

Adaptation as a Transmedial Process

Theories and Practices

edited by

Mimmo Cangiano, Filippo Luca Sambugaro



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Abstract

This miscellaneous volume aims at offering a fresh and updated view of adaptation and transmedial practices. In the wake of Linda Hutcheon's groundbreaking study, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), it discusses theories and exemplary case studies from different critical perspectives and points of view assessing past and present trends, and envisioning future prospects. The volume is divided in three macro-sections: *Theories* explores some methodological and theoretical facets of adaptation; *Practices I* includes analyses of literary, cinematographic and theatrical texts; *Practices II* discusses transmedial examples relating to arts. The book ends with the interview with the Czech-German artist Michael Bielický, a pioneer in the use of multiple media (especially digital ones).

Introduction

Filippo Luca Sambugaro, Marco Sartor

1. Why Adaptation as a Transmedial Process

In a short article published in the “Cinema nuovo” issue of September 1954, Italo Calvino outlined some thoughts on the status and purpose of film adaptations, starting from the analysis of some movies based on well-known novels that were in competition at that year’s Venice Film Festival.* On that occasion, the writer discussed the function of cinema in relation to literature, with specific reference to the transposition of a story from the page to the screen.

The novel [...] does not accept any other activity than reading. Its secret spring is triggered within the movement of the story: in the language, in the moral tension, in the way of approaching situations and problems. How shall the cinema replace this spring that lies beneath words, with another that stands beneath visual images? Should the movie try to translate the spirit of the novel? Or not rather try to say other things, things of its own, starting from the same story¹?

As Elliott² pointed out, the discussion on cinema and its devices is frequent in the writers of the last century, who “often argue passion-

* Although conceived in unified form from the development of common ideas, the first paragraph of this introduction was written by Marco Sartor, and the second by Filippo Luca Sambugaro.

¹ Calvino 1954, p. 188; my translation (here and below).

² Elliott 2003, p. 6.

ately [...] about the possibility and advisability of turning novels or plays into movies”³: similar precedents can be found in the texts of Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Lev Tolstoy, and Virginia Woolf. In particular, the latter’s essay *The Cinema*, which appeared in “The National & Athenaeum” on July, 3, 1926⁴, is on a quite similar wavelength to Calvino’s ideas. If, on the one hand, the British author lamented the simplifications literary works were subjected to in their cinematographic transpositions, on the other side, she also emphasised the potential of the new medium, which, from “be[ing] a parasite”, could “walk erect”⁵ by developing an independent language.

These expressions are to be traced back to the so-called 0.0 phase of Adaptation Studies according to the subdivision proposed by Leitch⁶. Apart from the (not insignificant) chronological distance separating those words from the present day, one of their obvious shortcomings for a theory of adaptation lies in the very limited range of media taken into consideration. After all, as Hutcheon states at the beginning of her study, “[i]f you think adaptation can be understood by using novels and films alone, you’re wrong”⁷. For this reason, this volume considers literature and cinema⁸ alongside other forms of art, starting with theatre and opera, in an attempt to account for the widest possible scope of adaptation practices. Some of Calvino’s assumptions, however, still bear some relevance, since they uphold the idea that adaptations are “second”, but not “secondary or inferior”⁹, and can therefore carve out an autonomous space, with their own languages, modes, and forms of expression, to “say new things” com-

³ Leitch 2017, p. 2.

⁴ Woolf 1926, on which Hankins 2009; Hutcheon 2013, p. 3; Leitch 2017, p. 2.

⁵ Cf. Woolf 1926, p. 382: «But what, then, are its devices? If it ceased to be a parasite, how would it walk erect? At present it is only from hints that one can frame any conjecture».

⁶ Leitch 2017, pp. 2-3.

⁷ Hutcheon 2013, p. XI.

⁸ For the relationship between cinema and the novel, see Bluestone 1957 and McFarlane 1996. A comprehensive definition of adaptation as *formal entity or product*, *process of creation* and *reception* is provided in Hutcheon 2013, pp. 7-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. XIII. On the poor account of adaptations in academic criticism, see Naremore 2000, p. 6.

pared to the “starting point”¹⁰. Despite their diversity of media, the *trait d’union* that links adapted texts (also called *source* or *original*) to their adaptations is “that fundamental human need to which both novels and films respond: to invent stories and recognise oneself in them”¹¹. Placed in the context of adaptation studies, the desire to tell stories justifies the rate of variance of the derived work, emphasising its innovative aspects¹²; at the same time, it has the merit of highlighting the process that leads from the source to its adaptation, rather than on the *fidelity* to the original.

Under these premises, the study of the “dialogic relations”¹³ between the two works, sometimes complicated by the presence of intermediate products, is the main object of this book, which aims at analysing adaptation in its development, according to a transmedial perspective. This means that, by editors’ choice, the case studies discussed always employ several media, and the transition from source to adaptation involves the consequent use of different forms, modes of expression, and languages, also in accordance with the specific requirements of the new medium. Indeed, as Hutcheon observed:

being shown a story is not the same as being told it – and neither is the same as participating in it or interacting with it, that is, experiencing a story directly and kinesthetically. With each mode, different things get adapted and in different ways¹⁴.

For this reason, the heterogeneity which features prominently in this volume must not be dismissed as a hackneyed excuse for naïve syncretism, but a deliberate, almost indispensable choice to valorise the multiple possibilities and the pervasiveness of transmedial adaptations.

This collection of essays – compiled within the framework of the

¹⁰ Calvino 1954, p. 190.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹² On this point, see also what Hutcheon 2013, p. XIV writes: “Because adaptation is a form of repetition without replication, change is inevitable, even without any conscious updating or alteration of setting”. On kindred modulations also stands Benjamin 1992, p. 90, for whom “storytelling is always the art of repeating stories”.

¹³ Hutcheon 2013, p. XII.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Bembus research project Transmediality and Comparative Studies¹⁵ – is not a handbook on adaptation studies, nor is it guided by a historiographical intention to trace the state of the art or the history of adaptation studies – functions already accomplished by Leitch’s handbook. Rather, priority was given to the discussion of case studies in sections II and III, in the light of the theoretical issues explored in section I.

The outcome is a work that stands at the crossroads of several media and artistic expressions and shows the potential of their unpredictably wide-ranging cross-fertilizations. The *palimpsestuous works*¹⁶ analysed in the case studies are also characterised by a variable degree of compliance with the source work. This is deliberate, as it aims to reproduce that “continuum of fluid relationships between prior works and later – and lateral – revisitations”¹⁷ discussed by Hutcheon in the concluding part of her study, and which we attempted to represent in the cover image of this volume. Created with the artificial intelligence algorithm DALL·E, it tries to represent “a hypothetical meeting place between literature, art, theatre in a dreamlike space, digital art”¹⁸. This is indeed the goal the volume set itself: accounting for the variety of interactions and fusions of different artistic forms resulting in a slew of *transmedial narrations*¹⁹ and *re-mediations*²⁰.

Admittedly, Hutcheon’s continuum is not an infinite line, but rather a segment whose delimitation is necessary in order not to thwart exegetical efforts. For this reason, limits have been set to the label of adaptation. At the extremes of this sequence are, on the one

¹⁵ The research project Transmediality and Comparative Studies (PI: Filippo Luca Sambugaro) is part of the international community of scholars Bembus (<https://bembus.org/>), which funded the publication of this volume; it aims to study the relationships between different media and art forms and the analytical comparison between them. For more information about the research project’s activities, events and publications, as well as a list of its members, visit <https://bembus.org/research/tcs> (last accessed 30 April 2023).

¹⁶ Ermarth 2001, p. 47.

¹⁷ Hutcheon 2013, p. 171.

¹⁸ This is the text prompt given to the neural network for the image generation.

¹⁹ Jenkins 2006.

²⁰ Bolter, Grusin 1999, p. 216.

hand, works that have no ontological status due to their excessive dependence on the source material and, on the other, whole narrative ecosystems whose link with the source is so slack that it cannot be referred to adaptation *stricto sensu*. The latter include the so-called *extended narratives*, which, “although designed as finite, exceed the measure conventionally attributed to the single story, constructing worlds and characters marked by coherence and continuity”²¹. None of this is accounted for in the present volume²², but the reader who wishes to explore these issues in depth can find a valid point of reference in other valuable recent studies²³.

2. Contents

As already mentioned, *Adaptation as a Transmedial Process* was conceived and subsequently developed not only with the intention of taking stock of the *status quaestionis* of the lively debate on transmedial studies, but also to present various and peculiar outcomes of adaptation practices and innovative insights on the subject. In this sense, adaptation is studied as a *transmedial process*: the works analysed are not considered stationary and monolithic entities, but rather magmatic elements that are positioned at the very end of an artistic process that focuses precisely on the transmedial relationship with other works.

The three essays in the first section – *Theories* – start from practical and thoroughly discussed examples in order to draw attention to some fundamental theoretical issues. The very title of Balestrini’s contribution, *Boundaries and Crossings: Why Adaptation and Transmediality Theories Should Dialogue*, clearly marks the distance between these practices, despite their close interrelations. Combining Hutcheon’s adaptation theory and Rajewsky’s transmediality theory, and through

²¹ De Pascalis, Pescatore 2018, p. 19. In this regard, see also Bisoni et al. (2013).

²² Also falling beyond the perimeter of the present work are thoughts on *media archaeology*, understood as a “methodology for investigating new media cultures through points that come from past new media, often with a strong emphasis on the forgotten, the eccentric, but also on the non-obvious apparatuses, practices, and inventions” (Parrika 2019, p. 29; my translation), for which see Fidotta, Mariani 2018 and Parrika 2019. However, a glimpse of this is grasped here in Pagello’s essay.

²³ Pescatore 2018 and Fusillo et al. 2020.

the interesting analysis of a unique case such as Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, the author proposes a new and original way of approaching the subject. Harrison's essay goes even further, offering a compelling study that analyses and compares Pasolini, Montanelli, Zanzotto, Nietzsche and Pirandello, reflecting on aspects not often considered, such as the difference between adaptation and transmediation or even cases of misadaptation. Finally, Guarracino's essay opens with Adorno's *Bourgeois Opera* and then focuses on the practice of the *Regieoper*. Relying on Hutcheon's tenet that adaptation cannot and should not be judged by its adherence to the source work, Guarracino analyses this practice, for a different and new perspective in transmedial and adaptation studies.

The second section – *Practises* – presents studies that focus their considerations, including theoretical ones, on one or more cases. This part of the volume is divided into two subdivisions: *Practises I*, dedicated to literature, theatre and cinema, and *Practises II*, which focuses on art (and especially visual art). Opening *Practises I* is Cinquegrani's lucid interpretation of a monumental work such as Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, discussing its (loose) source, Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle* in the light of Foucault's reflections. This is followed by Faienza's essay on Starnone's *Lacci*, a very interesting case of a novel adapted for the theatre and then for the cinema by the author himself. Faienza analyses the case thoroughly, also identifying constants and variants between the different versions of the work. Pagello's essay *Adaptation as a Transmedia Serial Process* uses the recent media case of the superhero expanded universes to study not only the different realisations of so-called *transmedial storytelling*, but also the relationships between the practice of serial adaptation and the narrative ecosystems generated over the years by writers, artists, and film producers. Finally, Lino presents the case of the adaptation of *Tino's Nights in Baghdad* by the artistic duo ConiglioViola. Here, experimentalism (in forms such as augmented reality and literature) becomes a tool for the adaptive and transmedial transformation of one work into another. Such an original transformation of a text into a digital narrative allows Lino to meditate on the unexplored (but possible) mechanisms that adaptation may develop and/or undergo.

The *Practises II* section is centred around visual arts. Mantoan's essay begins by tracing the complex and debated question of the func-

tion of adaptation in the arts: from Winckelmann's reflections to Goethe's, Mantoan investigates how interpretations on the relations between works generated through different media (sculptures, paintings, poems, plays) have followed one another over the centuries. These considerations are further explored in an analysis of Majewski's and Reihana's video-installations, which become not only a form of adaptation, but even of re-appropriation. In her essay, De Vincentis engages in recounting the brand-new reality of virtual museums and of Artificial Intelligence and how the latter one has become a tool for interpreting – and sometimes re-interpreting – artistic works (especially in museums). The volume ends with an interview with the Czech-German artist Michael Bielický, professor at the University of Arts and Design in Karlsruhe. Bielický is one of the first and most prominent artists who have used multiple media (especially digital ones) to present and represent their works, and for this reason his opinions on the relationship between different media and artistic forms are of utmost interest.

In conclusion, *Adaptation as a Transmedial Process* seeks to be a useful compendium for amateurs and specialists alike. Its essays discuss cases and examples from almost the entire world geographically, as well as from several centuries, and it will hopefully shed light on themes and practices that, as Jenkins predicted in his *Convergence Culture*²⁴, are more relevant and fundamental today than ever before.

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²⁴ Jenkins 2006.

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PART I

THEORIES

1. Boundaries and Crossings: Why Adaptation and Transmediality Theories Should Dialogue

Nassim W. Balestrini

*In loving memory of
Hermine Mayer-Berdjis (1933–2022)*

1.1. Adaptation and Transmediality

Adaptation studies (as theorized in anglophone academia in North America and Europe) and transmediality studies (as theorized most prominently in European countries) are fields that have been developing on parallel tracks and often in separate scholarly organizations. For researchers active in both fields, these tracks have crossed. Much can be gained by bringing adaptation and transmediality theories into conversation. In the last two decades, the variegated field of adaptation studies has evolved far beyond the novel-into-film focus and has managed to argue against the unabated interest in questions of fidelity which persists among lay audiences and the critics that address them. In the same period, transmediality theory has been refining its relation to intermediality theory and has offered increasingly differentiated methods of studying artistic features across media boundaries.

Combining those two theories produces more complete and nuanced readings of adaptations that cross media boundaries than each theory yields on its own. In order to tease out some advantages of applying both vantage points, I will discuss Lorraine Hansberry's 1961 unfilmed screenplay which she completed only two years after the phenomenal Broadway success of her eponymous play *A Raisin in the Sun*. The fact that the same artist wrote both works challenges

recipients to fathom whether differences are related to genre-specific features or may have economic or other reasons. Hansberry's screenplay demonstrates her sharp sense of cinematic possibilities and her goal to strengthen the argumentative prowess of her stage play, especially by emphasizing sociopolitical and site-specific contexts through filmic methods¹. I propose that the double perspective of transmediality and adaptation theory fosters insights into how the inner workings of spoken drama and film impact creative processes that are mindful of implied viewers' potential responses.

According to Linda Hutcheon, adaptations offer "repetition with variation" in a manner attractive to recipients who enjoy the combined experiences of "[r]ecognition and remembrance" as well as "change"². Appreciating adaptation from this experiential vantage point implies that Hansberry's screenplay of *A Raisin in the Sun* should be scrutinized in terms of how the envisioned film is meant to enhance what the Broadway production of the play was able to achieve through the expressive means of spoken theatre. Assuming that recipients would thus 'gain' rather than 'lose' something through the screenplay contradicts the prevailing perspective on 'original' texts versus their film adaptations³. As Hansberry authored the play *and* the screenplay, recipients are not confronted with the frequently surmised competitive relation between different artistic outlooks. The "palimpsestic"⁴ feature of the screenplay *as an adaptation* is still worth considering and may figure prominently in the minds of those who know the play and want to understand the process and the product of Hansberry's transposition.

Just as adaptation theorists have been debating the boundaries of what can be considered adaptation (and how it might differ from appropriation and remediation), the meanings and implications of transmediality are also in flux. While transmediality as a research focus clearly differs from Henry Jenkins's concept of transmedia storytelling, it should neither be regarded as a mere subcategory of intermediality nor as a more recent theory meant to replace longer-

¹ See Wilkerson 1994 and Lee 1994.

² Hutcheon 2013, p. 4.

³ Ibid., p. 38.

⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

standing intermediality theory⁵. Instead, transmediality offers new heuristic options because it replaces a competitive or exclusionary perspective with approaching “transmediality *on a par* with intermediality”⁶. As Irina Rajewsky argues, intermediality refers to “relations *between* media (i.e., medial interactions, interplays or interferences) and *transmediality* [...] to phenomena that occur *across* media”⁷. Thus, transmediality facilitates comparative analyses of works that have nothing to do with one another except for the fact that they, for instance, include metalepsis or a narrative frame. Works whose features we study from a transmedial perspective may, at the same time, contain intermedial components or be related to other works.

Transmediality-based insights can, thus, contribute to discussing the intermedial relation, for instance, between a short story that has been adapted into an *opera libretto*. By understanding the short story and the opera as individual texts within their genre conventions, one can begin to consider how the process of adaptation across media boundaries establishes new categories related to media differences. Instead of assuming that a screenplay necessarily uses a spoken drama as a generic point of departure (because spoken drama preceded film and because the two genres share constitutive elements), a transmedial perspective encourages awareness of differences determined by medial contexts. Rajewsky roots her understanding of this “‘double logic’ of transmedial phenomena” in the implied recipient’s response:

the crucial point of transmedial phenomena is that from the receiver’s point of view they materialize in *similar* ways across media [...], while their actual realizations nevertheless remain specific to the respective media. This is why transmedial phenomena may effectively sharpen our awareness and understanding of media specificities and differences between them⁸.

The very similarities between spoken drama and a cinematic screen-

⁵ See Rajewsky 2013, p. 21. Here and below, emphasis is always in the text.

⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

play can therefore be a scrim that prevents noticing crucial differences in each genre's poetics – at least for a lay recipient.

When discussing *how* adaptations are created, Hutcheon focuses on ways in which “the story” is rendered accessible through “different modes of engagement – narrating, performing, or interacting”⁹. Her focus on reception aims at going beyond intrinsically oriented studies that highlight “medium-specificity and [beyond] individual comparative case studies in order to consider as well relations among the major modes of engagement”¹⁰. This central concern with the communicative process offers fruitful intersections with recent developments in transmediality. Similar to Hutcheon's theorization of “modes of engagement”¹¹ and, thus, of how specific works address recipients, knowledge of specific media and genres, expectations as to how they work, and preparedness for deriving meaning from specific works, Rajewsky's approach reads formal structures and categorizations by embedding them within a culturally rooted heuristics of decoding the signification of specific media features and individual works.

Because this essay will focus on a case study rather than on meta-level theorization, its guiding principle will be the question as to which features of Hansberry's screenplay and spoken drama can be studied from a transmedial perspective in a manner that enriches the study of the screenplay as an adaptation. Rather than perceiving a competitive relation between the two works, the following discussion will highlight what has been taken out, added, or changed because of what film can do and what theatre cannot. The question is not whether Hansberry's screenplay is theatrical; it is rather how combining adaptation and transmediality theories alerts us to meaningful differences and interrelations between Hansberry's use of cinematic affordances instead of theatrical ones.

1.2. Scales of Showing

Spoken drama and film share the realm of mimetic showing

⁹ Hutcheon 2013, p. 10.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

¹¹ Ibid.

rather than diegetic telling, but “[n]ot all showing is the same”¹². While they are “composite media” that rely on “performance and staging”¹³, “film and theatre are media with different ‘automatisms’, different ‘affordances’, to use two words that often crop up in media theory”¹⁴. For instance, “with the aid of the mediating camera, [film] can both direct and expand the possibilities of perception”¹⁵ as compared to what is possible on the stage. In traditional Western theatre, an audience member remains seated in a specific location from which they can observe the stage. Similar to this stable vantage point, from which a theatre-goer can decide to focus on different segments within an unchanging visual field, a person watching a film in a cinema is also in a fixed location looking at a specifically sized projection, but the camera work of the projected film produces large differences in terms of the size of characters, objects, and locations in relation to viewers¹⁶; it can provide anything from extreme close-ups to panning shots and aerial views – perspectives that are impossible to achieve in the theatre with methods like on-stage lighting or even on-stage projections¹⁷. Furthermore, film is much more flexible and versatile than theatre regarding setting types and setting changes, both in terms of space and time.

As Jewell Handy Gresham-Nemiroff puts it: the medium of film proffered Hansberry the possibility of conveying “not merely the realities but the *epic* dimensions of the lives and world of the characters she had created”¹⁸. Gresham-Nemiroff uses the term ‘epic’ in the sense of immense meaningfulness through which individual characters reflect millions of lives scarred by a history of racism and classism. She quotes Robert Nemiroff (Hansberry’s literary executor and former husband) who understands cinematic techniques as primarily showing in areas where spoken drama has to make do with telling: Hansberry “sought to capture through the camera what the

¹² Ibid., p. 50.

¹³ Sava 2019, pp. 9-10.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁵ Hutcheon 2013, pp. 42-43.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁷ See Sava 2019, p. 10 *et passim*.

¹⁸ Gresham-Nemiroff 1994, p. XI; also see Wilkerson 1994, pp. XXIX-XXX.

stageplay could only *talk* about: the full reality of the ghetto experience¹⁹. Gresham-Nemiroff also references a 1959 “Village Voice” article in which Hansberry compares *Raisin*’s male protagonist, Walter Lee Younger, to mythical as well as to historical heroes and heroines, from Oedipus to the Little Rock Nine²⁰. Read in this light, the screenplay oscillates between personal and much larger-scaled social experiences, between personal triumphs and their hard-to-discern wider implications. Cinematically, the Younger family comes across as metonymically representing historical and psychological depth far beyond individual decisions and experiences.

1.3. Zooming In/Out and Superimposition

Based on these assumptions, the question arises as to when and how the realistically drawn characters are to be understood from an epic perspective that gives them such mythical proportions. Two film-specific strategies loom large here: first, zooming in and out from seeing an entire human figure to focusing on a strongly enlarged part of the body and, second, the superimposition of images, one of which is a close-up of a central character. Close-ups may inspire a perception reminiscent of observing oversized statues (e.g., of heroic figures) that, as complete entities and as large-dimensioned objects as compared to the viewer, assume symbolic valence. Varying degrees of closeness and distance – that is, of zooming in or out – could adapt the use of spotlights on stage, but Hansberry’s play does not feature such lighting instructions. From a transmedial perspective, the question rather pertains to characterization methods and to evoking realist or epic interpretations (in the sense explained above) in theatre or film audiences. Both zooming and superimposition also provide the cinematic basis for embedding the Youngers’ lives within larger social contexts in the vast and varied cityscape of Chicago. Thus, the screenplay uses scalar variety to depict human characters

¹⁹ Gresham-Nemiroff 1994, p. XVII; also see Wilkerson 1994, pp. XXXV, XXXIX. Wilkerson’s introduction to the published unfilmed screenplay points out major changes and additions, but obviously cannot provide an in-depth analysis. It does, however, serve as a useful point of departure for readers who are interested in the screenplay as an adaptation.

²⁰ Gresham-Nemiroff 1994, p. XII.

as well as environments.

Whereas the extensive stage directions of the play implicitly guide the reader's mental eyes through the Younger's apartment and highlight expressive details about the characters and their actions²¹, several of Hansberry's descriptions of the camera work stress a voyeuristic, agentic approach to inquisitive observation. Similar to Eugene O'Neill's plays, one wonders whether and how the detailed claims – like remarks about how Lena and Ruth Youngers' tastes developed over time²² – could be realized in the mimetic/showing mode. While Hansberry does not choose to employ Tennessee Williams's 'plastic theatre' technique of projecting texts or images, as this would not suit the realist approach of her play, she does make the Langston Hughes poem from which she culled the play's title visible in the screenplay by superimposing the text onto the opening panning shots of Chicago's Southside²³. Evocative of prophetic writing on the wall, each line appears as if inscribed onto the cityscape. As the final rhetorical question surmises whether volatile unfulfilled dreams might "explode"²⁴, the superimposed verse visualizes the lyrically condensed thematic core and its real-life context (rooted in the social conditions of Chicago after the Second World War) in unison. When the camera subsequently moves into the Youngers' tired and small quarters, Hansberry writes: "[c]amera comes in freely and inspects this apartment"²⁵, so that viewers who experience the camera as equivalent to their own act of peeking uninvited into a private home might feel uncomfortably intrusive. The moving camera practically determines the gaze, whereas a stage realization of the details described in the directions for the spoken drama leaves open how the gaze could scrutinize specific details.

The intricate interlacing of individual experience and social predicaments is visually enhanced by superimposing Walter Lee's image onto a skyscraper²⁶, which creates a poignant non-verbal impression

²¹ See, e.g., Hansberry 1995, pp. 23-25.

²² See Hansberry 1994, p. 6.

²³ Also see Wilkerson 1994, pp. XXX-XXXI.

²⁴ Hansberry 1994, p. 3.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

of his dreams of financial success and economic agency. In contrast, the preceding close-up of Walter's hands buttoning up his chauffeur's livery provides the background for a detailed visual sequence showing a segment of the cityscape, a luxurious home, his employer's wealthily attired wife, and the family's oversized garage²⁷. These images literally oppress and overshadow the screen-filling partial shot of Walter's hands. Wilkerson points out that Hansberry links close-ups of Lena's and Walter's hands to indicate their comparable experiences as domestics/servants for white employers²⁸. In Lena's case, close-ups of her hands occur more frequently and serve to intertwine her concern with her scraggly plant that can hardly grow for lack of light in the apartment²⁹, her loving care for her grandchild, Travis³⁰, and her work for a white family, the Holidays³¹. Despite the Lena-Walter connection, the motif is more fully developed in Lena's characterization, as Hansberry complements the close-ups of her hands with highlighting other physical features that show her aged, yet sturdy physique and especially her strong character, as emphasized by her determined jawline³².

