1929 to the Present.” The work deconstructs the role of the superhero as it came to be known from comic books until the 1970s. In *Watchmen*, most of the vigilantes do not have superpowers; rather than being heroic figures with an implacable sense of justice, they are mostly distressed and nostalgic middle-aged individuals who are now forbidden from fighting crime because society has turned against them. The plot is set in 1985 in the United States, in a dystopic scenario in which the country, led by Richard Nixon, has won the Vietnam War and, in the context of the Cold War, experiences an escalation of tension with the Soviet Union.
- 33 The graphic novel presents the story of the Watchmen, a group of ex-vigilantes who meet again when they realize their lives are in danger. In parallel with the main plot is another storyline that recounts the formation of the first group of heroes, called the Minutemen, in the 1930s. This arc is narrated in flashbacks spread throughout the graphic novel but they are also located at the end of each chapter, in sections containing fictional documents such as excerpts from newspapers and magazines, photos, police reports, an excerpt from Hollis Mason’s (former vigilante Nite Owl) autobiography *Under the Hood*, and letters, among other kinds of material. These documents are represented in their materiality, as if they were real proof of the Minutemen’s existence. This simulation, called media representation by Lars Elleström (2014), constitutes a strategy to point to factual reality; in *Watchmen*, a dystopic one.

- 34 A third storyline in the graphic novel is *Tales of the Black Freighter*, a pirate comic book telling the story of a shipwreck and a marooned survivor. The comic book, which appears occasionally from chapters 3 to 11 of the graphic novel and metaphorically comments on the events of the main narrative, is being read by a boy shown in the graphic novel. It is therefore a case of *mise en abyme*, a comic book inside another comic book.
- 35 In 2009, the graphic novel was adapted to the cinema by director Zack Snyder in a very reverential version which was extremely close to the original (except perhaps for the final sequence). Because of that, the film received dismayed criticism, with Snyder being accused of ignoring the audience that was not familiar with Moore and Gibbons's work and of not being able to come up with creative solutions that would consider the potential of cinema as a medium.
- 36 Besides the film adaptation with the story set in 1985 and in the 1930s, *Watchmen* was also adapted to other media as a transmedial project. In the same month of the movie's debut in theaters, a DVD containing a 26-minute animated version of *Tales of the Black Freighter*, as well as a 38-minute fictional documentary titled *Under the Hood*, were released. The latter was meant to resemble a 1980s, behind-the-scenes television news program, but mostly adapted the fictional content that appears at the end of each chapter of the graphic novel. In addition to an interview with Hollis Mason about his book *Under the Hood*, the host of the show also interviews Silk Spectre from the Minutemen, among other characters.
- 37 Later, some new scenes were included in the 162-minute theatrical version of the film, resulting in a 186-version called the director's cut. Afterwards, this longer version was combined with the pirate animation in order to produce the ultimate cut, a 215-minute version of the film that accurately reproduces the order of the interposed plots of the graphic novel, and thus reaches the most faithful adaptation of its source text.
- 38 The transmedial project created to adapt *Watchmen* also included the Internet. Part of the fictional material that was not included in the documentary *Under the Hood* was adapted in the form of videos on YouTube, a website domain, a Flickr photo album and a Twitter account belonging to *The New Frontiersman*, a fictional newspaper that appears in the graphic novel. On the newspaper's YouTube account (WATCHMEN YouTube), four videos were published in March 2009. They are:
- "NBS Nightly News with Ted Philips, March 11 (1970)", a news program that comments on world politics, more specifically on Dr. Manhattan's role in the American victory in the Vietnam War;
  - "The Keene Act & YOU (1977)", an institutional and instructional video explaining the Act that banned the masked vigilantes and how people should protect themselves from them;
  - "Who Watches the Watchmen? - A Veidt Music Network (VMN) Special (1983)", an MTV-style show of musical clips;
  - "World in Focus: 6 Minutes to Midnight (1985)", a TV show aired in 1970 with a retrospective about the ten years of Dr. Manhattan's existence.
- 39 While the content of these videos is not a direct transposition of narrative episodes of the graphic novel, it nevertheless adapts fictional elements that corroborate with *Watchmen's* storyworld in the transmedial franchise. The video "World in Focus," for example, contains an interview with the photographer of Dr. Manhattan's operation in Vietnam talking about his experience during the war. The program is interrupted by commercials for several products that appear in the graphic novel, such as the one for

Mmeltdowns, a type of candy that appears from chapters 1 to 11 of the book, usually as a detail in the background.