These details represent newly written material that Hansberry penned for the screenplay and that reflects her medium-specific awareness while adapting a spoken drama. But the point is not merely that spoken drama and film use different methods of showing and of thus engaging recipients. As Robert Stam argues, camera work in film represents an example of "authorial control of intimacy and distance, the calibration of access to characters' knowledge and consciousness"³³. This claim gains particular importance in Hutcheon's dismantling of the myth that modes of showing are limited to "exteriority" whereas modes of telling expertly provide "interiority"³⁴. In depicting Lena and Walter, Hansberry's methods of superimposition

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 43–44.

²⁸ Wilkerson 1994, p. XXXI.

²⁹ Hansberry 1994, pp. 30, 66, 78, 169, 191, 206.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

³¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 30, 31, 37, 42–43.

³² Ibid., pp. 31–43.

³³ Stam 2005, p. 35.

³⁴ Hutcheon 2013, p. 56.

and zooming aim at achieving both. Walter's dream of leaving his position as a chauffeur becomes obvious without verbalization. The array of close-ups of Lena's hands and other physical features does include combinations of such images and extended telling through monolog and dialog, particularly when Lena narrates her work experiences to Mrs. Holiday. Here, close-ups of Lena alternate with close-ups of her employer, and the extensive secondary text elaborates on the characters' emotions and thoughts³⁵. From a media-comparative perspective, the hand motif and the differences in using close-up and superimposition appear particularly instructive. Regarding Walter, the images juxtapose the strictures and psychological impact of his current job with his dream. Regarding Lena, 53 years of domestic labor and the entire history of her and her husband's Chicago experience require telling/verbalization, whose impact is heightened through the camera work. Furthermore, the focus on visuals confirms Walter's introverted taciturnity based on frustration, whereas Lena's detailed and determined telling of her own story bespeaks decades of getting ready for this moment of explaining herself.

1.4. A Panorama of Social Classes and Locations

The original play uses only one setting: the Younger family's cramped Southside apartment. Other locations are mentioned in the dialog but not seen. In contrast, the screenplay depicts several home environments and thus conveys social differences through visual details that are interlinked through patterns of repetition and contrast. Non-domestic locations such as eateries or public places contribute to this wealth of contextualization. The swift cuts from one locale to another may be experienced like jolts of astonishing differences in what individuals take for granted, dream of, and are (or are not) willing to grant to others.

A climactic triad of social environments (presented in the first quarter of the screenplay) serves as an exposition to class differences in Chicago. From the Southside and the Youngers' overpopulated living quarters, viewers first take in the apartment of a "middle-income

³⁵ Hansberry 1994, pp. 35-43.

young white couple, the Holidays"³⁶, where they see Lena on her final half-day of work. Right after that, viewers are guided to and through Walter's employer's home environment on the Upper North Shore Drive with its "lush atmosphere" and "luxurious home[s]"³⁷. This sequence of three domestic environments is not simply one of increasing wealth. Hansberry uses film-specific means of implicitly comparing individuals that never meet in person.

Despite the fact that Mrs. Holiday is working in an unspecified agency and, according to Lena Younger, could not afford two part-time domestics³⁸, she clearly differs from the Younger women. Instead of making breakfast and getting her child ready for school, as Walter's wife, Ruth, does in the opening scene, she enjoys her morning coffee in a comfortable state of having uncombed hair and not yet wearing street clothes³⁹. Her understanding of Lena's life of back-breaking underpaid labor is only a partial one⁴⁰, and her gleaming modern kitchen⁴¹ glaringly contrasts with the diminutive kitchenette/living room of the Youngers. The third iteration of an early morning scene shows the dining room (rather than kitchen) of Walter's employer in which the "[p]anning camera selects and studies excellent and expensive furnishing" and the employer's wife: "We do not see her face – only her voice, her gown, her manicured hands, tastefully jeweled, establish her character"⁴². This filmic depiction of the 'faceless' wealthy wife thus includes hands that, as far as the viewer can tell, are not linked to making a living. To top this off, the garage in which Walter buttons up his livery is more spacious than the Youngers' apartment and features its own "plumbing (for the help)"⁴³ – probably not out of sheer kindness, but to keep the "help" separate from the house. The triad of domestic locations, close-ups of hands, and their concomitant social implications is strengthened by

³⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 43.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 38, 40-42.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 39.

⁴² Ibid., p. 43.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 44.

the fact that the sequence in the Holidays' home begins with Lena painstakingly buttoning the daughter's coat⁴⁴.

The visualization of these domestic contexts then prepares the further plot strands of Lena's and Walter's respective dreams: Lena wants to move her family to a decent house; Walter wants to be a successful businessman. Thus, single-family homes depicted in the subsequent three quarters of the screenplay invite comparison with the Youngers' apartment, and a string of urban locations visualize Walter's inner struggle.

While the screenplay includes two locations related to the college context of Walter's younger sister, Beneatha⁴⁵, the non-domestic settings primarily develop Lena and Walter as round characters and display the complexity of Chicago's social and financial ecology. For instance, Lena rejects low-quality, high-priced apples at a grocery and meat market catering to African American customers⁴⁶ and moves on to a better market that sells "large, red, voluptuous apples"⁴⁷ reminiscent of the one she gives to her employer's daughter for her lunch⁴⁸. These scenes drive home the contrastive depiction of the Youngers' and the Holidays' domestic spaces.

More importantly, Hansberry expands the two-page dialog in which Walter summarizes his roaming through Chicago and his frequenting of The Green Hat to drink, think, and appreciate good jazz performances⁴⁹ and in which Lena admits that she "been doing to [him] what the rest of the world been doing to [him]"⁵⁰. She then entrusts him with two thirds of her late husband's life insurance money and makes him "the head of this family"⁵¹. In the screenplay, this fast-moving dialog is transformed into a lengthy visual montage of Chicago that includes the steel and meat-packing industries, the Loop, and "the Negro Soldier's monument in a square at Thirty-

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 47-51, 143-144.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 51-54.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 56.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

⁴⁹ Hansberry 1995, pp. 105-106.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 107.

Ninth and South Parkway”⁵² which merges into depicting a crowd listening to a street orator⁵³. In addition to sweeping views of the city, this part of the screenplay achieves a panoramic effect that contextualizes the Youngers’ experiences by showing urban sites and social stratification. Any notion of *A Raisin in the Sun* as a kitchen-sink drama that *only* concerns African Americans is thus discarded. Crowd scenes as well as brief scenes with unnamed characters that may or may not have speaking roles are possible in a film, but they would not be feasible in conventional theatre.

Theatregoers must rely on Walter’s comparatively scant verbal description of Chicago and The Green Hat. The screenplay emphasizes that the latter is not “a honky-tonk” but rather “[a] typical neighborhood show-lounge” which well-dressed Southsiders frequent to listen to jazz⁵⁴. In addition to this establishment which – despite Walter’s escapades⁵⁵ – bespeaks the dignity of its working-class customers, the screenplay includes a luncheonette where Lena and Walter establish their newly found rapport. Here, Hansberry does not only situate their conversation outside the family apartment. She also structures the depiction of Lena’s change of heart and mind differently: although Lena obviously has the insurance money (minus the house down payment) in her purse, it is Walter’s question about why his parents left the South that strongly affects Lena, as she realizes the analogy between her hopes linked to moving to Chicago and Walter’s dream to start a business⁵⁶. Before giving him the cash, Lena “looks down at his hands”⁵⁷, thus reinforcing the motif of servitude or agency connected to work.

As shown, Hansberry expanded poignant dialogs and interactions of her drama into cinematic sequences. Importantly, these sequences are not restricted to visual showing and would not achieve their goals of in-depth characterization and contextualization without in-

⁵² Hansberry 1994, p. 129.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 129-134. Michael Tritt convincingly interprets the inclusion of the stockyards in the montage as an allusion to Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle* (Tritt 2008).

⁵⁴ Hansberry 1994, p. 81.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 136-137.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 141.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 142.

corporating verbal telling.

1.5. Conclusion

Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and Rajewsky's theory of trans-mediality put the recipient centerstage in that they inquire into how recipients' responses relate to engrained practices of decoding specific media and genres, knowledge of specific earlier works, and other culturally embedded contexts that influence meaning-making. Claims about Hansberry's play and screenplay, particularly the juxtaposition of realist methods and epic effects, are relevant to interpretations of the screenplay as an adaptation and to a genre-comparative, transmedial discussion of both versions of *A Raisin in the Sun*. And, I would add, the historical context of when she wrote these texts needs to be taken into account. Adaptations can be discussed from the perspective of when large parts of a society are ready to discuss a topic. To Hutcheon, the film and opera adaptations of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) – which came out around the turn of the twenty-first century – exemplify this phenomenon⁵⁸. In light of this perspective on *Zeitgeist*, Hansberry's screenplay can be considered far ahead of its time in its unambiguous analysis and depiction of systemic racism. Regarding the first film version which was anything but close to Hansberry's text, Spike Lee finds that "all the cuts had to deal with softening a too defiant black voice"⁵⁹. Just as the film industry was not ready for Hansberry's screenplay, the Broadway production of her drama also required the deletion of a scene in which Mrs. Johnson, the Youngers' neighbor, imagines a newspaper headline about the bombing of the family's house in Clybourne Park, a white residential area which they will integrate⁶⁰. Regarding historical context and specific sociopolitical sensitivities, more research should be done on how Hansberry's screenplay relates to other screenplays of the period that address the urban working-poor, racism, and classism. I would not be surprised if film historians came to the conclusion that, in the early 1960s, her screenplay was as misun-

⁵⁸ Hutcheon 2013, p. 143.

⁵⁹ Lee 1994, p. XLVI.

⁶⁰ See Hansberry 1995, pp. 99-104, esp. p. 102.

derstood as her drama was. Such a conclusion would complement what Amiri Baraka bluntly claimed about early responses to the play: "We missed the essence of the work"⁶¹.

Within the purview of this inquiry, let me return to how adaptation and transmediality theory allow us to respond to Nemiroff's and Gresham-Nemiroff's idea that Hansberry transformed a realist drama into a screenplay with epic characters and an epic plot. This question does not have a simple answer as there is no medium-specific consensus on how recipients interpret different degrees of realism and illusion in the theatre or the cinema⁶². We also need to think about how and why certain medium-specific techniques may be understood as having epic proportions, and about how the realist and the epic may constitute layers *within* one work. Furthermore, recipients' understandings of mediation, mediacy, and immediacy are subject to changing practices of exposing oneself to drama and film – be it in a theatre or cinema in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the United States or, today, on a small screen in a private room anywhere in the world.

The analysis offered in this contribution proposes to have shown Hansberry's medium-specific expertise and transmedial concern with characterization, setting, visuality, verbal dialog, and motivic structures. In contrast to her unfilmed screenplay, the 1961 movie version hardly leaves the Youngers' living quarters and, all in all, feels more like filmed theatre than like a highly cinematic film. By foregrounding the camera's work as an invitation to assume various points of view and to contextualize the central plot in terms of time, place, and politics, Hansberry envisioned an epic effect that unmistakably breaks with interpretations focused on one troubled family or on a primarily private, small-scale conflict. This, however, does not mean that the play does not contain numerous references to how sociopolitical predicaments disadvantage African Americans in Chicago and across the United States, to a long history of racism and discrimination, to centuries of colonialism in Africa, and to divisive efforts to dismantle oppressive structures and to replace them with a new perspective on human dignity.

⁶¹ Baraka 1995, p. 19.

⁶² Hutcheon 2013, pp. 129, 131; Sava 2019, p. 24; Wolf 2013, p. 4.

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2. The Two-Text Phenomenon: Thoughts on Adaptation and Transmediality with a Discussion of the Blues of Roberto Ciotti, a Film on Carlo Michelstaedter, and Other Case Studies

Thomas Harrison

This essay reflects theoretically on the transmediation or adaptation of one art form to another. While many interesting studies have addressed this topic in general ways, it is worth refocusing our attention on how the reconstruction of a source text not only achieves new ends, but also changes our understanding of the point of departure. Throughout, I will be concerned with both the *poietic transformations* wrought by the new text and the *receptive consequences* of these transformations on readers, listeners, and senses of the precursor text. I will contend that subtexts, pretexts, and unspoken implications of both the first and the second productions become apparent precisely through the rapport established between them. Indeed, any successful adaptation turns this relationship into a prime issue – a two-text phenomenon – for readers already interested in the independent, pre-adapted source. The two-text phenomenon is processed by way of passage on a hermeneutical bridge, where the itinerary holds the point of departure and the destination together in a new interpretive act. My instantiations of this process will mainly be drawn from the Italian cultural tradition. They include the blues songs (both originals and covers) of Roberto Ciotti; Indro Montanelli's narrative recomposition of *Il generale Della Rovere* after Roberto Rossellini's filmic adaptation; the reinscription of the philosophy of Carlo Michelstaedter in a film by Paolo Magris¹; the self-refashioning of Luigi Pirandello's poetic conceptions; and the songs of Glass Wave², which remold literary classics in the medium of rock music in such a way as to voice

¹ Magris 2021.

² Glass Wave 2010.

the stories of characters who are mute in the originals (Nausicaa in the *Odyssey*, Ovid's Echo, the whale of *Moby-Dick*, and so on). I begin, however, with general reflections on adaptation and transmediation outside of the realm of art, including in contemporary discourse.

2.1. Adaptation or Transmediation?

Transmediality might seem to be the lay of the land in a world marked by endless multitasking, inviting us to shift our attention in seconds among media of very different orders: a text message, a YouTube video, a phone call, a song, a book, and television show. But could it be that transmediality – the negotiation of what is seen or represented in one medium to the seeing of another – is not actually activated by the greater part of our multiactivity? Granted that we are multitasking at rates unimaginable two decades ago, one could still ask how *trans-ing* we are. In *Transiti* (1998) the philosopher Mario Perniola pondered modes of effecting passage between times, cultures, frames of mind³. To occupy such spaces separately, one after the other, is not necessarily to work them into an itinerary, to coordinate them, to adapt them to synthetic ends. We do not bind different discursive fields simply by moving between them; we bind them by transmedial thinking.

Adaptation is not transmediality. It is a strategy of species survival. Creatures failing to adapt to circumambient challenges are simply superseded. Adaptation suggests intuitive wisdom and sensitivity to one's natural or cultural surroundings. No he, she, or it is an island. All need to understand the rule and tow the line, or conform to existential expectations, in order to have some assurance of survival. Webbed feet develop in birds that need to swim.

Adaptation does not seem to advance the purposes of culture as much as it advances those of nature. Difference and creativity propel solutions to problems. Jolts and revolutions do the same. They establish new standards and models for us to follow. Stagnation and inertia are steady by-products of adaptation. Innovation breaks the tyranny of what is.

We study the films of Pasolini and Antonioni because they were

³ Perniola 1998.

somehow singular. In a sense they were doubly exceptional, for originality, exceptions, and aberrations are perhaps even more often marginalized, ostracized, combated, and resisted by *color che sanno*. We study Pasolini and Antonioni because we welcomed their difference as formally, socially, or intellectually effective, creatively transformative. We are less likely to study works that are adaptive to norms. Some do, of course, and often this proves very instructive. But before academic enthusiasm for popular culture grew as large as it has become in the past fifty years, generic accounts of “what is the rule” in the world we inhabit belonged more to the ambit of journalism, or at least to disciplines not principally concerned with aesthetics, like history and sociology. Even in popular culture we tend to study and champion new gestures, new models, unusual contributions, unprecedented movements and styles. Must the gestures appear *new* to catch our attention? Fashion says yes. Even when a tendency has been around for years, it is only flocked to when it assumes a new guise. Critics, academics, and arbiters of taste put a stamp of approval on the novelty and thereby look up to date themselves.

Fashionable academic study is conducted around cultural questions and practices that are adjudicated to have up-to-date relevance. Those practices are not typical; they stick out from the ordinary. They shape the texture of culture and ideology. We can argue about whether Lucio Dalla or Fabrizio De André better belongs to a core list of notable Italian *cantautori*, but few are likely to champion Lucio Battisti. And this is not to say that Battisti *could not* be considered more original than the other two, it just means that championing one or the other follows from a perception of the individual and *effective* power of the artists or works in question. Scholars of twentieth-century Italian poetry are more assertive and imposing in their views of a canon, populated by Andrea Zanzotto and other decidedly innovative writers (though here, the many of same names recur; criticism adopts and adapts to consensus). Scholars of film are generally more appreciative of processes of adaptation, for they entail the determining forces of market economy, lording it over film productions more strongly than over the writing of poetry. Training in film studies makes critics singularly sympathetic to the authority of conventions and genres. In short, different fields of cultural analysis (popular music, poetry, in-

stitutional film) show greater or lesser interest in originality. Moreover, the greater the political interests of the evaluators, the more likely it will be that questions of conformism, adaptation, and status quo will influence the topics of study and methods of analysis.

2.2. Misappropriation and Misadaptation

In another optic, the uniqueness that has been admired in the West since modernism and the twentieth century looks somewhat like *misadaptation*. The philosopher Georg Simmel devoted several essays to clarifying the incentives to human practices and thinking⁴. The tension between life and form around which his thinking so frequently revolved made him suspect that the productive forces of culture reveal “an ongoing tendency to refuse every coagulation in a new cultural form”⁵. Mere accepting and adapting to those coagulations means risking to disappear into irrelevance, failing to effect change. Misadaptation, or active rejection of prevailing modes of thought, argues Carlo Rovelli⁶, is what led Anaximander and Albert Einstein to reground the principles and methods of science. Misadaptation can change conceptions of the things that we know and the practices we base on that knowledge. Just as Arthur Koestler’s bisociation of incompatible matrices produces intelligent discoveries⁷, so transformations of human culture occur when the principle of potentialities gets the better of the principle of reality. Neither psychoanalytic strictures nor sensible politics can suppress the eruptive irrationality of this process. Robert Musil celebrated it as ‘possibilitarianism’: living hypothetically, or in the subjunctive mood, where wishes, suspicions, demands, or desires prove to be more motivating than the indicative mood of factual assertions⁸. There are also cases of necessity strewn through this field of misadaptation, like the case of the Romani-French guitar player Django Reinhard:

⁴ Simmel 1968.

⁵ Fitzy 2018, p. 43.

⁶ See Rovelli 2017.

⁷ See Koestler 1964.

⁸ Harrison 1992, pp. 161-74.

A disastrous caravan fire in 1928 badly burned his left hand, depriving him of the use of the fourth and fifth fingers, but the resourceful Reinhardt figured out a novel fingering system to get around the problem that probably accounts for some of the originality of his style⁹.

He made extraordinary use of his difference, creating something new.

Everyday adaptation is pale and passive in comparison, despite the fair share of labor that it requires. It remains inflected by Darwinian implications: “Adaptation theory, also known as survival theory or survival of the fittest, is an organism’s ability to adapt to changes in its environment and adjust accordingly over time”¹⁰. Adaptation normally suggests reactivity, adapting oneself *to*, rather than proactive invention. Eventually it butts up against a related notion that has lately acquired decidedly negative connotations: *appropriation*, making something your own, something that does not originally belong to you, and which mores of “staying in your own lane” would advise that you leave to others ostensibly more entitled to it. Appropriation once named self-development in the ambit of existentialist thinking, especially in the historical and subjective ontology of Martin Heidegger, but today’s more voluntaristic and instrumentalistic approach to appropriating something fundamental to another culture, ethnicity, or ethos, and in the process coopting its difference, slides easily into its ostensible opposite: *misappropriation*. Very often it is difficult to know where one ends and the other begins. On March 1, 2022, a week after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, American Secretary of State Antony Blinken proposed that Russia be removed from the United Nations Human Rights Council, charging that the country had misappropriated the term ‘human rights’ by claiming that their military action was designed precisely to defend those rights: those, in this case, of native Russians in Ukraine¹¹. All appropriation can equally appear to be misappropriation, in the same way that every adaptation of an artwork manifests some ‘infidelity’. The second set

⁹ Ginell 2022.

¹⁰ King 2018.

¹¹ See Blinken 2022; Sanders 2015.

of terms fashions the first into something different, and we only approve that something when it does not smack of exploitation, hollowness, or inauthenticity.

2.3. Academic Adaptation

Progress toward sorting out these semantic ambiguities can partially be made by invoking a distinction between passive and active adaptation, enabling us to measure degrees of creative motivation at work in the transformation of A to B¹². Passive forms of adaptation tend to further conformism, as previously suggested. In theoretical circles they often funnel projects into conceptual jargon instead of thinking matters through anew. Academic job announcements and calls for papers can be fertile fields for monitoring this adaptation-adoption process – as when they characterize “Environmental Humanities as a key research strand” of a department (the last three words having a nice ring and the first two being an umbrella term); or when “Modern Languages” are defined “as a disciplinary field encompassing the integrated study of languages, cultures, and societies”¹³. Few American and British universities resist adapting to cognitive mimetism, especially to garner support. Recently my host university distributed a laudable and ambitious 163-page draft of a ‘Landscape Plan’ aiming to radically improve the environmental appeal and sustainability of its campus through the expenditure of unspecified millions or billions of dollars, payable to unspecified recipients. Hereafter I reproduce one page of this plan (Fig. 2.1).

Although this page designates fewer than 1% of the university students as gender nonbinary, its data set adapts the landscape-overhaul project to the notion of performance of identity. The explanatory text on the left suggests that the demographic diversity of the student body helps legitimate the development of “high performing landscapes”, indeed creating an “expectation for environmental performance”¹⁴. By responding to the racial and gender characteristics of the students, these landscapes will be able to “retain a core

¹² Leitch 2013, p. 173.

¹³ Institute of Modern Languages Research 2022.

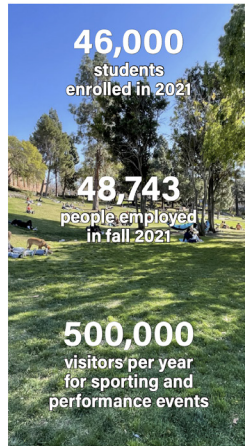
¹⁴ UCLA Landscape Plan Draft for Public Feedback 2022, p. 32.

2.2 CAMPUS DEMOGRAPHICS

UCLA receives more annual applications than any other university in the nation. It is ranked as the No. 1 public university fifth straight year by U.S. News & World Report. Efficient use of the campus and beautiful, high performing open space is critical to the success of the university by helping to attract students and by accommodate increasing enrollment and densification.

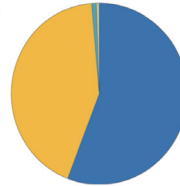
The campus population is also diversifying so the campus landscape must respond to this by also diversifying to accommodate new space programming, different aesthetic preferences, expectation for environmental performance.

High performing landscapes retain a core identity while accommodating the unique needs and desires of a complex user base. In the case of UCLA, this means a campus landscape that meets the needs across gender, race, and ethnic lines supporting institutional goals of diversity and inclusion.



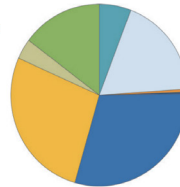
UCLA 2022 Enrollment Gender Demographics

Female | 66.0%
Male | 40.8%
Nonbinary | 0.9%
Not Reported/Other | 0.3%



UCLA 2022 Enrollment Racial Demographics

Asian | 28.6%
White | 27.2%
Hispanic/Latino(a) | 17.9%
International | 14.6%
Taiwan | 0.2%
Domestic Unknown | 3.7%
American Indian | 0.4%
Pacific Islander | 0.3%



32 | History + Existing Conditions

DRAFT

Fig. 2.1. Page 32 of the UCLA Landscape Plan Draft for Public Feedback, May 2022.

identity while accommodating the unique needs and desires of a complex user base”¹⁵. Apparently the user base is so complex that there is no space within it for an entry for African Americans, nor even for the more inclusive concept ‘underrepresented minority’. Yet the graph assures us that UCLA employs more than one worker per student, and hosts five times more sports spectators than students and employees combined. The next page of the Plan points out that 5,400 of this state institution’s fall 2021 students were international and just 31% Californian. What shines through such formulations is just one example, and a slightly incoherent one, of how intrinsically laudable projects are adapted to ill-fitting and poorly defined conceptual matrices. In response to internal critique, the final version of the Plan revised some of this rhetoric.

2.4. Radical Adapters: Hendrix and Nietzsche

There are no clear and cut distinctions between active and passive adaptation in the natural and cultural worlds. Even intellectual resistance to “strands”, when it wins new followers, depends on genial rhetorical accommodations. What made mavericks like Baudelaire, Le-

¹⁵ Ibid.

opardi, Nietzsche, and Zanzotto stand out from hundreds of peers was not just their distinctive style. It was their skill in attuning that style to the listening ears. They shunned ways of speaking that had lost their punch, devised manners to address their readers more efficiently – more directly and more forcefully. They welcomed deep understanding of contemporary history (the war traumas of the Veneto, for Zanzotto) or cognitive aporias (the crisis of religion and the challenges of positivism, for Leopardi and Nietzsche) into the ethical and aesthetic choices they made. Jimi Hendrix stepped away from conventional musical styles like rock ‘n’ roll, soul, and the blues just as soon as he intuited that *adapting* these genres to unprecedented uses could both fuse and transcend their virtues. This would also create a listening public that had not yet existed, having been parceled into different camps of concern. Even as a transracial and transnational audience was being imagined by the music industry (for not even Hendrix sprang forth in full regalia from the head of Zeus), that audience required active construction, which would also entail, beyond the actively molding power of the frontman and his music, a commercial campaign, able to adapt the listening habits of record buyers to an unfamiliar experience.

Another, no less important factor in the power and influence of such adaptive-creative events like Leopardi, Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Zanzotto, and Hendrix consists in the adaptive potential inherent to the body of their work. This entails the work’s adaptability to the needs and opportunities of culture unfolding ahead. Nietzsche’s writings have fulfilled the most extraordinary range of purposes for over a century, which can hardly be said of many other writings between 1875-1890. The *manner* in which ‘maladaptive’ rebels like him appropriated and adapted the ethical, aesthetic, and discursive materials available to their time makes clear why their transformations of those materials proved so adaptable in turn.

2.5. From Montanelli to Rossellini and Back Again

In literary studies, the most frequently studied adaptations involve transferrals of a story from one medium to another, from story to play, for instance, or novel to film, or story in one era to a rewriting some decades or centuries later. The most interesting cases draw

attention to the very process whereby A is mediated into B (meriting the letter C).

A curious story of an imposter who went by the name Generale Della Rovere was written up by Indro Montanelli in 1945¹⁶ and turned into a film by Roberto Rossellini in 1959. What makes the adaptation intriguing is just how the source materials were re-worked and to what purpose. In this case the process of transformation did not end with one step, from story to film, but involved a second: from derived film onto a doubly derived novel. It happened because the original story's author Montanelli was enlisted to help write Rossellini's screenplay. Within a short while, however, he found himself disapproving of the turns the film was taking and distanced himself from the production. This least credible 'premier journalist' of a Western European nation had already taken liberties with the facts about the 'general' he had met in the prison of San Vitore during the war, a certain Giovanni Bertoni who had been planted in the prison among leaders of the Italian resistance to gain their confidence and ferret out conspirators. On republication of Montanelli's story in early 1959 clamorous objections arose in the press on the part of eye witnesses to this Bertoni/Della Rovere (fellow prisoners, his wife, a guard) which contradicted the accounts Montanelli claimed to have lived through. The film adaptation of the story of Bertoni was partially sympathetic to these public recollections, and took the liberty to correct the gist of journalist Montanelli's account. Montanelli grew disaffected with the production, viewing Rossellini himself and his actor Vittorio De Sica as betraying the truth of the facts. No matter that the facts were ones that Montanelli himself had already distorted. Rossellini was being unfaithful to a story *already unfaithful* to collectively registered memory.

To establish the priority and authority of his personal version, Montanelli rushed into press a novelized version of the story (the fourth version) one month before the film premiered at the Venice International Film Festival in late August, 1959. Montanelli, in fact, dates his preface July 31, 1959¹⁷. What is interesting is not so much the effort to claim personal authorship, but the fact that the work that

¹⁶ Montanelli 1945.

¹⁷ Montanelli 1961, p. 7.

Montanelli signs is *itself an adaptation* into a novel of Rossellini's (unfaithful) film treatment. Far from correcting the cinematic story (which was written mainly by Rossellini's screenwriter Sergio Amidei), Montanelli's novel just adapts the film fiction into a narrative fiction and legitimates it with a signature. For decades after this fictionalization Montanelli equivocates repeatedly to insist that his own story is true. In the preface he hedges his bets, explaining that he is offering a *storia* rather than a *pagina di Storia*: "I have written it as a story, not as if it were a page from history"¹⁸.

If adaptations like this one – about Bertoni adapting his identity to Della Rovere so as to denounce others and save his skin, and about Montanelli adapting his interpretation of that adaptation to a filmic adaptation of it – present productive opportunities for study, it is not because they help ferret out authentic, historical kernels of meaning beneath conflicting fictions. It is because they demonstrate how multiple layers of narrative, ethical, and political efficiency come to play in even ostensibly direct historical reporting. Both Montanelli's story of 1945 and his novel of 1959 present us with second-level adaptations, as Hutcheon calls them¹⁹, proposing facts that arise from interpretations at the start, giving us a richer and more intricate story to interpret.

2.6. Thinking and Film

Adapting the thinking of a philosopher into a film poses more transmedial challenges than the recasting of one narrative like Montanelli's into another. Paolo Magris faces them in his docufiction about the philosophy of Carlo Michelstaedter, *Con il mare negli occhi* (2021). The purpose of the work is to familiarize audiences with the exceptional reflections of the young student from Gorizia, who took his own life at age twenty-three, unfolded in his university thesis *La persuasione e la rettorica*²⁰, published posthumously in 1912 and several times since. Key passages in the student's writings are declaimed on stage by an actor playing the young man from Gorizia, and filmed. The philologi-

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁹ Hutcheon 2013, p. 18.

²⁰ See Michelstaedter 1982.

cal sources of the film, which also include poetry, are then framed by a narrative in which the philosopher's alter ego – sharing approximately his age, but not his sex, a woman from Crotone, at the other end of Italy, a century later – privately reads the same thesis that is being declaimed. She also writes about it to a girlfriend, visits the Michelstaedter archives, his grave, the countryside of Gorizia, and peruses Carlo's paintings and poetry. At the conclusion of the film the two characters come together in separate but simultaneous amorous dreams (of each other), and gaze on each other in the single space of a beach of current-day Crotone. This transmediation of Michelstaedter's creative output and biography into a film which is part documentary and part fiction does not just present this historical event of Michelstaedter's philosophy in a form that can strike a young audience more concretely than would his mere words on a page. It also adds conceptual material to the source event, including the femininity of Michelstaedter's intellectual enterprise, illustrated by his invocations of his beloved Jolanda De Blasi, with whom the film's protagonist shares her first name. The work introduces a dialogical condition into the solitary and frequently alienated stance of Michelstaedter's theoretical positions. Magris's audiovisual concretization of a verbal corpus enacts what art does by definition with ideas and lived experience, adapting them to sensory form. Art is already an adaptation of life, a rearticulation and transmediation of empirical materials.

2.7. Pirandello Between Genres

Luigi Pirandello gives us another instance of the process by moving from one genre to another in his own artistic production (stories, novels, plays, poetry, screenplays) and by theorizing the losses and the gains involved. The Sicilian told nearly as many stories as there were days in the year (collecting them into *Novelle per un anno*) and transformed several into dramatic productions. It was as though he felt pushed to embody the issues adumbrated on paper in physically interacting characters who could be seen and heard on stage. Even so he harbored reservations about what fell by the wayside through the gain in aesthetic concretion. He worried, for example, about the extent to which a performing actor constricts the ideas an author puts on pa-

per²¹. By assuming dramatic form, those ideas take on a precise interpretation, made particular and individual, turned into a face. *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921) enacts that struggle between the ideal construction that we call a 'character' – a conceptual or spiritual archetype – and the 'actor' who can only give it a limited representation. One side of Pirandello resists the dramaturgical art, favoring his propensity for conceptual rarefaction and rationalization. Another side willingly transmediates ideas, discovering a proper (self-reflexive) dramaturgy to give them a new form.

At the same time Pirandello becomes fascinated by the young art of cinema, where he nonetheless pursues a somewhat different argument. He proposes that audiovisual forms should not cater to conceptual expression (even less than should drama). Cinema should remain mute and pantomimic. Although he adapted his stories into plays, he had misgivings about adapting plays into films. The written word had already sacrificed much by being theatrically embodied; it should not risk more by succumbing to the constraints of realist mimesis once cinema was enabled to allow characters to speak (in the late 1920s), threatening to become filmed theatre. As drama adapts to the new language of the movie screen it should at least forego the spoken word, he believed, and help reverse the de-idealizing process. Pirandello proposed an alternative program for the multimedial form of cinema: it should unfold as "cinemelography", a fusion of kinetic images and music, not represent action clarified by spoken words²². Film should show the motion of physical forms enhanced by music, letting the two components of the new audiovisual medium operate in dialogue and transmutation. Film should let artists adapt their inventive means into a double articulation. Music, being visualized, would be transformed by that double articulation, as would motion photography by being given acoustic elaboration.

2.8. Dante Rap and Cerebral Rock

Before commenting further on the implications of this double articulation, I would like to reflect briefly on several more examples of

²¹ Pirandello 1973, pp. 216-24.

²² Pirandello 1995, p. 202.

hermeneutically productive transformations of source materials. One involves the adaptation of the work of Dante by Italian rap music, a topic studied by Francesco Samarini²³. A single instance among many – a song called *Argenti vive* by the rapper Caparezza – allows a minor character in *Inferno*, Filippo Argenti, to develop his narrative voice into a counter-invective directed toward the very poet who placed him in Hell, elucidating in such a way a subtext not explicit in the Dantean text. The result is a feedback loop in which the second text, the Dante rap, grafts itself onto the original source, altering our understanding of it. Obviously a similar process occurs in less distant medial transformations, as from novel to film, above all when the interpretative operations of the second text are strong. Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice* (1971) expands latent meanings in Thomas Mann's original novella. It rewrites Mann's story in such a different thematic and symbolic register that it produces a fully autonomous text permanently reflecting back on the first, altering the dilemmas of the original story, rendering them potentially more complex. A CD compilation of original songs recorded by the literary rock band Glass Wave (2010), made up of professors of literature at Stanford, Princeton, and UCLA, performs a similar operation with classic narratives like *Lolita*, *Moby-Dick*, *Frankenstein*, and *The Metamorphoses*. The recordings give voice to secondary figures, often women, who were merely 'subject matter', or discursive objects, of the initial narrating voice. Whoever returns to the originals under the influence of this CD brings an enhanced understanding of the optic of Melville's great white whale, of Nausicaa, smitten by Odysseus, and of Ophelia, who is dispatched to her suicidal way by Shakespeare. To adapt a story with effect is to graft another life onto it. The transmediation of the story from one art to another also delivers it to a different audience and different prism of vision.

2.9. Blues Italian Style: Roberto Ciotti

Minor variations can suffice to infuse new significance into a form. The blues thrives on these small variations, playing itself out

²³ See Samarini's seminar entitled "Out of Limbo on a Lambo: Dante and Italian Rap Music", held on 3 March 2022 at Dickinson College (Pennsylvania).

for the most part in 12-bar compositions. But when the blues inducts an Italian interpreter into the performance something critical occurs. The American form gets exported to a non-homeland, joining an exogenous context in *distinction to which* the blues genre, autochthonous to an African American subgroup of the homeland, had originally carved out a niche. One exogenous interpreter is not only the most accomplished blues guitarist that Italy has produced, but also very much of a blues purist. Roberto Ciotti (1953-2013) intended to change nothing in the basic blues matrix. He composed most of his songs in English, performing them in the traditional manner on acoustic or electric guitar, either alone or with the standard small band of bass, drums, and keyboards. Often his English lyrics are so polished and colloquial that it is hard to be convinced that they were written by a non-native speaker²⁴. The only thing that gives these non-indigenous songs away is the ‘bad English’ of the bard’s pronunciation, as one song from his final CD, *Equilibrio precario* (2013), puts it. And this must be factored into the rendition, as well as its reception. In principle, Ciotti’s respect for the early Delta Mississippi style from which the most celebrated blues singers flowered is unimpugnable. He is virtually the only singer to have covered the rare *No More Blues* by Sleepy John Estes (1937)²⁵, a song most blues aficionados do not even know. What makes Ciotti’s choice of that song so genial, especially in the context of adaptation studies, is that it implicitly associates the ‘bad English’ of the Italian performer with the unschooled and grammatically unorthodox articulation of the original. In the following verses from the Estes lyrics, “need more” means ‘needing more’ and “box” means ‘guitar’ and/or ‘woman’:

Need more – it have harmed a many men
 Need more – it have harmed a many men
 And that’s the reason, I believe I’ll make a change [...]

Now, bought some gloves, bought me some socks
 I believe Poor John, he needs a box, ‘cause

²⁴ Good examples include *Hell Boogie*, *Castles of Sand* (both on Ciotti 1978), *Road ‘n’ Rail*, *Early on Sunday* (Ciotti 1992), *I Trust Myself*, *Don’t Recall the Past*, and *Prisoner of Fear* (Ciotti 1996).

²⁵ Estes 1937.

Need more – it have harmed a many men
 And that's the reason, I believe I'll make a change [...]
 Now, take me back, won't do y' mean no more
 Get all my lovin' you let Mr. So-And-So go, 'cause
 Need more – it have harmed a many men
 And that's the reason, I believe I'll make a change

The performance of this song in the same simple arrangement of guitar and voice, but by an Italian, establishes a linguistic and cultural community (between Italian and African American) outside the normative and politically empowered one of white Americans. As Ciotti's 'bad English' song assures us, notwithstanding the linguistic defects, "Everybody can understand, everybody in every land / If you listen to what I play, you'll hear what I say. // My guitar can sing, can cry and smile / With feeling, with touch, she can say so much"²⁶.

The minor, accented changes that the Roman Ciotti brings to the blues idiom allow his adaptations to highlight the signal effects of those few components on which blues music is based. Articulating his own lyrics in traditional paradigms, Ciotti does not strongly inflect those basic components as does Jimi Hendrix in songs like *Voodoo Child*²⁷, where the searing electric guitar, the non-12-bar form, and the long format radically alter the first intentions of the historical sources of inspiration. Restrained in originality, Ciotti adapts his own musicianship to the form, rather than viceversa. He appropriates the source material in a way analogous to Elvis Presley with the race record *Hound Dog*²⁸, originally delivered not just by an African American, but by a woman (leave aside the fact that the song was written for her by two white men). Ciotti's interventions in the blues take this to another place, even when the songs he sings are his own, where, by infusing the genre with a marked but not dramatic change, he invents another focus for it. Ciotti also sings the blues in Italian, which makes the listener cope with a clash of two national registers. When he sings in English the accented singer brings about the effect of a variant instrument in the mix, as though one were given a blues

²⁶ Ciotti 2013, track 10.

²⁷ Hendrix 1968.

²⁸ See Thornton 1953.

trumpet solo instead of the customary guitar or harmonica. In both cases the formal matrix is extended, taken to a destination clarified by the variation, not radically altered as in the case of *Voodoo Child*. Minor adaptations point up major principles. That variable blend of authority and freedom, claimed Igor Stravinsky, amounts to the traditional play of music itself. "The artist imposes a culture on himself and ends by imposing it on others. That is how tradition becomes established"²⁹.

2.10. Transmediating What We Are Given

A question here takes shape to which I alluded at the beginning of this essay: what effect do transmediations have on the way human agents interpret discourse, genres, and form, as well as their interconnections? What effect do rewritings of canonical texts have on our understanding of mediation? We have seen that the conversion of a literary classic into rock provides a new frame and context for the precursor text and that a similar thing happens when a blues song is sung with a foreign accent; and when Dante's characters rap without the oversight of the originating author; and even when a paradigmatically American genre like a Western turns into the Italian *Django*, starring Franco Nero (dir. Sergio Corbucci, 1966), and Quentin Tarantino returns to that Spaghetti Western in *Django Unchained* (2012), using songs from the original soundtrack, but with an African American as protagonist and an aged Franco Nero in a merely minor role. These cases all produce a two-text phenomenon, or indeed a multi-text one, delivering to the mind a "palimpsestuous intertextuality"³⁰. No doubt the best audience for the transcoding operation elicited by the intertextuality/transmediality is made up of people deeply familiar with the source text but also open to the doubleness, with a 'new-written-onto-the-old'. Ciotti's blues (or, for that matter, the blues of the Czech Rainer Ptacek or the Hungarian renditions of The Magyar Atom Blues Band) makes us reconceptualize the form as not just African American, sung with a certain timbre of voice, rough hewn, and so forth, but rather as a paradigm for many other uses. The different

²⁹ Stravinsky 1947, p. 56.

³⁰ Hutcheon 2013, p. 21.

pronunciation registers even when Italo Svevo writes in bad Italian rather than good German, to entertain an observation made by his friend Umberto Saba. By doing so, Svevo celebrates “the assimilatory charm of the ‘old’ Italian culture”³¹, allowing us to recognize, observe, and ponder the nature of the canonical language as well as linguistic formulations on its borders. In the Triestine variant of transmediality – in and through the old city’s openness to Germanic culture, in and through the city’s centrifugal excession of national confines – there occurs a skirmish between identity and identity-transcendence. Both claim equal rights, without suppressing the suture between them.

Recognition of the suture promotes perspicuity and critical readiness to engage with complexities we face every day outside the limited space of artworks, not least in the sphere of civic discourse, where ethical options we might like to consider mutually exclusive call out, as though in emergency, for reciprocal accommodation. All human forms entail adaptation to constraining circumstances accompanied by pointed initiatives. The more we understand the way forms themselves are transmediated, the better able we are to serve the double process. The questionable alternative is non-dialogical, monotextual discourse, which is nearing the breaking point in some cultures, despite their multimodality, where one dogma holds firm against another, rejecting all commerce and cooperation. The question is to what extent we can succeed, with all our multitasking, in multimediating the different claims placed on our attention, making them productively interact in that discursive space each attempts to define.

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³¹ Saba 1993, p. 188.

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3. Looking for Beauty. *Regieoper* as Transmedial Adaptation

Serena Guarracono

3.1. Whatever Happened to Lohengrin's Swan?

In a 1955 essay titled *Bourgeois Opera*, Theodore W. Adorno shows an almost uncanny prescience as regards what was going to happen in opera direction in the following decades:^{*} “if a producer – made wise or weary by innumerable backstage jokes – were to present a *Lohengrin* in which the swan is replaced by a beam of light, the premise of the entire work would be attacked to such an extent as to be rendered pointless”¹. His prediction has come true both in terms of what has happened in opera staging practices, and in the reactions it has aroused. Indeed, it has become rather difficult to represent *Lohengrin*'s swan as an *actual* swan; I am not aware that Adorno's suggestion of turning it into a ray of light has been picked up by any director as of today, but in Calixto Bieito's production for the Staatsoper Berlin in 2020, for example, the swan appeared onstage as an origami, in a production where, according to reviews, “*Regieoper* reigned supreme”².

In recent years, *Regieoper* has become a current term in opera studies to define a specific approach to opera directing, which following the lead of experimental theatre has been granting more and more

* The author thanks Anna Chiara Corradino and Massimo Fusillo for their ongoing support and generosity in sharing and discussing opera and directing, an extraordinary exchange from which many of the ideas in this article first emerged.

¹ Adorno 1999, p. 16.

² See Fiorito 2020.

authority to directors in devising the visual and choreographic elements of the performance; however, as Adorno also foresaw, this ‘director’s turn’ seems to undermine the premise of opera itself as an art form – to transform it into something completely different. This emerges as the main argument in criticism of *Regieoper*, which is routinely accused of not respecting the composer’s intention by (for example) moving the setting to a different time, using stage action as a counterpoint instead of a literal rendition of what is described in the libretto, and of including gratuitous topical and political references in what is still considered one of the (few left) strongholds of ‘high art’. One may quote, for example, the closing argument from the review by Mauricio Villa of Puccini’s *Turandot* directed by Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei for the Teatro dell’Opera in Rome in 2022.

Did this performance do justice to Puccini’s oriental drama? Did it provide a clear retelling of the plot with its meaning preserved intact? The answer to this is, unfortunately, ‘no’. It was a great theatrical experience with an incredibly imaginative use of the space, lighting, costumes, and projections, but it had little to do with Puccini’s *Turandot*³.

This contribution will eventually turn to Ai Weiwei’s *Turandot* to analyse the practice of *Regieoper* as a form of transmedial adaptation negotiating opera’s more fraught ideological nodes for the present day; nevertheless, it is first necessary to contextualize this staging in a long history where adaptation has constantly held a central role. Opera as a genre is indeed the product of adaptation as a long-standing practice in European theatre: operas from the main repertoire often adapt novels, plays, or other narrative forms – *Turandot*, for example, adapted a play by Corrado Gozzi, in its turn a stage version of the French translation of a Persian fable by François Pétis de la Croix included in a 1710 collection titled *Le Mille et un jour*⁴. Not only is opera ingrained with echoes from different artistic practices; it is also constituted by a vast array of media – from music and song to writing and theatre (itself a complex but independent medium, espe-

³ Villa 2022.

⁴ See Nicastro 2022, p. 114.

cially as regards acting), plus choreography and the visual arts. Moreover, it represents a fraught legacy for contemporary directors who still feel the need to engage these works and intersect them with topical issues and concerns.

The point of this contribution, however, is not to pass judgment on these practices as more or less ‘truthful’ to the original. The theory of adaptation has already and convincingly argued that adaptations should not be valued (if at all) according to a standard of adherence to the source text: as Linda Hutcheon writes, “an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing”⁵. Consequently, the following represents an attempt to read *Regieoper* as a form of adaptation precisely in order to challenge the premises of the current debate and to elaborate critical tools for an analysis of these works which takes into account the complexities and challenges of such an elaborate, multimedia spectacle. While each staging of an opera – or of a theatrical piece, for that matter – may be said to *adapt* the dramatic text, i.e. to translate it from the page into an embodied and spatial form, the specificity of *Regieoper* is in the interpretive take directors offer, which plays with and often disrupts the horizon of expectations of audiences who are generally acquainted – one might say even overly familiar – with operas from the repertoire. The methodological framework of adaptation to discuss *Regieoper* may thus help to recognize and appraise the creative work of these stagings; more importantly, at a time when opera is under the risk of becoming culturally irrelevant these adaptations, far from making them pointless (as Adorno feared), may actually result in heightening their topicality and significance for present day audiences.

3.2. Does Opera Need Directors?

For Adorno, the beam of light displacing the swan would betray the essence of opera, a genre which “runs head on into the aesthetic limits of demystification [*Versachlichung*]”⁶. A successful opera staging stands on the perilous balance of an illusion in which the audience

⁵ Hutcheon 2013, p. 9.

⁶ Adorno 1999, p. 16.

must relish without residue, much as a child would do. Any form of estrangement or intellectualization would destroy the foundations of the genre: the swan must be nothing else but a swan, in order to enact that “aesthetics of astonishment”⁷ that for Peter Brooks is the foundation of melodrama, exemplified both by excessive conflicts and passions and by the amazing visual effects (storms, floods, fantastic monsters) which complement them on European stages since roughly the end of the eighteenth century.

Directors were not always crucial to this endeavour. While composers, librettists, and conductors, together with singers and instrumentalists, have always played their respective parts in the opera machine, together with set designers, costume makers and stagehands, the idea that it was necessary to have someone to coordinate the visual and gestural aspects of a staging is actually quite recent, and coterminous to, if not dependent on, the development of director’s theatre in the twentieth century. As theatre historians David Bradby and David Williams argue in the eponymous volume from 1988, a role similar to what would today be called ‘director’ makes its appearance in European theatre not earlier than the beginning of the nineteenth century, in connection with technological innovation that made stagings more and more elaborate; however, until the late nineteenth century what had become known as the *régisseur* was often also the manager and lead actor (less often, actress) of the company. This was also the time when the word director was first used in its contemporary sense by modernist theorist (and director) Edward Gordon Craig in his 1911 *On the Art of Theatre*; the term then became current in theatre practice around the 1950s, probably as a loan from the then pervasive film industry jargon⁸.

Craig, who emerged from the symbolist movement, believed in the director as the unifying force behind any theatrical production, bringing together all the many and different arts onstage under a single vision. His idea was at least partially influenced by opera composer Richard Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art as brainchild of a single demiurge, which was in its turn a response to technological innovations which threatened to overwhelm the human

⁷ Brooks 1995, p. 27.

⁸ See Bradby, Williams 2020, p. 4.

factor in artistic endeavours. His insight has proven extremely influential for the analysis of more recent transmedial works (among which a staging such as Ai Weiwei's may positively be included) as it allows for competing and even contradictory elements to be held together by a single hermeneutic effort, shared by the director and the audience in a mutual, communal experience:

the slippery concept of totality thus becomes twofold, subsuming the complex web of perceptions, energies, and stimulations that alight upon the spectator of performance art, video art, and installations, while simultaneously evoking a comprehensive, anthropological vision of human identity⁹.

However, there are many differences as well as overlappings between the practices of director's theatre and that of *Regieoper*. The first has made use of a number of dramatic texts, often heavily reworked, together with producing new writing for the theatre (and, sometimes, no writing at all); moreover, many directors founded and thrived together with their own companies, from Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble to Ariane Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil¹⁰. This creative freedom and control over the 'raw material' from which the performance is moulded has been historically at odds with production and performance practices at work in the opera theatre, as pioneer director and theorist Konstantin Stanislavski discovered when, in 1918, he founded *Opernaja studija*, a workshop specifically intended to train opera singers for acting. The task of introducing acting practices in the (at the time) rather static routine of opera performance, and of bending the singers to the authority of the director, proved impossible, and his collaboration with the Bolshoi Theatre was limited to a single production of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*; in the following years Stanislavski's company produced repertoire works such as Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Verdi's *Rigoletto* and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, but outside the main circuit of opera theatres¹¹.

While experimentations may be dated even further back, to sce-

⁹ Fusillo, Grishakova 2021, p. 18.

¹⁰ See Bradby, Williams 2020, p. 3.