- 40 The online Flickr photo album for *The New Frontiersman* (WATCHMEN Flickr album) was created to display several images related to the film adaptation. Most of them are references that cannot be clearly seen during the film – unless the film is paused – but they are more evident in the graphic novel. These are, for instance, magazine covers (including one with Nixon as president), ads for products, letters, photos (such as the Vietnamese surrender), confidential reports, etc.
- 41 The YouTube videos and Flickr photos were linked to two other sites: *The New Frontiersman* web domain (THE NEW Frontiersman) and its Twitter account (TWITTER @NewFrontiersman). Released in January 2009, the newspaper's website was periodically updated until March 6, 2009, the day the film was released. The Twitter account for the newspaper, also created in January and updated until March 2009, only contains links to the YouTube videos and to the Flickr photos.

Figure 2. *The New Frontiersman*, screenshot of Twitter profile [@newfrontiersman] n.d.



©twitter.com/newfrontiersman (accessed on 15 Feb. 2022)

- 42 In summary, in addition to the film, a short animation, a documentary, YouTube videos, a website, a Flickr photo album and a Twitter account were also used in the transmedial project that adapted *Watchmen*. In this sense, as a transmedial adaptation, I have observed that the transmedial platforms that are supplementary to the film perform a two-fold purpose. By simulating the material mode of different media, they increase the sense of veracity of the story, as they become evidence for the dystopic narrative being told. Furthermore, they serve to adapt details of the graphic novel that could not be properly seen on film, whether because of constraints linked to the duration of the film; or because of the moving character of the film medium, which does not allow certain information to appear with great detail.

## Final considerations

- 43 In this study, I aimed at an approximation between adaptation and transmedial franchises, based on the perception of a gap in this theme among studies in both areas

of research. In the process, I attempted to demonstrate how the structure and mode of operation of traditional forms of adaptations differ from the ones located in a transmedial context. An analysis of two selected cases provided examples of how transmedial adaptations operate under different textual and medial dynamics.

- 44 The investigation has revealed that the adaptive processes in the television series *Sherlock* suggest that Doyle's texts are just the starting point for an adaptation that also took into consideration previous versions of Holmes for several distinct media. In *Watchmen*, only one source-text is present, and the adaptation retains a stronger sense of preservation as a homage to the original text.
- 45 Considering the transmedial aspect of the case studies provided, each franchise made use of its transmedial extensions in a different manner, disseminating different types of content to these ancillary media, according to its particular purposes. In *Watchmen*, the transmedial information particularly related to the contextualization of Moore's dystopic fictional world. It also expanded the story to moments before the beginning of the narrative in the graphic novel. Considering the distribution schedule of the project, the transmedial extensions, released a few days before the film reached theaters, aimed at increasing audience's expectations and, perhaps to a lesser degree, to inform a public that did not know the graphic novel.
- 46 In *Sherlock*, most of the transmedial extensions revealed perspectives of different characters on certain narrative events. The distribution schedule of the series suggested that the transmedial extensions served to keep audience's interest during the gaps between the series' episodes and seasons. As mentioned, web-based extensions such as social media profiles and online blogs are suitable for transmedial television projects, because they can be rapidly updated (Evans 2011).
- 47 While both of the cases under study provided interesting examples of transmedial adaptations, it is evident that they do not represent a varied corpus, because they are similar in many aspects. For instance, they mostly make use of web-based transmedial extensions; both offer very restricted forms of audience participation; both are international, English-language projects. Despite that, the analysis has already offered a first insight: that a transmedial adaptation is not necessarily dependent on a stable previous text, as the many sources of inspiration for *Sherlock* have demonstrated.
- 48 In addition, the fact that both projects are intercompositional and proactive (that is, designed to be transmedia from the beginning, as in Dena's (2011) classification) may suggest that transmedial adaptations tend to be developed as pre-conceived projects. They also tend to be composed of one main medium (which tells most of the adapted story) supplemented by other ancillary media (with less important information from that same story). Yet this affirmation requires further investigation with more diverse examples.
- 49 As this study may contribute to broadening the fields of adaptation and transmedia and thus be beneficial to both areas of study, it may also hopefully help us to better understand the new ways in which stories are being constantly told, retold, and consumed in our contemporary culture of media convergence. Nevertheless, as a relatively new phenomenon, further investigation is necessary in order to fully understand its specificities, potentials and impacts. Those investigations could, for instance, start from the following questions: Are transmedial adaptations defined by their structure or by the audience's experience? In other words, are they still