¹¹ See Cappelletto 2001, p. 1202.

nographer Adolphe Appia's 1895 anti-naturalistic *Siegfrid*, it is in the early twentieth century that opera becomes a more than episodic feature of avant-garde theatre. Not only Stanislavski, but Max Reinhardt in Germany in the 1910s offered ground-breaking productions of Richard Strauss's *Rosenkavalier* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*; and there is even information, albeit fragmentary, of a production of *Die Walküre* by Sergei Eisenstein in 1941¹². The twentieth century also marked the onset of experimentation in more traditional opera venues, with the productions by Ewald Dülberg, in close synergy with conductor Otto Klemperer, at the Kroll Opera in Berlin, which were inspired by the Bauhaus movement and saw the collaboration of artists such as László Moholy-Nagy and Oskar Schlemmer¹³; while painters such as Giorgio De Chirico, Mario Sironi, and Enrico Prampolini were involved in productions at La Scala in Milan since the 1940s¹⁴. These creative networks show the interactions among different artistic languages as a foundational practice of *Regieoper*: while the employment of different talents may be said to be at the core of theatre and the performing arts in more general terms, here different modes of authorship come into play. Alongside the traditional ones of conductor, instrumentalists and singers, visual artists and theatre directors do not feature here as producers of ancillary elements to the main core of the spectatorial experience – which was traditionally focused on music and singing – but as creative subjects in their own rights, bringing their own vision (and also their name) as 'cultural capital' to the enterprise.

Undoubtedly, opera exercised a deep fascination on early twentieth century theatre practitioners, because of the deeply ambivalent role of music in the dramaturgical structure. On the one hand, the presence of music may be put to work to counter or dispel any form of naturalism: Brecht himself, who never worked on repertoire opera, still chose musical theatre for early works such as *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928) and *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (1930), using music as one way to trigger estrangement. However, Adorno notes in *Bourgeois Opera*, opera is based on illusion – a condition it shares with

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Rothe 2019.

¹⁴ Cappelletto 2001, p. 1205.

the (at the time) new-born art of cinema; and although his comments are mostly directed at contemporary composers such as Schönberg, Berg or Stravinsky who risk falling “victim to helpless and corny symbolism”¹⁵, he significantly identifies the core appeal of this illusion not in the possibility of simulating reality (including verisimilitude in the representation of feelings and emotions) in a more or less accurate way, but on the contrary to turn chaos into destiny, and to naturalize even the most improbable cause-effect relationship:

in opera, music intervenes in and transforms fate’s blind, inescapable ties to nature [...] and the audience is called upon as a witness, if not indeed as a court of appeal¹⁶.

3.3. Where Has Beauty Gone?

What opera has been relentless in naturalizing, however, are often patterns of inequality and oppression which have a long-standing history in European culture. Its politics, both in terms of gender and more generally of the representation of minorities, have been problematized in recent years from within the field of musicology, starting from Susan McClary’s ground-breaking work on one of the most performed operas of the repertoire, Georges Bizet’s *Carmen* (1875). In her turn, McClary followed the lead of French feminist critic Catherine Clément; according to her, *Carmen* “refuses masculine yokes and [...] must pay for it with her life [...] somewhat whore, somewhat Jewess, somewhat Arab, entirely illegal, and always on the margins of life”¹⁷. It is for this transgression that both the plot and the musical dramaturgy of the opera show an apparently inescapable drive (Adorno’s ‘fate’) to her death: the chromatic excesses and exotic melodies that characterise *Carmen*’s musical language are resolved in the F sharp that closes the opera on the heroine’s death. The illusion staged by the opera’s intermedial narrative is in the way the perfect harmony of words and music makes this conclusion desirable as well as necessary:

¹⁵ Adorno 1999, p. 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁷ Clément 1989, p. 62.

Bizet's musical strategies [...] set up almost unbearable tensions that cause the listener not only to accept Carmen's death as 'inevitable', but actually to *desire* it¹⁸.

This destiny is shared by many opera heroines from the repertoire, as Clément's *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* argued in 1979; as second wave feminism was in full swing, Clément offered a bird's eye view of opera and spotted the pervasiveness of its misogynistic representation of women, who paid their centrality and visibility with inevitable, beautiful deaths: "on the opera stage women perpetually sing their eternal undoing. The emotion is never more poignant than when the voice is lifted to die"¹⁹.

Clément's canon, which includes staple tragic heroines from Carmen to Violetta, Madama Butterfly and Turandot, is strategically essentialist; it deliberately ignores, for example, *opera buffa*, where women's rebellion is usually rewarded (often with a rich husband), or baroque opera, where *en travesti* roles make gender binarism more fluid, open to layered, anti-normative embodiments²⁰. These limitations notwithstanding, her work (and that of feminist musicology following suit since the 1990s) has put opera's entanglement with the oppression of women subjects under the spotlight; the genre's objectification of subaltern subjects, Oriental 'others' put on display for Western eyes and ears has also been discussed in recent scholarship²¹.

With its ideological grounds under close scrutiny, one would think that opera could easily, as Mladen Dolar argues, "be assigned a neat place in cultural archaeology and thus properly buried"²²; a fate which seemed inevitable even before the 'culture wars', as the advent of cinema and the radio in the second half of the twentieth century risked making opera redundant and economically unsustainable. Already at that time, it was the crosspollination with other arts that allowed opera to survive: the second half of the twentieth century saw

¹⁸ McClary 1992, p. 62 (emphasis in the text).

¹⁹ Clément 1989, p. 5.

²⁰ As another French feminist writer, Hélène Cixous, recounts in her *Tancredi continues*. See Cixous 1995.

²¹ See for example Said 1993; Dellamora, Fischlin 1997.

²² Žižek, Dolar, 2002, p. 3

the success at La Scala of the stagings directed by Luchino Visconti²³, who brought to the opera theatre both the reputation and the techniques of cinema. His creative partnership with Maria Callas inaugurated a new course for opera performance, in which singers were expected not only to sing but also to act – and, maybe more crucially, to submit to the authority of the director as well as to that of the conductor. Where Stanislavski had failed, Visconti succeeded; and while to say that traditional hierarchies in opera productions have been since then completely overthrown would probably be to overestimate it – the conductor still has veto power over the director, but not vice versa; and lead singers are never expected to attend all rehearsals, but only those in the weeks preceding the premiere²⁴ – directors have nevertheless become a regular and prominent feature.

The reputation and artistic vision of contemporary directors contribute to the spectacle of opera today, although different approaches may still be identified. Visconti's productions, for example, while marked by his immediately identifiable aesthetics, adhere to the setting and the formal mechanisms of the works; as do Franco Zeffirelli's, another cinema director who has undoubtedly left his mark on how opera is staged in the twentieth century. Different is the case of directors who come from the theatrical avantgarde, and maintain the same iconoclastic drive; for example, Luca Ronconi's 1977 *Don Carlo* for La Scala made history for its Counter-Reformation iconography shaping Verdi's intimate tragedies into overarching, ideological power struggles; while Robert Wilson brought his idiosyncratic empty spaces and anti-naturalistic gestures not only to new, experimental works such as Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), which revolutionized the concept of musical theatre, but also, later in his career, to repertoire operas such as *Madama Butterfly* (1993) and more recently (among others) *Norma* (2011) and *Turandot* (2018). These productions share visual and gestural trademarks with the director's other works, thus showing clearly identifiable, 'signature' traits of authority. One is allowed, indeed, to speak of Visconti's *Traviata*, Ronconi's *Don Carlo* and Wilson's *Turandot*.

However, while all directors leave their own distinctive imprint-

²³ Cappelletto 2001, p. 1209.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 1206.

ing, not all directions produce adaptations; indeed, one may doubt whether they may adapt at all, as opera remains rather unpliable material – even with their current prestige, directors are never allowed to intervene on the instrumental and singing parts of the opera, which remain strictly under the control of the conductor and performers. So, how does *Regieoper* manipulate such a source text in ways that makes their work an adaptation? By exploiting the vast array of media involved, turning an intermedial genre into a transmedial narrative mechanism. While opera may not look like the transmedia storytelling discussed by Henry Jenkins in his groundbreaking *Convergence Culture*²⁵, it allows for the spreading of the narrative through different media, not necessarily limited to the time and place of the performance²⁶; and when “non-literal stagings”²⁷ explicitly rewrite or counterpoint the textual and musical matter, the audience is required to individually and collectively negotiate the different narratives offered, which together contribute to the “art of world making”²⁸ which for Jenkins is at the core of transmedia storytelling.

One of the most widespread strategies of *Regieoper* is to move the action to a different time, to set *Madama Butterfly* in contemporary Nagasaki (dir. Damiano Michieletto, Teatro Regio in Turin, 2010) or Verdi’s *Attila* in Nazi Germany (dir. Davide Livermore, Teatro alla Scala, 2018). But stage action can also rework parts of the plot: in Leo Muscato’s *Carmen* (Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, 2018) it was Carmen who killed don José; while in Robert Carsen’s *Don Carlo* (La Fenice, 2018) Rodrigo, the rebel who is executed by Filippo II, is portrayed as an emissary of the Inquisition and does not die but is eventually crowned king himself. Manipulation of stage action may also be less blatant: in Mario Martone’s *Otello* (Teatro San Carlo, 2021), Desde-

²⁵ Jenkins 2006.

²⁶ Purely for space reasons, this contribution will not discuss the way regular filming and broadcast practices have influenced recent productions; today filming opera has become an elaborate and rather independent art, which includes opening titles, advanced sound recording, and visual effects and points of view which are not available to the theatre audience but are specifically devised for people watching on TV, as happened for Davide Livermore’s 2021 *Macbeth* for La Scala.

²⁷ Rothe 2019.

²⁸ Jenkins 2006, p. 21.

mona's body was removed from the stage immediately after her murder, and Otello's final lament on the body of the woman he loved was delivered to an empty stage.

About this overly criticized choice, Martone stated:

In newspapers, when a woman is killed, the man says he loved her. An aspect that was not taken into consideration before: but we cannot avoid looking at it. Today I would find it difficult to see a man mourning the woman he has killed with the beauty of Verdi and Shakespeare. That beauty is there, but how can we narrate it?²⁹

Martone, who has also left his mark on opera directing in the last forty years³⁰, clearly tackles here the challenge of staging opera today: one cannot deny the beauty of that poignant emotion of which Clément writes, nor can it be restaged while ignoring – one may say, repressing – the ideological message with which it is imbued. Beauty, hence, identifies an aesthetic experience that does not rely uncritically on the authoritativeness of the opera canon (as the call for respecting rather elusive authorial intentions often requires), but neither does it seek consolatory solutions that make the horror and suffering expressed in opera more digestible to a contemporary sensibility.

3.4. Where Should One Look for Beauty?

Ai Weiwei represents still another kind of artist that has entered the opera landscape; not a theatre director by training or practice, he is among many visual artists who have taken up the challenge of opera directing. Collaboration of visual artists with opera stagings, as already mentioned, date back to the early twentieth century, and have a continued history up to Jannis Kounellis' set designs for the *Lohengrin* directed by Pierre Audi (De Nederlandse Opera, 2002) or Giulio Paolini's for the *Parsifal* directed by Federico Tiezzi (Teatro San Carlo,

²⁹ Cappelli 2021; my translation.

³⁰ Martone's early opera directions date back to the 80s, when he was also experimenting with the multimedia avant-garde (see Fusillo 2018); more recently he has also directed three film-operas produced by Teatro dell'Opera in Rome (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Traviata*, and *Bohème*), which push further his research into opera as an inter- and transmedial form.

2007). More unusual is the case of a visual artist taking up the role of director as well: a paramount example in this respect is William Kentridge directing Mozart's *Magic Flute* (Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, 2005), which allows to identify as specific use of transmediality that this kind of crossbreeding between opera and the visual arts produce. Not only Kentridge's signature animated drawings used as scenery made the staging work as an installation inside which the singers moved; but the work on the opera also resulted in two separate installations (*Preparing the Flute* and *Black Box/Chambre noir*) and a number of drawings and sketches, all part of separate exhibitions which travelled with the production and were eventually collected in a catalogue³¹.

Ai's production of *Turandot* was also accompanied by a separate installation, *La Commedia Umana*, exhibited in Rome at the Terme di Diocleziano while *Turandot* was running. A huge chandelier composed of more than two thousand pieces in black Murano glass in the shape of human body parts (skulls, bones, hearts) together with elements of the contemporary media landscape such as Twitter birds, the work rewrites the lavishness of the opera house – and its indispensable crystal chandelier – by focusing on the pervasiveness of death and its spectacularization in contemporary media. This is also one of the central themes of the actual *mise-en-scene*: for a decision shared by the artist and the conductor Oksana Lyniv, this *Turandot* closed on Liù's death in act III, where Puccini's score also ends; an unusual choice, first made by Arturo Toscanini in 1926 on the opera's premiere, but since then hardly seen again, as productions prefer to close on the finale composed by Franco Alfano (or, more rarely, on the one by Luciano Berio), which celebrates the 'melting' of the ice princess Turandot and the celebration of her (reciprocated) love for Calaf. A happy ending indeed, as one rarely sees in melodrama; but also, the subjugation of the powerful femininity embodied by Turandot, who refuses men to honour the memory of an ancestor who was forced into marriage and is eventually domesticated into a submissive and loving wife, which in reversing also echoes Liù's own love sacrifice³².

³¹ See Kentridge 2007.

³² See Riccobono 2018.

Ai does not curtail the folk-tale element of the opera; on the contrary, sets and costumes abound on the side of the oneiric and the fantastic. Turandot's all-white, butterfly-like costume includes a gauze hood in the first act, and a spider headpiece in the third; the incognito prince Calaf wears a frog on his back as a disguise (which he sheds at the end of the first act as he decides to submit to Turandot's trial by enigma) and has Lego bricks stuck in his hair; Liù's torturers look like monstrous, dragon-shaped humanoids; the children's chorus enters holding paper lanterns, which dancers also wear as headpieces shaped as the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac. However, in immersing into the illusion of this fairy-tale world, the audience is disturbed by a number of interferences: riot squad gears appear among the Oriental kaftans, and the paper-lanterns worn by the three counsellors Ping, Pong, and Pang are shaped as missiles, security cameras and hands showing the finger, a recurring *tòpos* in the artist's oeuvre (including the iconic *The Artist's Hand*, 2017). Security cameras and Twitter birds, together with chains, handcuffs, and guns, also appear in the animations projected on the background during the second scene of the second act, where they revolve (together with the Chinese zodiac signs) during the trial by enigma.

The staging makes no attempt to harmonize the fable and the dystopia; on the contrary, its main formal element is the contrast between these two levels of signification. The production was programmed to open in 2020; the irruption of the pandemic put in on hold for two years, and when it finally premiered, Russia had just invaded Ukraine (country of origin, incidentally, of both the conductor and of lead soprano Oksana Dyka). These and other topical issues intrude on the story happening on stage, especially through the images projected almost uninterruptedly on the back screen: from Covid-infested hospitals to the 2021 Hong Kong riots which loom over the stage during the first act, to the footage of deserted metropolises during lockdown (Paris, Venice, Rome) which accompany the three counsellors' fantasy of retiring in the country instead of working from the blood-thirsty princess, at the beginning of the second act; from the hypnotic spinning of guns and cameras to the animated drawings of refugees on which the opera closes, the audience's eye is constantly distracted from what is happening on a stage which is, in its turn, far from empty. On a set which looks like a lunar landscape

(and seen from the upper tiers shows a map of the world where continents are empty, gaping spaces) one choreography follows another, from group numbers by dancers in see-through, glittering outfits to solos by dancer Chiang Ching, who impersonates different characters among which the prince of Persia, the suitor who is executed in act I, and the ancestor evoked by Turandot in her second act aria.

When so much is happening, where should one look? Especially when experienced in the theatre, where there is no camera to direct one's own gaze, this production works like a multi-screen, trans-media installation, where it is the responsibility of the audience to choose on what to focus their attention; and every choice, significantly, means to ignore something else. And because Puccini's *Turandot* is a story about the workings of power and violence, looking at nurses walking down a hospital corridor in Wuhan means looking away from the prince of Persia as he falls victim of Turandot's unrelenting cruelty; following animated refugees as they disappear at a vanishing point at the centre of the screen means ignoring Liù as she is tortured and killed onstage. Although, of course, one listens; the prince of Persia is a silent role, but the choir of the population persecuted by Turandot, and Liù's heart-rending death aria, cannot be ignored.

Going back to Villa's review, one may agree that Ai's direction does not "provide a clear retelling of the plot", at least as far as action on stage and screen is abundant and non-linear. However, one might wonder whether any opera, a genre where the human voice is so stretched that most of the singing parts are structurally unintelligible,³³ should need a staging focused on retelling a plot most of the audience would probably be already acquainted with (playbills generally include both a synopsis of the plot and the full libretto). More significant remains the question of what it means to 'do justice' to Puccini's work, and what kind of engagement by the audience is required in a transmedial adaptation such as Ai's. Because of its roots in experimental theatre of the early nineteenth century, *Regieoper*

³³ Most opera scores are well above 312 Hz, the frequency at which the human voice presents optimum intelligibility. On average, only a quarter of soprano parts are below 660 Hz, the high E note, which marks the boundary beyond which linguistic articulation becomes impossible: in order to sing the notes above this frequency the singer is forced to subarticulate consonants, resulting in an almost total loss of linguistic articulation (see Poizat 1992, pp. 67-69).

does indeed push against the grain of the illusion that for Adorno was the core of the operatic experience; the dissonances between the different formal planes of the performance trigger an estrangement effect which interferes with a completely passive notion of spectatorship. Instead of sitting back and effortlessly enjoy the show, the audience is required to actively look (metaphorically but also materially) for the beauty of Puccini's score, of the orchestra's harmonies, of the singers' voices; with a chance to be newly, if differently, amazed; to find beauty, as it were, anew.

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PART II

PRACTICES I:
LITERATURE, THEATRE AND CINEMA

4. Kubrick modernista?

Lettura di *Eyes Wide Shut*

Alessandro Cinquegrani

4.1. Quattro dettagli

Eyes Wide Shut, il celebre ultimo film di Stanley Kubrick, sconta un'ambiguità: da una parte è un'opera molto discussa e commentata, anche in relazione al romanzo di Arthur Schnitzler dal quale è tratto¹; dall'altra è apparentemente l'adattamento meno stimolante del regista proprio perché pretendeva – stando alle parole dello sceneggiatore Frederic Raphael² – una fedeltà quasi assoluta alle indicazioni già presenti nel testo originale. Molti critici hanno perciò potuto affermare che le variazioni risultano poco rilevanti eccetto, ovviamente, il radicale cambio d'ambientazione dalla Vienna di inizio Novecento alla New York di fine secolo: una modifica sulla quale peraltro Raphael non si trovava d'accordo.

Su questa generale fedeltà non ci sono dubbi, tuttavia, proprio in questo contesto, le poche modifiche divengono più rilevanti e il dettaglio si fa rivelatorio di ciò che il regista ha voluto esprimere attraverso la sua opera. Questo studio si propone allora di analizzare al-

¹ Secondo Ruggero Eugeni questo aspetto è proprio della natura stessa del film e «*Eyes Wide Shut* [...] si afferma come la grande macchina di produzione dell'interpretazione del Novecento» (Eugeni 2019, p. 153), e tutto questo non è esente da derive: «For the cultists and conspiracy theorists, the commentaries are often passionately ridiculous. In the case of critical essays, there is deep, analytical speculation» (Kolker-Abrams 2019, pp. 133-34). Per una bibliografia completa fino al 2017 si rimanda a Cimmino et al. (2017). Per motivi di spazio, il presente contributo cita la bibliografia critica solo quando strettamente connessa ai temi affrontati.

² Raphael 1999.

cuni di questi dettagli, dai quali evincere la visione dell'autore sul clima socio-culturale del suo tempo. In particolare, si prenderanno le mosse da alcune scene della lunga sequenza del ricevimento a casa di Victor Ziegler che apre il film, mettendole in relazione con il discusso finale e la celebre battuta conclusiva, «Fuck», che ha generato molte interpretazioni contrastanti. Come è noto, il ricevimento iniziale è presente anche nella *Traumnovelle*, ma occupa uno spazio minore ed è raccontato a posteriori. Ci sono le “due maschere in domino rosso”³, con le loro allusioni di carattere sessuale che ritroveremo nel film, ma i dialoghi sono tutti ricreati nella sceneggiatura. Inoltre, nel testo di Schnitzler non c'è la figura di Victor Ziegler che ha un ruolo importante nell'economia della pellicola, né del seduttore Sandor Szavost.

La festa ideata da Schnitzler inoltre è una festa di Carnevale in maschera, mentre Kubrick colloca la storia vicino alle festività natalizie: il tema della maschera, decisivo per l'intreccio, dunque non viene aperto qui, ma più tardi. Tuttavia, ad un'analisi più accurata si vede come il film introduca gran parte dei temi che costituiranno le principali direttrici di significato proprio nei minuti iniziali, che trovano una compiutezza, poi, nel finale. Il film si propone dunque come opera chiusa, una parabola che nasce nei primi minuti, si sviluppa nel corso della pellicola, e finisce con l'ultima parola.

Come si tenterà di dimostrare, questa parabola chiusa vuole in un certo senso incorniciare il Novecento: partire dalla frattura epistemologica di inizio secolo in tutto ciò che il regista ricava dalla sua fonte letteraria e concludersi proprio alla fine del Novecento segnando una via per il nuovo millennio. Tutto ciò che innerva l'intero film è già evidente, come accennato più su, nella prima sequenza al ricevimento di Ziegler, se solo si mettono in relazione alcune battute di dialogo con le fonti più probabili dell'autore. In particolare, si analizzeranno quattro momenti topici del montaggio di questa lunga sequenza, che seguono immediatamente l'incontro di Bill con Nightingale che si può considerare l'inesco narrativo del film, ovvero:

- 1a. incontro di Alice con Sandor, primo tentativo di seduzione: riferimento all'*Ars amandi* di Ovidio, *focus* sulle gallerie d'arte, discorso sul matrimonio;
- 2a. incontro di Bill con le due modelle: nome della ragazza Nuala, ri-

³ Schnitzler 1999, p. 12.

cordo dell'episodio passato dell'incontro;

- 1b. Alice e Sandor: discorso sulla verginità;
- 2b. Bill e le modelle: discorso sull'identità del medico e sulla fine dell'arcobaleno;
3. Bill da Ziegler: la situazione di Mandy, ovvero lo svenimento della ragazza e la successiva ripresa;
4. Alice e Sandor: la collezione d'arte di Victor, l'invito a vedere i bronzi del Rinascimento.

Da un punto di vista meramente narrativo questa sequenza ha lo scopo di introdurre la sensualità adultera nel matrimonio dei due protagonisti, incarnata da Sandor per Alice e dalle due modelle e da Mandy per Bill. Inoltre, come è noto, Mandy, esattamente come *Nightingale*, avrà un ruolo decisivo nell'intreccio. Ma la libertà degli sceneggiatori rispetto alla fonte originale in questo passaggio permette loro di lavorare sui dialoghi e sulla messa in scena in modo da renderli particolarmente significativi.

La scena numero 3 tra quelle proposte è anche visivamente quella di maggior impatto, poiché si esce dal contesto del ricevimento per spostarsi nella stanza privata di Ziegler e subito si comprende che la situazione rimanda a qualcosa di sommerso e illecito come ci viene subito confermato dal riferimento esplicito alla droga e implicito ma evidentissimo al sesso extraconiugale. Si tratta di una scena centrale che illumina anche quelle limitrofe.

Inizia con Ziegler che si riveste alla meglio accanto alla poltrona dove è sdraiata Mandy, si sente bussare alla porta, e l'uomo percorre il breve tragitto per andare ad aprire. La macchina da presa lo segue, poi intercetta Bill che a passo spedito fa a ritroso lo stesso percorso dell'amico. L'inquadratura è da dietro una vasca da bagno al centro della stanza, dietro Ziegler e poi dietro Bill campeggia sulla parete un grande quadro che entra totalmente in campo: *Paula 6 months on red* di Christiane Kubrick. Non è il solo quadro della moglie del regista presente nel film, ce ne sono circa una ventina, ma questo è il più grande e il più significativo: è evidente, infatti, la somiglianza tra la Paula del quadro e la Mandy del film, entrambe nude e accasciate su una poltrona o un sofà rosso. Subito dopo l'ingresso di Bill nella stanza, mentre è accovacciato accanto alla ragazza c'è un campo e controcampo ripetuto tre volte in cui si vede nel campo Mandy aiutata da Bill e nel controcampo Ziegler alle cui spalle campeggia il qua-

dro nella sua interezza. In questo punto l'analogia tra le due è evidentissima.

Come è noto, il film, come e più del libro da cui è tratto, è tutto giocato sull'immagine del doppio, ma è in questo punto che il tema si apre in due direzioni: lo sdoppiamento e dunque la messa in discussione della realtà, da una parte, e lo sdoppiamento dell'archetipo della donna dall'altra.

4.2. Lo sdoppiamento della realtà

Nel 1929 René Magritte realizza il celebre dipinto *La trahison des images* che denuncia uno iato tra la realtà e la rappresentazione. Siamo negli stessi anni della *Traumnovelle* e in quella stessa temperie culturale: negli anni cioè in cui il modernismo mette in crisi le certezze precedentemente acquisite. Siamo, però, anche, nella medesima situazione creata da Kubrick nella scena descritta più su: Mandy – almeno la sua postura, la poltrona rossa, il modo in cui è inquadrata e concepita la scena – sembra generata da Paula (o viceversa: Paula è un ritratto di Mandy?) ma Paula sembra dichiarare, in virtù della sua ostentata gravidanza, *Ceci n'est pas Mandy*.

Nel 1965, in un'epoca di passaggio dal modernismo al postmodernismo, Joseph Kosuth, ispirandosi direttamente all'opera di Magritte, realizza *One and Three Chairs*, che rende ancora più esplicito il senso già proposto dall'artista surrealista ma attribuendovi un valore concettuale più forte e immediato e – importante per la relazione col film – introducendovi direttamente il piano della realtà: la sedia fisica appartiene alla realtà, la fotografia alla rappresentazione, la definizione scritta alla descrizione. Si tratta di tre mondi diversi che cercano di assomigliarsi, esattamente come la realtà del film (e bisognerebbe ovviamente aggiungere che si tratta di realtà finzionale, di realtà rappresentata in quanto si tratta appunto di un film) che cerca vanamente di assomigliare alla rappresentazione del quadro (o viceversa).

In *Il calligramma disfatto*, Michel Foucault commenta l'opera di Magritte in questi termini:

Paragonato alla tradizionale funzione della didascalia, il testo di Magritte è doppiamente paradossale. Si propone di nominare ciò che,

evidentemente, non ha bisogno di esserlo (la forma è troppo nota, il nome troppo familiare). Ed ecco che nel momento in cui dovrebbe dare il nome, lo dà negando che sia tale⁴.

Come nel film di Kubrick, anche qui sono due gli aspetti che vengono messi in campo: lo sdoppiamento e la differenza (attraverso la negazione).

Il magistero di Foucault è particolarmente importante per comprendere questo passaggio decisivo del film in relazione con la sua fonte⁵. Nelle *Parole e le cose* il filosofo francese analizza il complesso rapporto tra le parole e le cose, come annuncia il titolo, ma anche, più in generale, tra realtà e rappresentazione della stessa. Nel suo discorso è evidente che ciò che caratterizza il Novecento è un intrappolarsi della parola in sé stessa, ritrovando una densità non più legata alle cose:

La verità è intrappolata dalla filologia. [...] Il primo libro del *Capitale* è un'esegesi del «valore»; l'intero Nietzsche, un'esegesi di alcune parole greche; Freud, l'esegesi di tutte le frasi mute che sorreggono e scavano a un tempo i nostri discorsi apparenti, i nostri fantasmi, i nostri sogni e il nostro corpo. La filologia in quanto analisi di ciò che si dice nel profondo del discorso è divenuta la forma moderna della critica⁶.

Nel voler rappresentare il Novecento, ovvero lo spazio socio-culturale che intercorre da ciò che Schnitzler descrive nel suo tempo e il momento in cui Kubrick realizza la sua opera ambientandola nella contemporaneità, il regista sa che questo è un punto determinante che la cultura modernista approfondisce e declina in moltissimi modi diversi.

Come è noto, Michel Foucault distingue tra episteme del Rinascimento, episteme classica ed episteme moderna. Il discorso parte da un presupposto semplice.

⁴ Foucault 1988a, p. 32.

⁵ Fino ad oggi la filosofia di Foucault è stata messa in relazione al cinema di Kubrick soprattutto nei temi di follia e potere nel film *Arancia meccanica* (cfr. soprattutto Gehrke 2006); tra *Il bacio dell'assassino* e la *Storia della follia* (Decker 2007); tra *Il coraggio della verità* e la rappresentazione della realtà in Kubrick (e Caravaggio) (Fiotti 2021).

⁶ Foucault 1967, p. 322.

Nella sua forma originaria quando fu dato agli uomini da Dio stesso, il linguaggio era un segno delle cose assolutamente certo e trasparente poiché assomigliava ad esse. I nomi erano deposti su ciò che indicavano, come la forza è scritta nel corpo del leone, la regalità nello sguardo dell'aquila, come l'influsso dei pianeti è stampato sulla fronte degli uomini: mediante la forma della similitudine⁷.

Anche se "tale trasparenza fu distrutta a Babele per castigo degli uomini"⁸, la forma della similitudine resiste durante l'episteme rinascimentale, quando, sia pure con una complessità che il filosofo francese affronta nel dettaglio, esisteva un nesso diretto tra le parole e le cose che dunque appartenevano a un mondo di significazione. È proprio questo tempo ad essere perduto nella modernità: "La soglia dal classicismo alla modernità [...] venne definitivamente varcata allorché le parole cessarono d'intrecciarsi alle rappresentazioni e di quadrettare spontaneamente la conoscenza delle cose"⁹.

Nel raccontare il modernismo, ovvero un'epoca che attraversa tutto il Novecento nella sua variante di post-modernismo ("Postmodernism follows from modernism, in some sense, more than it follows after modernism", ricorda Brian McHale¹⁰), parte dunque da questo sdoppiamento della realtà reale dalla realtà rappresentata, sottintendendo una nostalgia per quella che Foucault chiamava 'episteme rinascimentale'. Se si riprende il breve elenco di scene riportato più su, si nota che subito dopo l'episodio di Mandy – punto d'inizio, come abbiamo visto, di questo sdoppiamento – si ritorna, al minuto 14:46, al ricevimento dove Alice sta ballando con Sandor e il loro dialogo è il seguente:

SANDOR: I love Victor's art collection, don't you?

ALICE: Yes. It's wonderful.

S.: Have you ever seen his sculpture gallery?

A.: No, I haven't.

S.: He has a wonderful collection of Renaissance bronzes. Do you like

⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 328.

¹⁰ McHale 1987, p. 5.

the period?

A.: I do.

S.: I adore it. The sculpture gallery is upstairs. Would you like to see it? I can show it to you. We won't be gone long.

A.: Maybe... not just... now.

La scena, incorniciata tra due momenti nella stanza da bagno dove si trova Mandy, è costituita solo da queste battute. Da un punto di vista narrativo non sono particolarmente importanti: benché sia qui che si concretizza la proposta di Sandor, le sue intenzioni erano già chiare fin dall'inizio. Il centro del discorso riguarda piuttosto i temi ai quali allude. Anziché parlare genericamente di sculture, l'uomo specifica "Renaissance bronzes" e subito dopo pone l'accento sul periodo e non sulle sculture stesse. Il Rinascimento – l'episteme rinascimentale in cui parole e cose sono legate da un rapporto di somiglianza – è dunque un'ipotesi, che piace sia ad Alice che a Sandor, ma che è troppo presto perché sia raggiunta. L'ultima battuta di Alice si comprende solo in questo contesto: il "not just... now" non può riferirsi effettivamente ad un nuovo incontro tra i due (Alice ribadisce più volte di essere sposata e che dunque la cosa è impossibile) quanto a un momento futuro in cui si può tentare di raggiungere l'equilibrio tra parole e cose proprio del Rinascimento.

Ma non ancora: è dichiarato l'obiettivo dei personaggi, la fine della parabola che a questo punto è ben lontana da essere raggiunta. Per tutto il film, infatti, questa frattura tra parole e cose resta evidente. Nella celebre scena della festa clandestina, si mette in atto una ritualizzazione del sesso il cui innesco è dato dalle parole d'ordine. Michel Foucault nella sua *Storia della sessualità* associa l'origine della modernità occidentale a "un imperativo [...]: non solo confessare gli atti contrari alla legge, ma cercare di trasformare il proprio desiderio, ogni proprio desiderio, in discorso"¹¹.

Il punto di passaggio verso la cultura moderna è dato, spiega nelle *Parole e le cose*, dalla figura di Sade e della sua *Justine*, che incrina il rapporto tra la natura e la rappresentazione: "tale opera impraticabile manifesta il precario equilibrio fra la legge senza legge del desiderio e

¹¹ Foucault 1988b, p. 22.

l'ordinamento meticoloso d'una rappresentazione discorsiva"¹². Sade potrebbe essere il riferimento più chiaro della scena dell'orgia nella quale è evidente il sistema di potere che vuole portare a una rappresentazione rigorosamente ordinata del disordine del desiderio. E in questo caso però la corrispondenza tra parole e cose è già incrinata, è impossibile. Così viene interrogato Bill alla festa, quando ormai è stato scoperto:

UOMO COL MANTELLO ROSSO: May I have the password, please?

BILL: Fidelio.

U.: That's right, sir. That is the password for admittance. But may I ask, what is the password for the house?

B.: The password for the house?

U.: Yes.

B.: I'm sorry... I... I seem to have... forgotten it.

U.: That's unfortunate. Because here, it doesn't matter whether you have forgotten it or if you never knew it.

Sembra un problema che riguarda solo Bill: è lui che non conosce la parola per accedere alle pratiche della casa, sembra che per lui viga la frattura tra la parola e le cose. Ma non è così, la frattura è endemica di un'intera epoca, come spiega Ziegler molto dopo: "there was no second password". Trasformare il proprio desiderio in discorso, come dice Foucault, è impedito perché le parole non ci sono o sono inadeguate. Nella *Volontà di sapere* il filosofo francese assume ad emblema di questo momento di passaggio la confessione cristiana: e una confessione è anche quella di Bill, a suo modo, per la quale verrà però condannato, a meno che qualcun alto non si sacrifichi per lui, non sia "ready to redime him", come dice la donna che lo salva (Mandy?).

4.3. Lo sdoppiamento della donna

Per questa scena, la terza tra quelle elencate, quella definita "la situazione di Mandy", si è parlato più su di sdoppiamento, ma si è fatto cenno anche alla differenza o alla negazione. Le due donne, Mandy e Paula, benché consapevolmente associate o sovrapposte nella

¹² Foucault 1967, p. 229.

posa, sono anche palesemente diverse, essendo Paula visibilmente incinta e Mandy chiaramente lontana dal rappresentare la maternità, e piuttosto simbolo dell'amore ancillare, o del sesso certamente non volto alla procreazione.

Poco prima – scena 1 – Sandor si avvicina ad Alice e le prime parole che dice fanno riferimento all'*Arte di amare* di Ovidio. Dopo le presentazioni infatti si dice:

SANDOR: Did you ever read the Latin poet Ovid on *The Art of Love*?

ALICE: Didn't he wind up all by himself crying his eyes out in some place with a very bad climate?

S.: But he also had good time first... a very good time.

È evidente il gioco di seduzione tra i due: mentre Sandor allude al più noto manuale su come conquistare una donna, Alice risponde ricordando i pericoli di una simile pratica e dimostrando al contempo, però, che l'approccio di tipo culturale ha avuto efficacia. Si potrebbe pensare che queste parole scaturiscano solo da un bisogno di tratteggiare il carattere colto, raffinato e al tempo stesso audace dei due personaggi, ma, come per il riferimento al Rinascimento di cui si è detto, potrebbero nascondere significati più pregnanti. Subito dopo, Sandor chiede: "Are you here with anyone tonight, Alice?", e la risposta, sia pure data con una certa enfasi, è la più ovvia: "With my husband". Poco dopo Sandor riprende il discorso sul matrimonio e sulla verginità, avventurandosi in affermazioni diventate celebri come aforismi. Proprio in quest'ottica e nell'ambito di questi temi – il matrimonio, la verginità – il riferimento a Ovidio diviene più pregnante. Anche in Ovidio si fa spesso riferimento alla distinzione tra le vergini e le matrone (donne sposate).

In riferimento alle donne sposate, come Alice, inoltre Ovidio istituisce un'altra distinzione:

Se il minore e il maggiore degli Atridi hanno schiacciante accuse
contro Elena il primo e contro la sorella di Elena il secondo,
se per l'infame azione della figlia di Tàlao, Erifile,
il figlio d'Eclo andò vivo allo Stige su cavalli vivi,
c'è anche Penelope, fedele mentre per due lustri andò errando

il marito, e per due lustri fece guerra¹³.

La donna sposata può dunque seguire il modello di Elena, che fugge con l'uomo amato oppure il modello di Penelope, fedele anche a costo di rinunciare alla propria felicità. Si tratta della questione che sarà dibattuta dai coniugi quando dopo la festa Alice, spinta anche da alcool e marijuana, confessa la tentazione del tradimento a Cape Cod: è esattamente in quel punto che la frattura tra Elena e Penelope, annunciata dalle parole di Sandor, si palesa con tutte le conseguenze che porta con sé¹⁴. Poco prima della confessione, Alice riprende il pensiero di Bill, ragionando proprio sull'identità della donna Penelope: "Millions of years of evolution, right? Men have to stick it every place they can, but for women, it is just about security and commitment and whatever the fuck else!".

Si noti come questo dialogo avviene e come si muove Alice nella stanza. All'inizio il dialogo si svolge a letto: Alice è sdraiata, seminuda, e dietro di lei la testiera del letto è rossa con delle losanghe grigie. A ben guardare è identica a quella del quadro di Christiane Kubrick, *Paula 6 months on red*, che abbiamo già trovato a casa di Ziegler. Quando il discorso si orienta verso il desiderio di Sandor che "wanted to fuck my wife", Alice si alza e si posiziona davanti alla porta del bagno, dietro c'è una luce blu, mentre nella stanza da letto campeggiano i colori caldi. È in quel punto che Alice diviene fredda, razionale e inizia a contestare ogni parola di Bill. Poi si sposta mentre pronuncia queste parole: "Do you realize that what you're saying is that the only reason you wouldn't fuck those models is out of consideration for me?", cioè mentre comprende che il loro matrimonio si sostiene solo sull'identità di moglie e di madre (come dirà Bill) di Alice. E si sposta davanti a una finestra dalla quale traspare ancora una luce blu. Si siede su uno sgabello, si alza, si risiede, e poi, dopo una risata malsana, è a terra, e comincia il racconto del desiderio di tradimento a Cape Cod. Man mano che il racconto procede Alice si appoggia sotto la finestra semisdraiata, seminuda, e con accanto una tenda rossa a

¹³ Ovidio, *Ars amandi*, III, vv. 11-16, che si cita da Ovidio 1998.

¹⁴ Pur con riferimenti più generici, Karen D. Hoffman legge il richiamo a Ovidio in relazione alla stessa frattura: "the contrast between good time of romantic love and the true intimacy of marital love" (Hoffman 2007, p. 61).

losanghe: la somiglianza con quella di Paula (o di Mandy) è, anche questa volta, evidentissima.

Durante questo acceso confronto col marito sull'identità della donna e sul ruolo della moglie, sembra che Alice migri da una figura di donna all'altra, delle due che abbiamo conosciuto nella scena precedente, Mandy e Paula, due mondi diversi o meglio due archetipi diversi di uno stesso mondo sdoppiato: una sembra essere il punto di partenza e una di arrivo. Certamente sono Elena e Penelope raccontate da Ovidio, ma sono anche altro, di più.

Ritorniamo alla scena 3, la situazione di Mandy. Chi sono Mandy e Paula? Per Paula è semplice identificarne l'identità: è una madre, la gravidanza è evidente, il titolo del quadro lo sottolinea. Anche l'identità di Mandy è facile da ricostruire, ma, se ci fossero dubbi, Ziegler lo ribadisce nella parte finale del film: "She was a hooker", ovvero una prostituta. Si tratta di due archetipi, molto noti e discussi in epoca modernista, a partire da un libro diffusissimo a quel tempo anche se oggi ritenuto immorale, ovvero *Sesso e carattere* di Otto Weininger: "tutte le donne si considerino tali da recare in sé qualcosa di proprio a due tipi, quando con prevalenza dell'uno, quando dell'altro: *tali tipi sono la madre e la prostituta*"¹⁵.

Alice è una madre, o almeno così la chiama la figlia, "Mommy", al minuto 2:14, cioè prima della festa, e soprattutto così la vede Bill durante il tempestoso dialogo in camera da letto: l'uomo sostiene di non essere mai stato geloso della moglie "maybe because you are the mother of my child" e in questa frase è chiara l'eco di Weininger quando dice che "quando una tale ragazza è stata resa madre, non importa da chi, nel caso ideale non si cura più di alcun uomo"¹⁶. Ed è proprio in questo momento, di fronte all'identificazione come madre che Alice avvicinandosi alla finestra (alla tenda rossa) accede all'altro archetipo, al polo di Mandy, alla donna prostituta nel gergo oggi difficilmente accettabile di Weininger. Lo spostamento dal rosso della testiera del letto al rosso della tenda è dunque uno spostamento tra i due archetipi, dato che – si legge in *Sesso e carattere* – "casi in piena regola di *duplex* o *multiplex personality*, di sdoppiamento o moltiplica-

¹⁵ Weininger 1992, p. 270 (corsivo nel testo).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 276.

zione dell'io, sono stati osservati solo nelle donne"¹⁷.

Nonostante questo, è evidente che è Bill il vero protagonista del film, ed è a lui che si deve l'intera parabola narrativa che più o meno inconsciamente attiva. È lui, infatti, a risvegliare l'archetipo sopito della prostituta quando si rivolge a Mandy: "Can you open your eyes for me? [...] Come on, look at me, look at me. Look at me, Mandy. Good!". Se Mandy invece di essere un personaggio fosse un archetipo – quello che Weininger chiamava 'donna prostituta' – questa frase sarebbe davvero l'inizio del viaggio di esplorazione di Bill in una dimensione perduta. Ed è sempre lui, però, a decidere che questa peregrinazione sarà provvisoria e a individuarne la fine, quando la avverte che una seconda volta potrà essere fatale, come in effetti accade nel finale del film e Victor ricorda a Bill: "Come on. It was always gonna be just a matter of time with her. Remember? You told her so yourself"¹⁸.

Nel corso del film Bill osserva quell'archetipo, non ha direttamente a che fare con esso, si muove in un mondo sommerso: un uomo non può rapportarsi con un archetipo se non in un mondo simbolico. Alla fine della peregrinazione, quando l'archetipo-Mandy sembra scomparso, Bill torna a casa e vede se stesso – simbolicamente rappresentato da una maschera sul cuscino del letto matrimoniale, serenamente accanto a Alice – "come le linee in ombra di un volto umano"¹⁹, scrive Schnitzler – che non ha mai abbandonato realmente il suo posto nel letto coniugale: la rappresentazione simbolica è palesata.

Perché dunque è avvenuto questo viaggio simbolico? Scrive Weininger:

Quindi non resta altro che supporre due contrarie predisposizioni innate che si distribuiscono tra le diverse donne in diverse proporzioni: la madre assoluta e la prostituta assoluta. Fra le due si trova la realtà:

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 265.

¹⁸ Mandy e la donna mascherata che salva Bill sono, a detta di Victor e Bill e perciò agli occhi dello spettatore, interpretate da due attrici diverse, rispettivamente Julianne Davis e Abigail Good, a sottolineare probabilmente la dimensione simbolica che va oltre la natura di personaggio. La stessa ambiguità è resa esplicita nel romanzo di Schnitzler.

¹⁹ Schnitzler 1999, p. 112.

di certo non vi è donna che sia priva di ogni istinto da prostituta [...]. Altrettanto poco, però, esiste una donna che manchi di ogni impulso materno²⁰.

Lo sdoppiamento dell'archetipo Mandy-Paula, prostituta-madre, che apre il film va dunque ricomposto. Il punto a cui tende la parabola dell'intreccio è ricostruire questa complessità, secondo la quale la donna *reale* porta dentro di sé entrambe le dimensioni e non è costretta necessariamente a scegliere. Così risulta chiaro il significato delle battute conclusive:

ALICE: and you know, there is something very important that we need to do as soon as possible.

BILL: What's that?

A.: Fuck.

4.4. Kubrick modernista?

Il primo capitolo della celebre monografia di James Naremore, *Su Kubrick*, si intitola *L'ultimo modernista* e vi si legge tra l'altro:

Come gli altri modernisti, Kubrick creò uno stile peculiare, che si è evoluto, come fanno tutti gli stili. Ha anche mostrato interesse per molte delle tendenze dominanti, estetiche o ideologiche, del modernismo: cura per la forma specifica di ogni *medium*, resistenza alla censura, predilezione per la satira e l'ironia a scapito del sentimento, avversione per il convenzionale realismo narrativo, riluttanza a permettere l'identificazione dello spettatore con i personaggi principali e attenzione ai rapporti tra la razionalità strumentale e la sua ombra onnipresente, l'inconscio irrazionale²¹.

Poco più avanti ricorda:

Tom Gunning mi disse nel corso di una conversazione che Kubrick potrebbe essere considerato non semplicemente come l'ultimo mo-

²⁰ Weininger 1992, p. 275.

²¹ Naremore 2009, p. 16.

dernista ma anche come l'ultimo autore viennese. [...] Oltre a Freud, Kubrick si interessò a Stefan Zweig e ad Arthur Schnitzler²².

I riferimenti ricostruiti fin qui – la frattura primonovecentesca tra parole e cose descritta da Foucault, *Sesso e carattere* di Otto Weininger, oltre ovviamente alla *Traumnovelle* di Schnitzler – riconducono tutti a quella temperie culturale²³. Tuttavia, per comprendere meglio questo passaggio e soprattutto l'accezione con la quale l'associazione col modernismo può essere efficace per *Eyes Wide Shut*, è necessario analizzare brevemente la scena 2b dell'elenco proposto più su.

Il momento è quello che precede immediatamente l'episodio di Mandy, anzi il discorso viene interrotto proprio dall'assistente di Ziegler che chiama il medico per soccorrere la ragazza. Il dialogo verte prima su questioni generali che riguardano la professione del medico e prima ancora sulle circostanze di un passato incontro fortuito. Tutto procede con allusioni sensuali, ma anche su argomenti verosimili in quella circostanza, poi però – mentre la ripresa frontale continua a seguirli nel loro girovagare senza meta apparente, verso un futuro che sembra non arrivare – il centro della conversazione vira improvvisamente:

BILL: Ladies, where exactly are we going... exactly?

GAYLE: Where the rainbow ends.

B.: Where the rainbow ends.

NUALA: Don't you want to go where the rainbow ends?

B.: Now that depends where that is?

G.: Well, let's find out.

Queste battute sono atipiche in un contesto realistico, benché compromesso dall'ebbrezza e dall'alcool, perché non sembrano avere significato. Tuttavia, nel film, l'arcobaleno compare più volte (è il nome del negozio nel quale Bill affitta lo smoking, non senza un contorno grottesco che occupa uno spazio notevole del film), e dunque

²² Ibid.

²³ Naremore aggiunge anche altri riferimenti modernisti, e cfr. anche il capitolo *Kubrick and Kafka: The Corporeal Uncanny* in Peucker 2007, pp. 104-115 o il paragone con Joyce in Webster 2011, p. 159 e sgg.

sembra un riferimento non casuale. In inglese esiste l'espressione idiomatica *to chase rainbows* che allude all'idea di darsi da fare per non ottenere nulla. Potrebbe certamente essere un manifesto della notte di Bill: la ricerca di un rapporto sessuale che sembra sempre imminente ma non arriva mai, il girovagare a vuoto, sfiorare la tragedia, ma in fondo alla fine ritornare al punto di partenza. Tuttavia, in questo caso il riferimento sembra più preciso: non genericamente all'arcobaleno ma più precisamente al punto in cui finisce l'arcobaleno.

Nella leggenda irlandese di San Patrizio, si narra che alla fine dell'arcobaleno ci sia una pentola d'oro custodita da uno gnomo²⁴. Potrebbe dunque trattarsi di un tesoro, ma che tipo di tesoro? Per rispondere a questa domanda è necessario riferirsi all'arcobaleno più famoso della letteratura americana, *Gravity's Rainbow* di Thomas Pynchon, il capolavoro del postmoderno americano pubblicato nel 1973. L'arcobaleno a cui si riferisce il titolo è quello compiuto dal famoso razzo V2, utilizzato dai nazisti contro gli inglesi alla fine della Seconda Guerra Mondiale. Ma il contesto bellico nasconde una metafora esplicita che spiega il significato della fine dell'arcobaleno:

Per Katje il grande arco tracciato nel vuoto era una chiara allusione a certe voglie segrete che animavano tanto il pianeta quanto lei, e quanto Quelli che la usavano... raggiungeva l'apice e poi si tuffava giù, ardente, verso l'orgasmo terminale²⁵...

La fine dell'arcobaleno, dunque, dove il razzo precipita è proprio l'orgasmo. Perciò, per le ragazze in preda all'ebbrezza del film, la proposta di andare a vedere la fine dell'arcobaleno è audace e quasi pornografica. Ma è anche rappresentativa dell'intero intreccio, che è un tentativo, rimasto inevaso, di raggiungere quel punto, che sarà sempre, per cause diverse, evitato, almeno fino al finale, quando si allude a un possibile *happy ending*: "Fuck".

Come detto, il finale è risolutivo per ciò che riguarda lo sdoppiamento della donna, ma, a ben guardare, è risolutivo anche per l'altra

²⁴ Alonge, Carluccio 2015 sottolineano la dimensione fiabesca nel film a partire proprio dal riferimento all'arcobaleno.

²⁵ Pynchon 2017, p. 315.

linea, lo sdoppiamento della realtà. La dominante ontologica del postmoderno prevede quelli che McHale chiama in riferimento a *science fiction* e *postmodernist fiction* “worlds in collision”²⁶, proprio perché separati, sdoppiati. Ma, se il finale indica il punto in cui finisce l’arcobaleno, questo allude anche alla fine della condizione di sdoppiamento della realtà e dei mondi e perciò il superamento del postmoderno al quale si può ricondurre il riferimento ossessivo all’arcobaleno.

Sia pure con un altro tipo di dominante, il postmoderno affonda le radici, come si è visto, nel modernismo²⁷. Le coppie oppositive caratterizzano l’inizio del Novecento e ovviamente sono presenti nella novella di Schnitzler così come nel film di Kubrick. Ma il regista sposta l’ambientazione del film dalla Vienna del primo Novecento alla New York della fine del Novecento. Mentre l’austriaco scrive quindi dall’inizio di quel mondo, l’inizio della frattura, Kubrick ne disegna la fine. Quella di Schnitzler è la denuncia o semplicemente il resoconto di qualcosa che sta avvenendo, quella di Kubrick è la denuncia di qualcosa che è già avvenuto e per il quale l’*happy ending* rappresenta l’unica salvezza possibile.