considered an adaptation if the public does not move across media? How does the knowledge of the original work influence the reception of the transmedial adaptation? In cases in which some online material is not available anymore after the transmedial project has been launched, how might this absence affect the consumer's perception of the adaptation as an adaptation? And, finally, how could the unavailability of some media products of the franchise or the deliberate decision not to consume all of them influence the work's criticism as an adaptation?

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## NOTES

1. Mittell uses the expression "balanced transmedia" to refer to Jenkins's earlier examples of transmedia storytelling, those in which "all elements of the crossmedia project contribute equally to the storyworld" (qtd. in Harvey 26).
2. And, more recently, there is apparently a certain consensus in the use of "transmedia" and "transmediality" for any phenomenon or process that involves the transference of certain medial characteristics across media.
3. Colin Harvey may be one of the few exceptions. In *Fantastic Transmedia* he mentions the interesting example of the Marvel Cinematic Universe: "The instance of the MCU is particularly illuminating as it draws so heavily on the source material of the Marvel Comics, deploying numerous techniques of adaptation, while at the same time extending the storyworld intramedially across the various films in the franchise and transmedially outward to live action television and comics" (80).
4. I call this phenomenon *transmedial adaptation* for the sake of simplicity, but I do recognize that this term is not the most appropriate considering that all adaptations are transmedial (in the sense of transference/transformation of certain medial characteristics across media). A more precise expression would perhaps be *transmedial storytelling adaptation*, or *transmedial franchise adaptation*.
5. The creators admit, however, that there are certain "'immutable' elements of the Holmes stories, such as the hound of the Baskervilles and Moriarty (...) Sherlock still has an arch-enemy and a clever brother, plays the violin, has a landlady called Mrs. Hudson (...) and a police colleague called Lestrade" (SHERLOCK HOLMES).
6. This also applies to Brazilian telenovelas, which frequently make use of social media profiles and online diaries for characters. See, for instance, FIGUEIREDO (2016; 2019) for a detailed analysis of the transmedial project created for the telenovela *Cheias de Charme* (2012).
7. One notices here a small change in the name of the family, a play on the titles of the cases that is recurrent in the series, for example, "A Study in Scarlet" instead of "A Study in Pink" or "[The Adventures of] The Empty House" for "The Empty Hearse".

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## ABSTRACTS

Despite being two of the most popular medial phenomena in contemporary culture, few studies have been devoted to understanding what happens when adaptations meet transmedial franchises. In this study, I propose an examination of two cases in which one or more original texts have been adapted into the form of a transmedial franchise, resulting in a transmedial adaptation. The aim is to understand how transmedial adaptations transcend traditional binary models of adaptation, with one or several texts being adapted into a convergent project composed of several media. Using the examples provided, I also seek to examine how this multi-media phenomenon activates different textual and medial dynamics. In order to do so, I will use an approach that considers both intermedial and transmedial aspects of the phenomenon.

Bien qu'il s'agisse de deux des phénomènes médiatiques les plus populaires dans la culture contemporaine, peu d'études ont tenté de comprendre ce qui se passe lorsque des adaptations rencontrent des franchises transmédiales. Dans cet article, je propose deux études de cas dans lesquelles un ou plusieurs textes originaux ont été adaptés sous la forme d'une franchise transmédiale, résultant en une adaptation transmédiale. L'objectif est de comprendre comment les adaptations transmédiales transcendent les modèles binaires traditionnels des adaptations, avec un texte ou plusieurs textes adaptés en un projet convergent composé de plusieurs médias. À l'aide des exemples fournis, je cherche également à examiner comment ce phénomène plurimédia fait fonctionner différentes dynamiques de production et de consommation de produits culturels. Pour ce faire, une approche qui considère à la fois les aspects intermédiatiques et transmédiatiques du phénomène sera utilisée.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** transmedia, adaptation, franchises, transmedial adaptation, transmediality

**Mots-clés:** transmédia, adaptation, franchises, adaptation transmédiale, transmédialité

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