La parabola di *Doppio sogno* è simile nella struttura a quella del *Fu Mattia Pascal* di Pirandello, per esempio, ovvero situazione convenzionale-fuoriuscita-ritorno, dove la frattura delle certezze precedenti è dunque fallimentare. Come Freud, Schnitzler esplora la mutazione in atto, la riproduce, esamina pulsioni inconsce e le attribuisce ai suoi personaggi. Elogia la potenza del racconto, che è uno dei punti cardine della novella (“D’ora innanzi ci racconteremo sempre subito storie del genere”²⁸ si dicono i coniugi all’inizio e alla fine Fridolin “si propose di raccontarle presto, forse già domani, la storia della notte passata”²⁹). Quella di Schnitzler è la diagnosi stupefatta della mutazione in atto, ma quella di Kubrick non può essere questo perché è una visione a posteriori. Data per assunta, la mutazione ne indica una via d’uscita, quel bisogno, al termine del Novecento, di risolvere o supe-

²⁶ McHale 1987, p. 59.

²⁷ Da qui forse l’equivoco di *Eyes Wide Shut* come “a postmodern, erotic tragedy” in Pizzato 2004, p. 100.

²⁸ Schnitzler 1999, p. 18.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 112.

rare lo sdoppiamento che l'aveva caratterizzato. Proprio in virtù di questa consapevolezza Kubrick situa l'ultima scena nel luogo più tipico della costruzione borghese novecentesca: un negozio gremito di giocattoli per gli acquisti natalizi. Proprio questo spostamento dal contesto carnevalizio di Schnitzler a quello natalizio di Kubrick, secondo Roberta Ascarelli,

stravolge la prospettiva temporale: anche qui degli 'eroi' escono dal tracciato della loro storia personale e dalle determinazioni della loro epoca, eppure il viaggio di Alice, ma soprattutto di Bill, li porta, non all'inizio, ma alla fine del tempo³⁰.

Però la fine di quel tempo può corrispondere al superamento della deriva ontologica, e proprio lì la parola "Fuck", con la sua spudorata immediatezza, si potrebbe porre alla convergenza tra parole e cose e tornare a significare senza ipocrisie semplicemente quello che dice. Secondo Ruggero Eugeni "*Eyes Wide Shut* si presenterebbe come un *rebooting* della modernità, ma anche come un atto di commiato da essa"³¹. Più un atto di commiato che un *rebooting*, si potrebbe dire: un atto di commiato che allude a un tempo nuovo a venire³².

Nel suo dettagliato studio sul film Michel Chion, benché interpreti in altro modo la fine dell'arcobaleno, conclude alludendo a un possibile futuro:

So after the end of the film, if there is a future, the characters are going to make love. Perhaps another human being will be born of this act. In the space between beginning and end a man and a woman have died. But for this hypothetical new human being, who would never have been born had Bill and Alice's adventure unfolded in another way, life will present itself as a new adventure, a path of light always drawing us on, even beyond our awakened vision, to another infinite

³⁰ Ascarelli 2000, p. 10.

³¹ Eugeni 2019, p. 154.

³² "Il cinema di Kubrick si è sempre premurato in maniera quasi maniacale di situarsi in un tempo che deve ancora giungere e in un luogo non ancora scoperto" (Ciaruffoli 2003, p. 15).

country³³.

Mentre il futuro della *Tramnovelle* sarà esattamente quella strada che l'autore ha indicato, dello sdoppiamento della realtà e della riemersione dell'inconscio, il futuro di *Eyes Wide Shut* sarà non tanto quello di un'ipotetica nascita (ma è lecito ipotizzare il futuro dei personaggi?), ma certamente quella di una nuova epoca socioculturale che inizierà a cavallo del millennio e che tenterà di risolvere lo sdoppiamento dell'essere umano e della realtà.

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³³ Chion 2002, p. 88.

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5. Pensare per le scene: l'adattamento di *Lacci*, tra teatro e cinema

Lucia Faienza

Una sempre più diffusa pratica di adattamento intermediale, tra le conseguenze della circolazione del prodotto-libro al di fuori della sola sfera del letterario, ci porta ad osservare negli ultimi tempi la genesi di opere cinematografiche, televisive e teatrali a partire dal *best-seller* del momento. L'adattamento del romanzo al cinema non è certo un fenomeno nuovo, né recente, inoltre la critica segnala che negli ultimi anni “molte tra le *fiction* italiane più interessanti sono trasposizioni di romanzi”¹. Ciò che più interessa è rilevare alcuni tratti in comune agli adattamenti che in questi anni hanno ottenuto un maggior successo. Il riferimento va romanzi come *Gomorra*, *L'amica geniale*, *Romanzo criminale*, *Suburra*, *Il contagio* – per limitarci ai più noti – che hanno avuto la capacità di generare dei veri e propri ecosistemi narrativi, talvolta satelliti dell'opera romanzesca – quando gli adattamenti ruotano nell'orbita tematica e contenutistica del libro – altre volte “pianeti indipendenti, ognuno con il proprio demiurgo”². Se *Gomorra* è stato il precursore, e l'esempio più evidente, dell'entrata del testo letterario nel circuito del *brand* commerciale e del marketing³, tale fenomeno interessa anche la tetralogia dell'*Amica geniale* e, più trasversalmente, i romanzi di De Cataldo, Bonini e Siti. L'ampia risonanza a livello mondiale dei romanzi di Ferrante, infatti, ha originato un vero e proprio indotto economico, tradotto sotto l'etichetta di *Ferrante fever*⁴: questo riguarda non solo l'adattamento della serie te-

¹ Tirinanzi De Medici 2018, p. 259.

² Faienza et al. 2022, p. 396.

³ Benvenuti 2018.

⁴ Bisogno et al. 2020.

levisiva in co-produzione con HBO e il documentario di Giacomo Durzi (2017) sul fenomeno globale generato dai romanzi di Ferrante, ma anche l'ossessione per i luoghi reali in cui sono ambientate le tappe della storia di Elena e Lila. Inoltre, per le produzioni televisive e cinematografiche lo stesso nome dell'autrice è diventato un *brand* che assicura una fetta di *audience* affezionata all'*Amica geniale*, grazie alla ricorsività di certi *tòpos* tematici e di caratterizzazione: sono da inquadrare in questa prospettiva l'adattamento filmico de *La figlia oscura* (2022) – che coinvolge in co-produzione USA, Gran Bretagna, Israele, Grecia – con la regia di Maggie Gyllenhaal, o ancora la serie tv su *La vita bugiarda degli adulti* distribuita su Netflix dal 4 gennaio 2023.

Un'altra delle possibili conseguenze di questo fenomeno di 'espansione' extraletteraria del romanzo è il ridimensionamento della complessità del discorso autoriale nei vari adattamenti, come avviene nel *Contagio*: la rimozione "degli elementi più oltraggiosi (soprattutto sul piano sessuale)" e "lo schiacciamento palese sull'attualità"⁵, per quanto riguarda il cinema; o ancora la riduzione delle battute a quelle di maggior effetto linguistico, nello spettacolo teatrale. Lo sfruttamento del registro gergale imprime alle storie un 'colore' locale che porta a una sorta di cortocircuito tra la realtà dei personaggi e quella del contesto urbano e antropologico in cui le storie sono ambientate: in *Romanzo criminale* e *Suburra* è Roma la grande protagonista che rende possibile la nascita di una propria mitopoiesi criminale, estendibile in più direzioni – come dimostrano le varie stagioni e i *prequel* delle serie televisive – e non dissimile da quella di *Gomorra*.

Il caso dell'adattamento filmico e teatrale di *Lacci* (2014) presenta dei tratti originali rispetto ai fenomeni sopra citati per l'attenzione posta all'autonomia del prodotto artistico rispetto alle ragioni del marketing e della produzione dell'industria culturale italiana. Il romanzo di Domenico Starnone viene adattato per la prima volta a teatro sotto la regia di Armando Pugliese, nel 2017, e solo successivamente, nel 2020, viene portato al cinema da Daniele Luchetti. Innanzitutto va sottolineato, nel confronto con i romanzi di Saviano⁶,

⁵ Marchese 2020, pp. 291-292.

⁶ Saviano 2006.

Ferrante⁷, Siti e De Cataldo che la narrazione si sofferma su una *tranche de vie* privata senza valore metonimico rispetto alla Storia (nazionale o criminale) – ed è questo il caso de *L'amica geniale* e de *Il contagio* – né con ambizioni mitopoietiche o dal respiro epico – come, appunto, in *Gomorra* e nei romanzi a tema criminale. Quest'aspetto è centrale: gli adattamenti del romanzo di Starnone non sfruttano altre risorse se non quelle proprie del testo; la storia, infatti, non attinge altra energia se non dai meccanismi interni al racconto. Tuttavia, va fatta un'annotazione riguardo al rapporto con il genere: seppur il romanzo di Starnone non possa essere inquadrabile all'interno di una cornice paraletteraria, viene utilizzato l'impianto giallistico come sottoschema, anche se in maniera ironica. Sono due i filoni tematici che si inseguono fino alla fine: la storia dell'allontanamento familiare di Aldo e quella del misterioso furto del gatto. Quest'ultima è profondamente integrata all'impalcatura narrativa e sarà funzionale al *coup de théâtre* finale: in tal senso si può rilevare che l'espedito di genere è presente, ma più in funzione narratologica che tematica. D'altronde lo stesso sovvertimento diegetico, con la mancata coincidenza di fabula e intreccio, è tipico del giallo, che mantiene alta la curiosità del lettore attraverso la *suspense*.

5.1. Il romanzo e il teatro

Il romanzo è un'indagine amara e a momenti grottesca sul modo in cui i legami familiari diventano rovina e condanna per i protagonisti, destinando tutti a una profonda infelicità. L'idea minima della storia parte da un tema romanzesco piuttosto comune, quello di un matrimonio infelice e delle convenzioni – culturali, psicologiche – che legano i personaggi al loro destino. Non è difficile avvertire delle risonanze da altri romanzi borghesi in cui la divisione interna del protagonista genera le azioni che condurranno alla catastrofe, come – ad esempio – in *Madame Bovary*, dove la scissione della protagonista si compie tra “il senso del reale e il senso del romantico”⁸. Nel romanzo di Starnone, invece, ciò che è divisivo per Aldo – il protagonista – non è l'astrazione tra la vita sognata e quella vissuta ma la

⁷ Ferrante 2011.

⁸ Villari 2003, p. 310.

pragmatica stessa dell'istituzione matrimoniale, invecchiata rapidamente con i fermenti storico-sociali degli anni '70 ("Soprattutto era cambiato di colpo lo sfondo contro il quale recitavo la parte del marito e del padre"⁹): ritorna il vecchio conflitto tra dovere e piacere, tra famiglia e amante, che viene apparentemente ricomposto dalla scelta di Aldo di ricongiungersi ai suoi affetti, abbandonando la giovane donna con cui era andato a convivere. La narrazione inizia proprio in seguito a quest'atto di riparazione, che si rivelerà posticcio e fallimentare. A differenza di altri romanzi recenti, in cui parlare dei legami familiari – attraverso la formula che richiama il *family novel*¹⁰ – diventa il pretesto per rappresentare sulla pagina l'"allegoria della storia di una comunità, di una nazione, se non addirittura di una civiltà"¹¹, nel romanzo di Starnone il rapporto Storia-individuo sembra rovesciato: i referenti temporali e spaziali (il periodo storico, Napoli, Roma) vengono inghiottiti dal primo piano dei personaggi e saranno funzionali alla *loro* narrazione. L'individuo e tutto ciò che lo definisce – sensi di colpa, bugie, incoerenze, vigliaccherie – sono il centro narrativo, e non il pretesto per parlare di un'altra realtà. Il puntare i riflettori sull'io come "soggetto legittimo"¹² sembra avvicinare i personaggi di Starnone a quelli della letteratura modernista¹³, proprio per l'importanza dell'operazione di scavo interiore nell'economia del romanzo, nonostante la sostanziale irrecuperabilità della vita del protagonista nella sua linearità e interezza.

L'aspetto della costrittività dei legami familiari (o meglio, il lato-ombra della famiglia) diventa eloquente sin dal titolo, per il quale l'autore ha scelto "quasi una formula magica, una parola guida attorno a cui ruota tutta la storia e che dunque ritorna costantemente"¹⁴.

⁹ Starnone 2014, pp. 58-59.

¹⁰ Il riferimento va a quanto teorizzato da Polacco 2004 e alle successive riflessioni sul romanzo italiano contemporaneo di Canzaniello 2017 e Abignente 2017.

¹¹ Lapia 2020, pp. 119-139.

¹² Donnarumma 2012, p. 20.

¹³ A tal proposito è Daniela Brogi che suggerisce per il personaggio di Aldo "la suggestione di una qualche somiglianza col protagonista della *Coscienza*", ipotizzando una comparazione tra il cognome Cosini, per Zeno, e Minori, per Aldo ("Anche Aldo è un campione di minieroismo, anche lui potrebbe avere il vizio delle bugie, come del resto molti altri personaggi di Starnone"). Cfr. Brogi 2017, p. 46.

¹⁴ Starnone 2017.

Lo stratagemma fabulatorio si presta anche alla rappresentazione scenica perchè individua due dei parametri funzionali alla resa teatrale suggeriti da Ionesco: la concretizzazione di un simbolo (il legame affettivo) attraverso la valorizzazione di un oggetto preciso¹⁵ (i lacci delle scarpe). A ben vedere, infatti, un primo elemento di interesse del romanzo – nel confronto con i suoi adattamenti – è la sua quasi innata vocazione teatrale, già dall'impostazione del racconto. Questo, infatti, nel romanzo e a teatro, si sviluppa come un dramma multifocale perchè il lettore viene a conoscenza della storia dalla prospettiva interna dei diversi personaggi (o 'prospettiva multipla indiretta'¹⁶), senza l'ulteriore mediazione del narratore. Come osserva Belpoliti, l'introduzione di più punti di vista nella narrazione dell'autore non è casuale, ma testimonia "la vocazione pirandelliana di Starnone, il suo giocare col tema dell'identità", al fine di far vacillare il racconto che fa di sè il protagonista maschile, e di "destituirlo di fondamento"¹⁷. La focalizzazione variabile è quindi più di un vezzo stilistico e riflette un'idea centrale della narrativa di Starnone: l'impossibilità di pronunciarsi sulla verità attraverso l'oggettività di un unico punto di vista e la difficoltà di assegnare ai personaggi – in maniera definitiva – il ruolo di vittime e di carnefici.

In *Lacci* l'immediatezza espressiva è tradotta, già nella scrittura, dalla presa di parola diretta del personaggio, nella rinuncia quindi alla terza persona che amplificherebbe l'effetto romanzesco – quindi fittizio – del racconto. Come suggerisce Barthes, nella riflessione sulla scrittura del romanzo, l'io della prima persona è

[...] nello stesso tempo la soluzione più immediata, quando il racconto si mantiene al di qua della convenzione letteraria (l'opera di Proust, per esempio, non vuol essere altro che un'introduzione alla Letteratura), e la più elaborata, quando l'«io» si situa al di là della convenzione e tenta di distruggerla riportando il racconto alla falsa naturalezza di una confidenza¹⁸.

¹⁵ Ionesco 1965.

¹⁶ Viene qui ripresa una categoria sviluppata da Friedman 1984 riguardo al punto di vista nella narrazione.

¹⁷ Belpoliti 2019.

¹⁸ Barthes 2003, p. 27.

Un altro elemento del romanzo allusivo al teatro sono le scelte linguistiche e descrittive: ricorrono spesso infatti i riferimenti alla recitazione, alla finzione, alla messinscena; gli stessi Aldo e Wanda parlano dei loro ruoli in termini di 'recita'. Il registro lessicale sembra quindi rimandare al principio della metateatralità, come se i protagonisti si guardassero dall'esterno e fossero consapevoli dell'aspetto di messinscena delle loro vite.

Ulteriori elementi che rendono particolarmente adattabile il testo originario al teatro sono di tipo temporale, discorsivo e compositivo. Per quanto riguarda la temporalità tutta la narrazione viene riportata sull'asse del presente, nonostante la presenza di vari *flashback*: benché il tempo della storia si muova all'interno di uno spazio di trent'anni, il tempo del racconto è inchiodato al presente dei protagonisti e si svolge nell'arco di una narrazione breve, densa, contratta. La stessa storia viene raccontata da più attori/personaggi in diversi momenti; l'intensità emotiva della trascrizione teatrale è anche in correlazione con questa dimensione del presente perché, come nota Peter Brook, mentre il cinema "proietta sullo schermo immagini del passato [...] il teatro, che invece si afferma sempre nel presente, può essere più reale del normale flusso di coscienza ed è questo che a volte lo rende così inquietante"¹⁹.

In relazione all'aspetto discorsivo va sottolineato che il romanzo si svolge prevalentemente tramite le parole dei personaggi, azzerando quasi la diegesi, a favore del discorso diretto e indiretto che si presta bene alla conversione in monologo teatrale. Si prenda come esempio di trasposizione letterale del testo del romanzo l'incipit secco e diretto:

Se tu te ne sei scordato, egregio signore, te lo ricordo io: sono tua moglie. Lo so che questo una volta ti piaceva e adesso, all'improvviso, ti dà fastidio. Lo so che fai finta che non esisto e che non sono mai esistita perché non vuoi fare brutta figura con la gente molto colta che frequenti²⁰.

A teatro le parole di Wanda fanno irruzione sulla scena come un

¹⁹ Brook 1998, p. 108.

²⁰ Starnone 2014, p. 5.

flusso di rabbia e risentimento che inchiodano Aldo in un mutismo colpevole. La replica alle parole della moglie avviene in un secondo momento, nel quadro successivo: qui conosciamo il racconto dal punto di vista di Aldo, ma sempre in differita, quasi che fosse impossibile una conciliazione sulla verità dei fatti. Tutte le emozioni che agitano i protagonisti vengono espresse unicamente dalle parole – notiamo inoltre che nella rappresentazione teatrale Aldo è quasi sempre seduto, quasi a ricalcare la mancanza di energia e di volitività del personaggio – e in tal modo la regia, al pari del romanziere, applica un principio pluridiscorsivo al testo perchè ogni voce è portatrice di un conflitto. Lo scontro tra Wanda e Aldo – quindi – avviene tutto sul piano verbale, senza che si possa mai parlare di vero confronto in quanto le parole vengono incanalate in un unico blocco senza interruzione, né replica. È esemplare la resa scenica di tale condizione, introdotta già nel primo quadro (che coincide con il primo libro): il palcoscenico è diviso a metà dalla luce, lo spazio illuminato è occupato da Aldo che legge la lettera di Wanda, ma rimane in silenzio. In penombra invece il personaggio-Wanda recita il suo monologo di suppliche e recriminazioni; l'espedito illuminotecnico permette di rappresentare sulla stessa scena lo scarto temporale e i personaggi in primo e secondo piano. Lo spettacolo teatrale, nella quasi totale assenza dell'azione scenica e della messinscena sembra in parte additare al teatro di parola proposto da Pasolini, dove "l'oggetto diretto non sia la lingua, ma il significato delle parole e il senso dell'opera"²¹; ma nonostante la preminenza della parola sugli altri elementi dello spettacolo, ciò che viene rappresentato è proprio la difficoltà della parola di farsi strada nella comunicazione tra gli esseri umani. E, infatti, le voci e i punti di vista non giungono mai ad un avvicinamento reale: ne è testimonianza la convivenza dei genitori che non restituisce ai due l'empatia e l'intimità di un tempo.

Dal punto di vista della strutturazione del testo teatrale vediamo una simmetria puntuale con quello del romanzo: entrambi i testi si suddividono in tre parti, in un crescendo di *pathos*, sino allo scioglimento finale del mistero. Il romanzo si compone di tre macrosezioni, che funzionano come unità drammatiche: la prima e l'ultima più brevi, la seconda articolata a sua volta in più capitoli. È interessante no-

²¹ Pasolini 1968, p. 15.

tale che le proporzioni testuali coincidono perfettamente con quelle dello spettacolo teatrale, la cui durata totale è concentrata soprattutto nel secondo atto. In questa suddivisione, oltre alla classica tripartizione aristotelica, è possibile leggere il modello 'restaurativo' individuato da Eugène Scribe²² per cui a ciascuna delle tre parti sono affidati dei momenti drammatici precisi – articolati in inizio, sviluppo, fine. La seconda parte è anche quella più corposa, perché è il luogo di elaborazione delle tensioni e degli snodi della trama. Benché non si possa parlare di superamento delle tensioni nel terzo e ultimo atto, vi è comunque una forma di 'ricomposizione' grazie alla soluzione del mistero sui ladri. Il dramma si chiude con un finale carnevalesco, in cui le tensioni che fino a quel momento erano sempre rimaste a fior di labbra esplodono nella gestualità dissacratoria e distruttiva dei figli (i quali ritrovano, nel frattempo, l'intesa fraterna che si era corrotta nel tempo). Ma l'entusiasmo giocoso e liberatorio si trasforma in vera e propria violenza, che assume le sembianze simboliche di un duplice parricidio-matricidio, come testimoniato dalle ultime righe del romanzo che mimano l'efferatezza dell'atto omicida:

In principio ci siamo limitati a guastare l'ordine dei nostri genitori, tallonati allegramente dal gatto. Poi ci siamo fatti prendere la mano e siamo passati a sfasciare tutto. Faceva sempre più caldo, ero sudata, presto mi sono sentita stanca. Ho detto a Sandro: basta, ma lui ha continuato e sempre più accanitamente²³.

A teatro la rottura dell'ordine della casa è di particolare impatto visivo, proprio perché in contrasto con l'immobilismo precedente dell'azione, e chiaramente rappresenta una forma di vendetta liberatoria verso le vessazioni subite dai genitori nel corso degli anni. Inoltre, nel romanzo, l'epilogo finale traduce letteralmente la metafora dello 'scioglimento', con l'insistenza sull'immagine dei lacci che i figli sembrano, appunto, sciogliere tramite il racconto:

– Questa storia dei lacci ci ha coinvolti tutti. Papà è tornato per mamma, per me, per te. E noi tre abbiamo voluto che tornasse. È chiaro?

²² Dancyger, Rush 2000.

²³ Starnone 2014, p. 133.

[...]

– Gli unici lacci che per i nostri genitori hanno contato sono quelli con cui si sono torturati reciprocamente per tutta la vita²⁴.

Da un punto di vista drammaturgico l'epilogo finale rafforza l'aspetto farsesco del dramma, colorando di ridicolo le ipotesi e i dubbi che avevano prima formulato gli anziani genitori circa i ladri e il rapimento del gatto. Si assiste in questo punto a un sovvertimento di regia: se fino a quel momento le vite dei figli erano state 'dirette' dalle scelte dei genitori, dal loro ingresso in scena diventano essi stessi i burattinai e gli aguzzini dei loro genitori. Questi, infatti, agiranno come avevano previsto i figli: un esempio è il trambusto generato dalla sottolineatura, sul vocabolario di latino, della parola *labes*, che inculcherà in Wanda il sospetto che dietro al nomignolo dato da Aldo al gatto non si celi un riferimento più aggressivo, alla 'rovina' del matrimonio ("la parola *labes* era sottolineata a penna, come anche i suoi significati, uno per uno. *Caduta, frana, crollo, rovina*. Uno scherzo dei tuoi"²⁵). È interessante, inoltre, che questo espediente si riveli funzionale alla struttura del giallo: non solo il mistero, ma anche la disseminazione degli indizi e le congetture delle 'vittime' diventano parte del disegno totale della *detective story*. Tale sovvertimento finale coinvolge anche il registro drammatico, in uno slittamento dal tragico al farsesco: se per i primi due atti il punto di vista dell'osservatore (e del lettore) coincide con quello di Wanda e Aldo – soggetti della narrazione – e chi guarda empatizza con i loro tormenti, nell'ultimo atto i genitori diventano l'oggetto della narrazione dei figli – narrazione che li ridimensiona e li restituisce nel loro egoismo e meschinità, quasi deridendo la gravità dei loro personaggi. Si compie così proprio quell'abbassamento che Bachtin individua all'origine del grottesco e del comico²⁶, nel passaggio dalla serietà delle elucubrazioni e delle nevrosi di Aldo e Wanda alla materialità della distruzione del loro mondo, attraverso il corpo e i gesti.

Seppur gli adattamenti, teatrale e cinematografico, si sviluppino in assoluta fedeltà al testo letterario, è chiaro che la messinscena si

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 118-119.

²⁵ Ibid., vd. p. 104 e pp. 127-128 (corsivo nel testo).

²⁶ Bachtin 2001.

concentra sulla selezione dei ‘momenti acmeici’²⁷, tralasciando inevitabilmente altri meno funzionali all’edificio narrativo. Entrambi gli adattamenti trascurano, ad esempio, la rappresentazione del momento postumo alla riconciliazione, quello che nel romanzo viene liquidato in poche pagine e che potrebbe fungere da raccordo di passaggio con il presente: a tutti gli effetti il racconto ci viene presentato attraverso la selezione del materiale mnemonico dei personaggi, e la vistosa ellissi temporale ha un maggior impatto sullo schermo e sulla scena ponendoci dinanzi ai protagonisti ormai invecchiati.

5.2. Dal teatro al cinema

Nell’adattamento filmico, la diegesi minima nel romanzo e nel teatro viene recuperata attraverso lo spazio drammatico che viene dato ai *flashback* (resi, nel testo originale e a teatro, solo a parole): le sequenze si soffermano sull’infanzia dei figli, sul ‘suicidio’ di Wanda, sul rapporto di Aldo con Lidia. Ma ciò che si distacca con maggior evidenza nel film di Luchetti rispetto all’adattamento teatrale è la rappresentazione del contesto napoletano, che pur se sullo sfondo “resiste [come] qualcosa di carnale, di violento; qualcosa che comunque arriva nella storia”²⁸. Il film, inoltre, indebolisce il dispositivo della multifocalità che permette alla storia di essere vista con gli occhi di più personaggi – e che, forse, è anche l’invenzione più originale dal punto di vista narrativo. Proprio per tale motivo l’adattamento cinematografico è maggiormente focalizzato sul racconto dei genitori e, in particolare, sul primo piano di Aldo; le stesse caratterizzazioni dei personaggi assumeranno un tono più grave, più drammatico – senza l’ammortizzazione di quegli elementi farseschi che, a teatro, abbiamo visto intrecciarsi con il registro serio dei protagonisti – eccezion fatta per il finale.

Il film può concedersi qualche libertà maggiore dal punto di vista dell’intreccio, giocando con l’ordine temporale degli eventi rappresentati, ma l’impalcatura tematica e morale del romanzo resta sostanzialmente intatta. Inoltre, il film di Luchetti conserva la centralità metaforica dei lacci: la sequenza iniziale, infatti, si apre proprio con una

²⁷ Gasparro 2005.

²⁸ Tammaro 2020.

scena corale, di festa, sul primo piano delle scarpe. Almeno due elementi sono rilevanti: il primo è la presenza di scene d'insieme, totalmente assenti nello spettacolo teatrale; il secondo è l'introduzione del motivo carnevalesco d'apertura che crea una continuità tra l'inizio e la fine del racconto. Inoltre, va osservato il modo in cui viene realizzato il grande tema che fa da controcanto in tutta la narrazione del romanzo, ossia il rapporto tra realtà e finzione, tra verità dell'io e rappresentazione del sé: nel film questa funzione viene affidata principalmente alla voce radiofonica di Aldo che racconta e commenta i romanzi. Tale motivo deriva dall'amplificazione di un dettaglio presente nel romanzo, che nel film viene utilizzato a più livelli: la voce di Aldo è sia il suo sostituto simbolico e immateriale – Aldo è un intellettuale e allo stesso tempo un personaggio di carta, romanzesco, che possiamo conoscere solo attraverso le parole – sia è assimilabile al narratore che tira le fila della storia e commenta il senso di quanto sta accadendo. Un esempio del primo caso è nella scena del tentato suicidio di Wanda, in cui la donna fa precedere la propria caduta dal lancio della radio che stava trasmettendo il programma di Aldo – quasi a trascinare con sé il marito nella sua sventura. È interessante questa scelta perché entrambi i gesti – l'omicidio e il suicidio – sono veri nella sostanza anche se non sono veri nella realtà empirica²⁹. Nel secondo caso, invece, vediamo Aldo parlare del tradimento come possibilità di fare una scelta che porta nel cuore del reale, assumendosi le proprie responsabilità: così facendo sembra riassumere contemporaneamente il senso della storia di cui è protagonista e indicare la strada da seguire al suo sé fittizio.

Sia dal confronto dell'opera di Starnone con altri testi letterari entrati nel circuito transmediale, sia dall'analisi interna dell'adattamento di *Lacci* per le scene teatrali e cinematografiche è possibile cogliere che una peculiarità propria del romanzo – e della narrativa di Starnone – è la scarsa sfruttabilità della materia narrativa per produzioni di largo consumo. Se da una parte i temi trattati sono di facile riconoscibilità e riproducibilità – l'ambientazione borghese, i tradimenti, il contesto geografico e sociale – dall'altra l'insistenza sul dialogo interiore, con tutte le sue idiosincrasie e mezze verità, sposta il

²⁹ Wanda, infatti, dirà: "Mi sono ammazzata, lo so che dovrei dire 'ho tentato di ammazzarmi', ma io nella sostanza sono morta" (Starnone 2014, p. 14).

racconto su un piano più mentale e astratto che si combina poco con la resa cinetica in *media* dal regime prevalentemente visivo. Proprio per i motivi sopra indicati *Lacci* – seppur comporrebbe una triade ideale con *Scherzetto* e *Confidenza*³⁰ – non si presta alla traduzione in una narrazione seriale e sulla lunga durata: la scelta dell'autore di rappresentare la frammentazione e l'irrisolto sul primo piano dei personaggi, a scapito del macro-quadro d'insieme, disattiva le potenzialità narrative di tipo epico e mitopoietico. Detto altrimenti, la scelta dell'autore sembra volta più a dare spazio a ciò che resiste alla rappresentazione, a favore di una letteratura che si concentra sulla singolarità dell'atto creativo, slegato dalle richieste dell'industria culturale e cinematografica.

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6. Adaptation as a Transmedia Serial Process: Transmedia Storytelling, Superhero Universes and the Cultural Logic of Popular Seriality

Federico Pagello

During the last fifteen years or so, the theme of transmediality has somehow obscured academic discussions about adaptation, especially in the fields of film, media and cultural studies, where Henry Jenkins' concept of transmedia storytelling has had a huge impact. However, abandoning the widespread enthusiasm provoked by the publication of *Convergence Culture* in 2006¹ – a sometimes acritical excitement, often based on an exaggeration of the novelty of the phenomena labelled there as 'transmedia storytelling' – it is now easier to explore the reasons for its influence, distinguishing what is still useful from what can be historicized. What theoretical and ideological background led scholars to embrace the notion of transmedia storytelling, instead of (further) developing that of adaptation? What aspects of the migration of texts, characters, and stories from one medium to another are really better understood through this specific idea?

As Marie-Laure Ryan has argued², it is possible to think that the expression transmedia storytelling quickly became a 'buzzword' mostly because of its ability to be used by professionals of the creative industries to market their products as more innovative, interactive, and so on. Crucially, many (particularly, young) scholars passionately welcomed Jenkins' praise for a variety of narratives, objects, and fan practices that had always been excluded from academic debates and could now be regarded not only as legitimate objects of study but even as tools for political activism. With a bit of hindsight –

¹ Jenkins 2006.

² Ryan 2015.

thinking of the cultural and (geo)political climate in which we have been living at least since the 2008 economic crisis – it is possible to acknowledge that there might have been an overestimation of the progressive rhetoric linked to transmedia storytelling; and yet, the attention to industry and fandom is what can also help us better appreciate the usefulness of the concept as well as its partial eclipsing the topic of adaptation, at least in the fields of film, media and cultural studies. Behind marketing strategies and ideological beliefs, we can identify the crucial role of one of the principles that regulate popular culture as a whole: the practice of seriality. This key aspect of modern culture, which has major technological, economic, cultural and political implications, has been crucial since the emergence of cultural industries in the course of the 19th century, but it only became a legitimate object of study in the last few decades, particularly since the mid-2000s, as a result of the academic legitimization of TV series³: not coincidentally, at the very same time when Jenkins' started publishing his most influential work.

In this essay, I will therefore examine how the concept transmedia storytelling can be related, implicitly and explicitly, to the issue of seriality. Addressing some of Jenkins' texts, I will first discuss how this relationship is a key reason why scholars working on transmedia storytelling shifted the attention from textual analysis – which has been at the core of studies on adaptation for a long time – to the study of production, distribution, and reception strategies – which, conversely, is an essential aspect of any research on popular serial narratives. I will then highlight how both Jenkins' supporters and critics have critically re-examined the idea of transmedia storytelling, supporting the adoption of narratological and historical perspectives showing both the key role of seriality and the continuity with older processes of adaptation. Finally, I will argue that even a quick look at the history of film and TV adaptations of superhero comics proves how the notion is better utilized to examine popular narratives from this particular angle, helping understand what happens when adaptation becomes a coordinated transmedia serial process.

³ See Levine, Newman 2012.

6.1. Transmedia Storytelling, Adaptation and Seriality According to Jenkins

Rereading Henry Jenkins' writings on transmedia storytelling, it is interesting to highlight two, apparently unrelated, themes. On the one hand, the idea of transmedia storytelling has been constantly distinguished from that of adaptation. On the other hand, seriality has been more and more openly identified as one of the key features of transmedia storytelling (even though Jenkins has always been eager to specify why seriality's basic economic logic cannot fully explain its social and cultural value). Together, the insistence on these two themes seem to single out one key objective: to shift the attention from the analysis of individual texts and medium-specific issues that had always been the focus of studies on adaptations to the examination of production, distribution, and reception practices of popular serial narratives⁴.

In fact, the opposition of transmedia storytelling and adaptation plays a central role in Jenkins' early writing on the topic⁵. In the short article that inaugurated his research on the topic, *Transmedia Storytelling: Moving Characters from Books to Films to Video Games Can Make Them Stronger and More Compelling* (2003)⁶, as well as in *Convergence Culture* just a few years later, Jenkins posited in very clear terms how transmedia storytelling should go *beyond* the idea of adaptation:

We need a new model for co-creation-rather than adaptation-of content that crosses media. [...] The current licensing system typically generates works that are redundant (allowing no new character background or plot development), watered down (asking the new media to slavishly duplicate experiences better achieved through the old), or riddled with sloppy contradictions (failing to respect the core con-

⁴ As is well known, in the very same year when Henry Jenkins published *Convergence Culture*, Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) offered a new framework to look at adaptations that aimed from a perspective able to go beyond textual analysis: it is precisely for this reason that I believe that the (implicit and explicit) focus on seriality is what most distinguished the idea of transmedia storytelling from that and made it so influential among scholars in film, media and cultural studies.

⁵ Dena 2018.

⁶ Jenkins 2003.

sistency audiences expect within a franchise). These failures account for why sequels and franchises have a bad reputation. Nobody wants to consume a steady diet of second-rate novelizations⁷!

Adaptation is seen here as a simple repetition of something already existing in another media, and on many other occasions Jenkins will repeatedly talk about adaptations in terms of ‘redundancy’. Both creatives and viewers – the point of view of fans is strong in these texts as everywhere else in Jenkins’s work – can benefit from the adoption for another approach: instead of just *translating* into a different medium the same characters and stories, transmedia storytelling promises to give shape to *new* material and ideas, that is, to a creative development of what had already been made⁸.

This perspective is linked to the deepest motive of Jenkins’ writing, which never intends to offer purely academic analysis but is envisioned as a performative act: the concept of transmedia storytelling was just one of a series of interventions directly supporting the creative agency of the producers and the audiences. While this is also why it is possible to criticize Jenkins’ approach to participatory culture as highly ideological⁹, it must be acknowledged that the theoretical affirmation of the intrinsic democratic value of popular media and the practical promotion of their use by individuals and organizations have always been its declared goals, as in the final line of *Convergence Culture*:

Popular culture allows us to entertain alternative framings in part because the stakes are lower, because our viewing commitments don’t carry the same weight as our choices at the ballot box. Our willingness to step outside ideological enclaves may be greatest when we are talking about what kind of person Harry Potter is going to grow up to be or what kind of world will emerge as the machines and humans learn to work together in *The Matrix* (1999). That is, we may be able to talk across our differences if we find commonalities through our fantasies. This is in the end another reason why popular culture matters

⁷ Jenkins 2003.

⁸ See Jenkins 2003, and Jenkins 2006, p. 96.

⁹ Fuchs 2013, pp. 60-66.

politically—because it doesn't seem to be about politics at all¹⁰.

As anticipated, this approach also explains why transmedia storytelling is strictly linked to the process of serialization. The focus on the creative practices of producers and consumers encouraged scholars to examine how the experience of producing and consuming transmedia contents is shaped by seriality's specific temporality, which is defined by its impact on the everyday life of individuals and communities over extended periods of time. It is therefore not surprising that the more Jenkins clarified what transmedia storytelling actually is and how it develops in the years following his first writings about this phenomenon, the more he highlighted the role of seriality, which had not been really thematized in his earlier discussion of transmedia storytelling and actually seemed to be consciously underplayed in *Convergence Culture*. In a well-known 2009 post published devoted to the seven principles of transmedia storytelling, on the contrary, he stated very clearly:

We can think of transmedia storytelling then as a hyperbolic version of the serial [...]. [T]here is a great deal we can learn by studying classic serial forms of fiction, such as the serial publication of novels or the unfolding of chapters in movie serials or even in comic book series.

Early writing on transmedia (mine included) may have made too much of the nonlinear nature of the transmedia entertainment experience, suggesting that the parts could be consumed within any order. Increasingly, we are seeing companies deploy very different content and strategies in the build up to the launch of the 'mother ship' of the franchise than while the series is on the air or after the main text has completed its cycle¹¹.

This excerpt already responds to some criticism that scholars had made to the initial definitions of transmedia storytelling as something entirely new and unrelated to previous practices of (serial) adaptations: as we will see in this next section, a study of the history of seri-

¹⁰ Jenkins 2006, pp. 238-239.

¹¹ Jenkins 2009.

ality leads to recognize the interest of looking at transmedia storytelling from the perspective of its inter- and transtextuality, as well as the necessity to acknowledge how cross- and even fully trans-media narratives have existed for a long time as a result of practices of serialisation across media.

It is interesting, therefore, that in a more recent text Jenkins himself has indeed reworked his previous argument, stating that adaptation and seriality could be considered in relation to a larger set of intermedial practices, which would connect it more strictly to transmedia storytelling:

Inspired by what Jacques Derrida has called the ‘archontic principle’, Abigail Derecho suggests the term ‘archontic literature’ to describe a range of textual practices – from fan fiction to literary texts such as *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *The Wind Done Gone*, or *Ahab’s Wife* – which self-consciously build upon but also re-center existing texts. For Derecho, as for Derrida, this ‘archontic principle’ is the “drive within an archive that seeks to always produce more archive, to enlarge itself”¹². We can see both adaptation and extension as different forms of the archontic principle at work whereby beloved stories resurface and recirculate, sometimes because they are being retold and sometimes because they are being extended in new directions. Such a framing suggests that those of us who study transmedia (and fan fiction) and those who study adaptation are asking a related set of questions¹³.

This shows how, in the span of fifteen years, the concept of transmedia storytelling has been explicitly reconsidered, nuancing its opposition to the idea of adaptation (“a range of textual practices [...] which [...] build upon but also re-center existing texts”), and recognizing how seriality (“extension”) is a fundamental aspect that helps define the basic logic of transmedia narratives.

¹² Derecho 2006, p. 64.

¹³ Jenkins 2017.

6.2. Seriality and Transmediality: Storyworlds, Trasfictionality and Transmedia Archaeology

In the course of the last decade, both supporters and critics of the idea of transmedia storytelling have questioned its theoretical foundation, historical background and ideological motives. Going beyond – or looking through – the rhetoric about participatory culture, scholars have thus engaged with the actual texts in which ‘transmedia stories’ will eventually exist, and with the strategies that have made them possible in the past and the present. To better understand what transmedia storytelling has to do with seriality and adaptation, it is therefore useful go back to the basic question: what does transmedia storytelling really do? What does it make?

According to Jenkins, transmedia storytelling is “the art of world-building”¹⁴. On the one hand, this definition can help us further understand why scholars initially insisted that the ‘spreading’ of the same narrative universe across different media differed from the adaptation of a specific text in another medium, and why the creation of such ‘storyworlds’ can be seen as much more complex than the simple process of cutting a single story into multiple episodes¹⁵. On the other hand, however, the notions of world-building and storyworlds could be seen as the cause for both the superimposition and the distinction between these phenomena, that is, as an analytical perspective precisely aims to distinguish different aspects of the same process of transmedia serial adaptation. A recent essay by Matthew Freeman has recently made this ambiguity clearly manifest:

It is important to nuance the complexity of how seriality underpins cases of transmedia storytelling. Ben Singer defines seriality as that which “extends the experience of the single [...] text by division, with the selling of the media product in chapters”¹⁶. But in some sense, Jenkins’ definition of transmedia storytelling is in direct opposition to seriality: “Each [textual] entry needs to be self-contained so that you

¹⁴ Jenkins 2006, p. 166.

¹⁵ See Jenkins et al. 2013.

¹⁶ Singer 1990, p. 90.

do not need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa"¹⁷. Rather than operating as a process of selling serialised chapters, then, and as I have previously argued elsewhere, "transmedia storytelling is perhaps better theorised as either a strategic or an emergent/contingent form of expansive intertextuality – using things like characters and their components to link stories together"¹⁸.

Contrary to what Freeman is suggesting, in my view his own words seem to demonstrate how the distinction between transmedia storytelling and seriality here is not based on an objective evaluation of what they really *make* (i.e. they create narrative series/serials), but it serves once more the strategic goal of shifting the emphasis from the traditional and commercial aspect of serialisation (seriality is seen here as the uncreative process of cutting a single work into smaller parts, a very reductive view of the phenomenon) to the supposedly innovative and creative aspect of transmediality. And yet, by pointing out that we are dealing with 'expansive intertextuality', Freeman seems to confirm that his approach to transmedia storytelling is actually very close to that of seriality – conceived in a different, broader way – as they both can be seen as the creation of a variety of narrative, diegetic and stylistic links among different texts.

From her own perspective, this is what Marie-Laure Ryan has argued, polemically engaging with Jenkins' writing. A harsh critic of the (ab)use concept of transmedia storytelling in the industry and especially in academia, Ryan has repeatedly argued that behind the 'hype' there was little substance, particularly since narratology had already addressed the same issues from a more solid theoretical background¹⁹. While not abandoning all of her criticism, in a more recent contribution Ryan has proposed a framework that helps clarify the different aspects of the phenomena under scrutiny as it identifies four main discourses about transmedia narratives, each originating from a different field of research or practice: the discourse of media theory, the discourse of the industry, the discourse of the fans, and

¹⁷ Jenkins 2006, p. 98.

¹⁸ Freeman 2018, p. 3. The last sentence is quoted from Freeman 2016, pp. 25-26.

¹⁹ See Ryan 2013 and Ryan, Thon 2014.

the discourse of narratology²⁰. While the first three were promoted by subjects involved in the production and reception of transmedia narratives and (therefore?) seem to over-emphasise the novelty of these phenomena, for Ryan the narratological discourse is best suited to examine these phenomena because of its more detached, scholarly perspective, allowing to identify the continuity between transmedia storytelling and previous forms of serialization. Ryan argues that how her own work on storyworlds²¹ as well as Richard Saint-Gelais' theory of transfictionality²² can provide better tools to analyse how transmedia narrative products work, and how they simply developed the underlying cultural logic that have shaped (serial) narrative texts for a long time. Crucially, I regard here transfictionality as a different label to approach the same phenomena usually discussed by media scholars in terms of seriality, offering the opportunity to study on a more abstract level processes such repetition, multiplication, differentiation, expansion, and continuation that are all different aspects of narrative serialisation.

In this sense, it is also important to notice that Ryan's narratological model distinguishes four different 'components' in transmedia storytelling:

- (1) a transfictional component that describes how stories belonging to the same storyworld are linked; this component will assess the consistency of the storyworlds;
- (2) an adaptive component that studies how narrative content travels across media [...];
- (3) a mythical component that studies what makes stories and storyworlds into cult narratives, since popular success is the prerequisite to the development of transmedia franchises [...];
- (4) an audience-behavior component, devoted to what people actually do with cult narratives in general and with today's transmedia systems in particular.²³

²⁰ Ryan 2020.

²¹ Ryan, Thon 2014.

²² Saint-Gelais 2011.

²³ Ryan 2016, p. 8.

This framework seems perfectly suited to stress how transmedia storytelling is (1) a process of serialisation that, necessarily, includes (2) the adaptation of narrative content from one medium to another and that, in case of success (3 and 4), is able to elicit the kind of reaction and creativity that scholars such as Jenkins were keen to celebrate. In recent years, other scholars have indeed taken up the Ryan's and similar approaches to storyworld and trasfictionality to explicitly discuss transmedia storytelling as a form of seriality, offering convincing in-depth analysis of the narrative structure of TV series, superhero films and videogames²⁴.

Equally important is the development of the field of transmedia archaeology²⁵, which has been busy *Historicizing Transmedia storytelling*, to cite the title of the influential book by Matthew Freeman (2016).²⁶ Also, in this case scholars have looked at the history of popular culture, retracing – even if in a simpler form – the same serial logic of contemporary transmedia storytelling in older examples of popular narratives:

Following Bertetti, who defines a transmedia character as “a fictional hero whose adventures are told across different media platforms, each one giving more details on the life of that character”²⁷, if contemporary transmedia storytelling is “the art of world-building”²⁸, then older forms of transmedia franchises can be based on a more simple logic centered on character sharing. Jason Scott (2009) introduces a similar notion of character-oriented franchising after tracing the origins of transmedia productions back to the age of silent cinema, where he discovered economic and promotional strategies common to contemporary media franchises²⁹.

In the next section I will build on this perspective by looking at the most telling illustration of the (dis)continuity between the past

²⁴ See Thon 2018; Pearson 2018; Jaagola 2019; Brinker 2021.

²⁵ See Bertetti et al. 2014; Bertetti 2018.

²⁶ Freeman 2016.

²⁷ Bertetti et al. 2014, p. 3344.

²⁸ Jenkins 2006, p. 166.

²⁹ Bertetti 2018, p. 266.

and the present of popular narrative: the history of the superhero genre.

6.3. Superhero (Multi-)Universes: from Serial Adaptations to Transmedia Storyworlds

In the last twenty years, the superhero genre has become a central, if not the hegemonic form of contemporary transmedia popular culture; to anyone familiar with the genre, however, this is not that surprising, as both the process of adaptation and the logic of serialisation have shaped its development since its inception.

First, superhero comics are the heir of 19th-century and early 20th-century popular serial narratives: 1930s characters such as Superman and Batman were nothing but an updated version of the heroes of the *feuilletons*, dime novels, pulp magazines and serial films of the previous decades. The genre is thus based on a network of intermedial references and the practise of serialisation, making its migration into other media a natural consequence of its enormous success in the field of comics. Secondly, the centrality of characters is a distinctive feature of superhero fiction. While other genres are defined by a specific set of themes, narrative structures or stylistic traits, superhero narratives revolve around their protagonists' identity, appearance, powers, spectacular exploits, and relationships: this makes it the perfect subject for developing entire storyworlds around a constellation of transfictional figures easily transferred into other media. Thirdly, not only has the genre given shape to persistent storyworlds but it championed the exploration of multiple, parallel narrative realities. Since the early 1960s, superhero comic book series took advantage of the potential to offer a variety of competing versions of the same characters, gradually building the so-called 'multiverse', a label used to describe the co-existence of different fictional worlds in which variants of the same characters live. This original narrative device was nothing but the result of the intense process of serialisation of the genre during the previous decades, which had led to a continuous re-creation of the original characters: instead of replacing the old versions with new ones, however, writers at DC and Marvel realized they could turn the proliferation of incoherent representations into one of the most surprising (and reflexive) commercial strategies in

the history of popular culture. It is because of the combination of all these features the superhero genre fully achieved the ultimate goal of any serial narrative: the creation of a trans-generational community of readers and viewer, which has spread across the world for more than 80 years.

That superhero narratives can tell us something about seriality as a whole is not a recent idea. In the first academic study of the genre, Umberto Eco analysed the late 1950s Superman comics arguing that the fundamental premise of this kind of serial narratives was that the main character(s) could not age, change or die, so that they could serve as the matrix for a potentially endless series of narratives³⁰. As a result, the accumulation of stories could never produce any actual temporal progression: each episode told a single narrative that appeared to be contained in what Eco defines as “a sort of oneiric climate”³¹, because whatever happened in each story was deprived of any lasting effect on the stability on the overall storyworld of the series. While this perfectly describes the structure of many classical series (from 1950s comics books to traditional sitcoms and cop shows in television), the later development of superhero ‘multiverses’ proved how the fundamental mechanisms of the genre’s seriality did not lie in a particular narrative structure, but rather in its underlying logic: the potential to endlessly multiply the narratives in any direction, including any possible contradictions while maintaining at the same time a sense of identity.

In particular, the adoption of the multiverse further reinforces what for Eco was the effect of the particular seriality of Superman comics: the creation of a virtually endless set of variations of the same characters and stories, which can explicitly contradict themselves and turn such inconsistencies into spectacular narratives, thus exploiting the logic of seriality to its very end. As Frank Kelleter clarified:

While it is true that Superman does not age as a character [...] Superman nevertheless does develop: as a figure of seriality. This is to say that we can trace countless transmutations of the character without ever being able to decide which one is definitive – a narrative of its

³⁰ Eco 1964.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

own, evolving at a higher level of pop-cultural self-observation. Hence, after a while, the sprawling versions can also include an aged, and even a dying, Superman. But these continuations, dependent as there are from secondary observations, will always be marked as variations, that is, as temporary and revocable innovations within a storyworld that progresses more in the sense than it spreads than it unfolds³².

To understand how Kelleter's conceptualisation of seriality helps better understand the cultural logic of transmedia storytelling, it is also useful to notice his use of Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities'. In particular, Kelleter argues that the participation of members to an imagined community is not grounded in the construction of any specific worldview, that is, in the building of a consensus over any specific content³³. In fact, the essentially mediated nature of such communities – which for Anderson are inherently connected to the emergence of modern media – allow their members to experience a feeling of belonging to the same shared social space without requiring full identification with its hegemonic values, but simply recognizing it as the reality in which they can act. For Kelleter, serial narratives are also able to reach a large audience precisely because they can include all sorts of contradictory (grand) narratives, starting from critical and even conspiratorial views of the very media system that generates them.

Looking at audiovisual expansions of superhero narratives offers the most obvious and yet always instructive opportunity to apply this theory to contemporary transmedia narratives and to identify the specificity of transmedia storytelling in relation to seriality and adaptation. Superhero comics were immediately turned into cinematic products: soon after the explosion of the genre in the comics field after Superman's first appearance in 1938, the 12-episode serial film *Adventures of Captain Marvel* (dir. William Witney, John English, 1941) was only the first of a number of low-budget, serial adaptations that were produced between the early Forties and the mid-Fifties, when superheroes became a staple of TV shows, primarily aimed at chil-

³² Kelleter 2017, p. 22.

³³ Kelleter 2017, pp. 26-29.

dren. Later, Hollywood cinema started to invest in large-scale productions with films such as Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978), Richard Lester's *Superman II* (1980) and *III* (1983), Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992), Bryan Singer's *X-Men* (2000), Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* (2002), Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), promoting the genre from cheap serials to blockbusters with some auteurish appeal. Throughout the Twentieth century, therefore, superhero serial narratives were a significant phenomenon of American comics, film, and television.

However, between the contemporary approach to transmedia storytelling and these previous forms of transmedia adaptation there are also a few crucial differences. For a long time, the film and TV versions of superhero narratives were not presented or perceived as part of the same narrative universes, but rather as different *interpretations* of the same characters and stories. If the TV series and cartoons were instrumental to build up the fandom community and bring new readers to their comic versions, they were not considered by producers or the audiences as part of the 'canonical' universe of the superhero comics. This was evident with the release of the first, big-budget cinematic adaptations, as the names of Donner, Lester, Burton, Singer, Raimi, and Nolan aimed to emphasize the specific cinematographic and authorial approach to the comic book material. For both creative and marketing reasons, these films explicitly invited viewers to see them qua adaptations, that is, unique *cinematic* interpretations of the original comics.

The situation changed with the establishment of the so-called Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), which since 2008 has given shape to almost 40 interrelated films and TV series, with 12 other films and 14 shows currently under production. Each individual text is presented and perceived as part of the same storyworld. It doesn't matter how confusing or contradictory the result might appear to some viewers: its producers think about each product not as *distinct* re-interpretations but another expression of a single, multi-faceted (trans)fictional world, to be accepted by the audience as part of a more or less coherent whole. It is no coincidence but the result of the (somehow surprising) success of this strategy that ten years into this process of accumulation the concept of the 'multiverse' had to be introduced also in the MCU. Recent films such as *Spider-Man: Into the*

Spider-Verse (dir. Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey, Rodney Rothman, 2018), *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (dir. Jon Watts, 2021), *Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness* (dir. Sam Raimi, 2022), and TV series such as *Loki* (Disney+, 2021) and *What if* (Disney+, 2021) bring to the big and the small screen the very theme of the competing versions of the same characters. In this sense, the participation of three different actors who played the role of Spider-Man in the last twenty years in *Spider-Man: No Way Home* is not only an all-time novelty in the history of popular cinema but to one of the most explicit metalinguistic moves in a Hollywood film.

At this point, and as a way to conclude, it is interesting to stress how the Marvel Cinematic Universe is paradoxically named after one of the oldest mass media. The label might even appear as a misnomer: the MCU is a fully transmedia phenomenon that comprises a movie saga, 'traditional' TV series, Netflix and Disney+ shows, and endless digital and physical extensions (including good old comic books). In fact, it is really remarkable that cinema played such a crucial role in Marvel's strategy in the course of the last 15 years, exactly at the same time when movies and movie-going have lost so much ground in relation to other media and other forms of popular culture. And yet, it is precisely for this reason that I believe the MCU can help us emphasize a significant aspect of transmedia storytelling and its relation to the logic of seriality as described above by Eco and Kelleter.

The possibility to create transmedia worlds lay in the ability to mobilize the potential of a medium that exercises a resistance toward the temporal as well as spatial fragmentation of contemporary audiences, which is brought about by digital media as well as transmedia storytelling, by using serialisation within the same medium as a vehicle to produce a stronger narrative coherence. From this perspective, Kelleter's specific adoption of the concept of imagined community aptly describes the logic of transmedia storytelling as serial process: the dispersed and contradictory fictional universes created by serial narratives can actually work only if it is anchored to a shared cultural space (not a single ideological discourse), which in the case of the MCU was secured by the centrality of the old-fashioned practice of going to the movies. The creation of events such as the release of a new film and the consequent gathering of millions of viewers in the

theatres supply the shared space and time that are necessary to provide a sense of identity to the variety of parallel, competing, and contradictory narratives that constitute the Marvel multiverse. The example of the MCU thus reveals how the ability of transmedia storytelling to create a large audience is based on a double process: on the one hand, the endless proliferation of transfictional characters and narratives that do not require any radical closure and complete coherence; on the other hand, the employment of narrative and engagement strategies to secure an identity for these storyworlds, materialised through series of texts and events that support the self-recognition of the community of readers/viewers.

While Marvel/Disney established the most complex, long-form transmedia narratives in Hollywood history, it could do so only by building on the heritage of 80 years of serial narratives in the superhero genre, as well as the apparently outdated, 20th-century habit of movie going. If transmedia storytelling can be thus seen as something partially new, first of all in its scope, its success also relies on the traditional practice of adapting well-established serial narratives in another media, starting from good old cinema.

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7. “Tearing Up the Pages of the Book”. The Transmedia Adaptation of Else Lasker-Schüler’s *Tino’s Nights in Baghdad* According to ConiglioViola: an Example of Augmented Literature

Mirko Lino

7.1. Oscillations: Trans-Mediality and Adaptation

In transmedia studies, the question of adaptation finds a fluctuating¹ epistemological location: on one hand, it defines an initial orientation towards analysis of potential combinations between a story and its narrative developments; on the other, it risks lapsing into insufficiency of theorisation, lacking focus on the formal fabric and media entanglements of a transmedia experience. In framing the general lines of the relationship between adaptation and trans-mediality in the industry of contemporary culture, Paolo Bertetti positions the two terms at theoretical extremes, emphasising how the distance between the two processes is not absolute, but rather measurable by degrees. In fact, in analysing the transpositions from the novel to the cinema and serialization, as carried out by major media franchises such as *Harry Potter* and *Games of Thrones*, the scholar recognises both the permanence of traditional ‘adaptive practices’ and the vectors of ‘narrative trans-mediatization’, fixing the two terms in a relationship of “graduated opposition”².

The concurrence of both processes allows for a reconsideration of

¹ For a critical overview of the expulsion/inclusion of adaptation within the theoretical debate on transmediality I refer to Dena 2018, pp. 195-206. The scholar, in fact, acknowledges the hermeneutical utility of the exclusion of adaptation in order to understand, in the first instance, the conceptual core underpinning the notion of transmediality; at the same time, however, she sees in the programmatic exclusion of adaptation the dangers of an extreme conceptual reduction of transmedia processes.

² Bertetti 2021, p. 25.

the epistemology of certain criteria traditionally central to the study of adaptations, such as the notion of the 'original text' and the 'principle of fidelity', leading to the deconstruction of the idea of a superiority of the original and the implicit hierarchy between media³. In line with the poststructuralist shift towards framing adaptation processes from an intertextual and intermedial perspective⁴, William Proctor emphasised the inherent arbitrariness of these two historically established notions. Considering the transmedia articulations of *The Walking Dead* (an adaptation of a comic novel for television serialisation), from which numerous narrative expansions have been developed (mainly spin-offs), along with various interactive extensions (360° videos, Augmented Reality installations, interactive maps, video games, etc.)⁵, the scholar has shown how the comic book text can itself be considered the result of adaptation processes from a dense intertextual matrix in which the main themes and motifs of the zombie apocalypse are embedded; furthermore, the axiom of the faithfulness of the derived text (traditionally perceived as an indicator for the success of an adaptation) loses its meaning in the face of the discretionary taste of individual fans: some prefer the comic novel, others the television series⁶.

By delimiting the centrality of the original text and the faithfulness of the derived one, it becomes possible, as Carlos Scolari⁷ suggests, to broaden the conceptual boundaries between adaptation and transmedia narratives to the point of blurring their basic differences⁸. For Scolari, in fact, adaptation becomes a transmedia mechanism,

³ This latter aspect has found an important boost from methodology traceable to the new film history, aimed at radically problematising the linear relationships, as well as hierarchies, between media (Uricchio 2003; Elsaesser 2004 and 2016; Parikka 2012). It is an approach that lends itself well to framing the relationships between media and their textual specificities within the theory of re-mediation (Bolter, Grusin, 1999) and media convergence (Thornburn, Jenkins 2003; Jenkins 2006).

⁴ See especially Hutcheon 2013.

⁵ For a formal analysis of the adaptation between comics and TV series of *The Walking Dead*, see Hassler-Forest 2014 and Tirino 2015. For an extended analysis of the construction of the transmedia storyworld, see Freeman 2019 and Lino 2020b.

⁶ Proctor 2014, pp. 13-14.

⁷ See Scolari 2013.

⁸ Bertetti 2021, p. 25 shows a certain diffidence towards the fluidisation of differences argued by Scolari, as it would compromise the understanding of the structural distinctions between the two concepts.

since it already contains its main processes; the transition from one medium to another offers a further opening to the narrative content, produces new media texts, and includes variations that enrich the narrative. Undoubtedly, further insights and issues for the analysis of the relationships between adaptation and trans-mediality arise within the digital processes of remediation (the representation of one medium within another)⁹, of media convergence (the interplay between old and new media)¹⁰, of transmedia attractions (the immersive mechanisms, such as theme parks, installations and other artefacts)¹¹ and of transmedia experiences (the immersive configuration between user, narrative world and platform)¹². Thus, these concepts pose the epistemological question of adaptation in relation to the intrinsic specificities of digital media, including the notions of interactivity, performativity, and the centrality of paratextual constructs¹³; in recent years these have become privileged subjects in the study of the forms and reception of transmedia products and expanded narratives in general.

Whilst entertainment content tends to be arranged along complex and layered narrative threads (thanks to spin-offs) and expanded in time (prequels and sequels)¹⁴, parallel to this 'narrative continuum', a system of 'interactive attractions' is developed, with which to engage the emotional sphere of the user, leading him or her to handle media experiences that lie between the virtual, materiality and physical spaces¹⁵. This challenge drives the analysis "beyond adaptation"¹⁶, broadening perspectives in order to include the different aspects of the transmedia scenario of symbolic production and contemporary media experiences.

The following analysis will therefore try to move along the lines of media experiences, narrative organisation, and attractive perfor-

⁹ Bolter, Grusin 1999.

¹⁰ Thornburn, Jenkins 2003; Jenkins 2006.

¹¹ Freeman 2018.

¹² Tosca, Klastrup 2018.

¹³ Gray 2010.

¹⁴ See Meneghelli 2018.

¹⁵ Lino 2020a.

¹⁶ Fusillo et al. 2020.

mance, considering the case of the adaptation of the novel *Tino's Nights in Baghdad* (*Die Nächte der Tino von Bagdad*, 1907) by Else Lasker-Schüler, in the hands of the video-artist duo ConiglioViola (Brice Coniglio and Andrea Raviola) in 2016. An attempt will be made to contextualize the video-artists' work as an experience of *augmented literature*, organised around Augmented Reality technology for the visual translation of the original text into moving images, and *locative media* for a narrative texture strongly focused on the spatial dimension¹⁷. The range of practices and techniques in this particular adaptation transforms ConiglioViola's artistic operation into a complex media object, the analysis of which cannot be exhausted by focusing solely on the transition from one medium to another, but actually needs us to consider the convergence between narrative techniques and media experiences, between the transience of experience and its preservation.

7.2. Augmented Literature: Spaces, Animation and Recombination/Recombin-Action

In the collection of brief, fragmentary prose mixed up with poetry that make up *Tino's Nights in Baghdad*, one can grasp certain aspects of the general climate of literary experimentation that characterised the first decade of the 20th century: the instability of forms, geared towards expressing the fledgling experience of modernity; insistent meta-textual research; the absence of a narrative core and a solid conducting thread; the dissipation of unity in favour of multiplication of detail; the co-presence of different languages and registers. Aside from a certain taste for the oriental setting, which was well-established in the imagination of the time, there is a leaning towards fragmentation, inherited from the impact on the literary form of montage techniques, borrowed from a cinema that had, as yet scarcely, been codified. The aesthetics of montage, the integration of prose and poetry, and the proceeding by accumulation, reveal the need, via a literary form, to express the traits of an increasingly eclectic society, traversed by technological innovation accelerating the rhythms of experience, setting photographic images in motion, and delineating a

¹⁷ Greenspan 2011; Farman 2014.

subjectivity increasingly interconnected with the media and therefore open to new perceptual automatisms. Therefore, in these pages by Lasker-Schüler, there emerges a formal line of research geared towards the contemplation of the literary artifice, and a comparison of the imagination of the ancient (the fairy tale, specifically the oriental one, on the model of the *Thousand and One Nights*) with an interpretation of an emerging modernity that finds expression in the fragmentation of points of view triggered by the experience of the early 20th century metropolis.

And it is precisely in the prolongation of the perceptive experience that ConiglioViola's adaptation becomes framed as a legitimisation of the expressive-artistic qualities of Augmented Reality¹⁸, an emerging technology with which to intercept certain segments of a broader media and cultural transition that places at the centre of its 'poetics' the deconstruction of the opposition between real and virtual.

In the words of ConiglioViola, at the origin of the adaptation is the gesture of "tearing up the page"¹⁹: the act of dismantling the formal structure of the text in order to enable the visionary component continually evoked by the German writer's style to burst forth, enlivening its suggestions and setting them virtually in urban space. A first method of 'laceration' may be seen in the dissemination of the original work in the series of posters put up at bus stops in the cities of Turin and Milan (Fig. 7.1), from which to procure audio-visual content to be viewed on smartphone screens. Images waiting to come to life thus become parts of a disseminated digital text, disjointed

¹⁸ In recent years, several artistic movements have sprung up, aimed at developing the creative field of Augmented Reality (AR). This is the case of Mobile Augmented Reality Art and Manifest.AR, which aim to transform the perception of public space through the installation of virtual objects. As stated on the official website of the Manifest.AR collective: "The group sees this medium [AR] as a way of transforming public space and institutions by installing virtual objects, which respond to, and overlay, the configuration of located physical meaning". See <<https://manifestarblog.wordpress.com/about/>> (last accessed 30 April 2023). For further discussion, see the stimulating contributions of Wright 2014 and 2015, where the development of an artistic dimension of Augmented Reality is articulated from Deleuzian assemblage theory. Also, see the extensive survey on the artistic forms of Augmented Reality by Geroimenko 2018.

¹⁹ See <<https://vimeo.com/131346826>> (last accessed 30 April 2023).



Fig. 7.1. The dissemination of posters put up at bus stops in the cities of Turin.

portions of a work already lacking a centre, whilst geared towards enhancing the writer's stylistic fragmentariness. In fact, once the figures in the posters have been framed by the device, they are processed by an Augmented Reality app that converts them into short videos with strong dreamlike traits, in which shapes, bodies and movement frame the settings described by the German author. The translation of the text into digital animation illustrates the particular feature of Augmented Reality in introducing a dynamic tension into static images, similar to that of the *tableaux vivants* of the 19th century tradition, and to that of the first cinema movies, in which the difference between the moving image and the photographic image was made explicit²⁰.

Augmented Reality, therefore, produces an aesthetic experience governed by the realization of digital images and the vivification of whatever is static; therefore, one might define it as surfacing media,

²⁰ Papagiannis 2014, p. 36 recalls how in the cinema of attractions the transformation of the static image into a moving image was a stylistic device used constantly to emphasise the difference between the photographic and cinematic image. In the same way, various Augmented Reality contents, usable via mobile devices – smartphones, tablets, visors or glasses – exploit this same expedient, exhibiting the digital metamorphosis of a static image, or an object, to emphasise the interpenetrating relationship between materiality and the digital.

i.e. a medium that allows digital images to emerge (to surface) from urban surfaces²¹. This definition is certainly provisional and is meant to reflect on one of the many media segments in which Augmented Reality can be localized²²; it leads to a second conception of laceration of the page, which in this case refers in particular to the ways in which the spatial dimension is stressed. The absence of linearity that characterises the formal organisation of the audio-visual texts prompts the user to carry out a work of re-composition of the contents of the work, breaking down and recomposing the urban space in a host of directions generated by the use of mobile media and movement through the city. The aesthetics of montage, central to Lasker-Schüler's literary construction, is hence reconceived as a practice of hyper-mediation²³ in which the smartphone interface becomes the focus of experience.

Therefore, whereas adaptation renews the artistic sphere of Augmented Reality, the re-use of locative media in a narrative key also becomes apparent, going beyond the computational processes and data processing that dictate its main uses. For Jason Farman²⁴, the ability of locative media to structure narratives is based on the alignment of three factors:

- a) the qualities of the selected space (site-specificity) where the contents are disseminated, being imbued with symbolic-cultural instances and delineate experiences of the space;
- b) the narrative triggers (urban markup), through durable or ephemeral signs²⁵, inserted into the space (markers, QR-codes, stickers, graffiti, architectural elements, etc.), with which it becomes possible to extract excerpts, videos, and other items that make up the

²¹ Lino 2018, p. 90.

²² There are numerous fields of application for Augmented Reality techniques: these range from entertainment, advertising promotion, journalism, to scientific, as well as artistic, fields.

²³ In the sense described by Bolter, Grusin 1999, in which the process of remediation is determined in the display and explication of representational means.

²⁴ Farman 2014, pp. 3-4.

²⁵ Farman echoes the distinction between durable and ephemeral inscriptions made by McCullough 2008, pp. 61-62: the former refer to signs that endure over time, such as epigraphs on monuments; the latter are transitory in nature, such as murals and graffiti in urban spaces.

story;

- c) the creative use of the medium (creative misuse), which allows its operational functions to be rearranged and go beyond the conventional functions.

In the case of *ConiglioViola*, the narrative triggers are generated from the posters put up at bus stops, thus transforming what are traditionally considered “non-places”²⁶ that lack a relational centre into areas of interactive and narrative practices. What emerges, then, is a localised and mobile narrative, “constructed through programmes and applications that require the user to move through space physically in order to reveal narrative fragments by means of mobile devices”²⁷.

The transformation of the original text into a digital narrative makes it possible to define certain cross-references between the different media forms involved in the adaptation process. Both texts, original and derivative, resort to instances of attraction, by shaping, with their respective means of expression, the ways in which the real and the virtual converge in the same narrative space. Wherever the accumulation process and syn-aesthetic intensification transform Lasker-Schüler’s page into an area of tensions (where the exotic meets modernity), *ConiglioViola* similarly organise their suggestions by creating ‘digital phantasmagoria’, apparitions of images and videos that can be located in urban space, thus transforming the act of reading into an exploratory and expressive experience. Furthermore, whilst Lasker-Schüler’s literary work provides the reader with access to another world, suspended in the oneiric and framed in an idealised elsewhere, the work of the two video-artists configures the act of adaptation as access to an augmented environment steeped in literariness, and without undergoing a radical substitution of the surrounding reality (a typical result, on the other hand, of the synthetic environments produced with Virtual Reality):

AR allows the user to see the real world, with virtual objects superimposed upon, or composited with, the real world. Therefore, AR supplements reality, rather than completely replacing it and ideally, it will appear to the user that the virtual and real objects coexist in the

²⁶ Augé 1992.

²⁷ Bertetti 2019, p. 93.

same space²⁸.

Augmented Reality thus permeates everyday experiences.

Augmented Reality on the smartphone is not in opposition to everyday life; it allows the user to interface with the physical environment and media using a *soft* approach, as opposed to the more invasive and *hard* features of Virtual Reality devices (visors, glasses, cardboard, etc.). Indeed, Augmented Reality devices guarantee a *multilayer* approach, consenting the simultaneous use of different levels of communication. This experience is much closer to the everyday experience of the average user, who perceives the communication context as brimming with glimpses, perspectives, people moving, screens, and all kinds of signals; on the contrary, Virtual Reality – closed within an artificial, albeit immersive and 'realistic', perceptual atmosphere, – maintains a vaguely obsessive claustrophobic, 'laboratory' feel²⁹.

In the light of the relationships between image, media and space outlined thus far, the adaptation of *Tino's Nights* becomes conceivable as an experience of augmented literature: a literature reshaped around the dialogue between authorial style and augmentation techniques; it is geared towards transforming the reading experience into a kind of access to an augmented and elusive environment, since it is organised around the striking confrontation between the virtuality and reality of urban space and a series of ephemeral, temporary inscriptions. The idea of an augmented literature does not only respond to a display of the expressive possibilities of this emerging technology, but also investigates the anthropological desire to set a story in one place, transforming it into a structure with stratified narratives. This spatial materialisation of stories therefore maintains the idea of the entrenched nature of the perception of a literary text. The reader, in fact, implements 'recombin-actions'/'re-combinations' to provide an assumed order to the micro-narratives distributed throughout the urban fabric. If the medium's operational set-up changes, so does that of the reader, who casts off his traditional guise and assumes the pro-

²⁸ Azuma 1997, p. 356.

²⁹ Lughì 2017, pp. 145-146 (emphasis in the text).

file of a 'diviner'³⁰; with a technological gadget the diviner unearths the pulsating and expectant presence of audio-visual fragments, and renders what is hidden manifest, superimposing it in space. The collected contents create

narrative environments, within which the meaning is provided through the interaction between the text uttered (the space) and the various, single, uttered experiences (the paths) of the readers, who update the virtualities present therein in an ever-changing and often partial way³¹.

Urban space may become a navigable matrix in the manner of a hypertext – more specifically, a web of non-sequential writing³² – where the headwords (links) are replaced by short audio-visual texts that can be tracked in no particular order, thus eluding any principle of linearity. There is significant mirroring between textual constructs and spatial segments, “so much so that we might speak of ‘spaces as texts’ (spaces can be interpreted, mediated and transformed into something spectacular, and written down thanks to geo-localisation processes)”³³. In this way, each path taken by the reader-diviner traces a narrative experience that communicates with a hypermedia space, and is disengaged from fixed codifications, since it cannot be traced back to a univocal re-composition but rather to a continuous recombination/re-combination.

7.3. Trans-Material Rewritings: the Permanence of the Ephemeral

As Bertetti points out³⁴, narratives with locative media, such as those that focus on Augmented Reality, revolve around the principle of

³⁰ I owe the use of this fascinating metaphor to the intense dialogue and exchange of views that took place with Mariano Equizzi of Komplex-Live Cinema Group during several workshops we held together on Augmented Reality media practices.

³¹ Bertetti 2019, pp. 98-99, my translation.

³² Landow 1994.

³³ Lugh, ConiglioViola 2016, p. 2, my translation.

³⁴ Bertetti 2019, p. 93.

'extractability': a notion that Jenkins³⁵ expounds in defining several of the reference principles of transmedia narratives. The possibility of taking content from the fictional (virtual) to the spatial (real) area, in order to extend it into extradiegetic contexts, aims to produce the cognitive gratification for the reader of being able to interact with materialised versions of certain elements of the fictional³⁶. This concept is formulated by ConiglioViola by addressing a twofold deconstruction: that of the traditional opposition between virtual and material and that of the distance between author and reader, so as to make reading a dynamic and participatory experience that is inseparable from space. The initial deconstruction can be observed in the actual techniques used by ConiglioViola, employing their own transmedia rewriting, to create the thirty videos that are realised in accordance with an intriguing synergy between craft and digital techniques: the images and videos are created using different copper engravings to recreate sets, figures and masks faithful to the German writer's imagery, which are activated manually like puppets; this craftsmanship is coupled with staging accomplished through digital techniques such as chroma-key (Fig. 7.2).

The lavishness and detail in ConiglioViola's videos fuse and confuse 'archaic' expressive techniques, such as shadow play and the artificial movement of the puppet, with digital ones, placing in a continuum the idea of a tangible and hand-crafted cinema, made up of shadows and imbued with mythological allusions, with the entirely post-cinematographic idea of the film scattered throughout space, fragmented, a-linear and geo-localised, using Augmented Reality techniques³⁷.

The second is structured through a search for audio-visual content carried out by the reader-diviner. The discovery of the contents is then shared on the web platform set up by the video artists. In this way, the order of the micro-stories of the original text is re-arranged

³⁵ See Jenkins 2009.

³⁶ There are several examples pertaining to the concept of 'extractability'; perhaps the most obvious one concerns the merchandising of objects belonging to fictional universes, consolidated in the collective imagination: toys, action figures, costumes, etc., which allow for an imaginative, ludic, cultic (e.g. collecting) and performative (e.g. cosplaying) use of elements characteristic of a specific fictional world.

³⁷ For a survey of Augmented Reality within post-cinematographic forms, see Arcagni 2016.



Fig. 7.2. The technique of chroma-key.

in the sequencing produced by the directions chosen by the individual participants, resulting in a re-writing comprising various trajectories and paths:

when we experience territories, we create stories. We model these stories using mental maps, referring to one person's point of view perception of their own world, influenced by that person's culture, background, mood and emotional state, instantaneous goals and objectives³⁸.

This procedure is clearly inspired by the experiments of *combinatorial literature*, geared towards restructuring the text within a certain number of possibilities, the aim being to multiply the number of narratives, with the reader thus being assigned a co-authorial function.

The use of the web platform is one of the modes of preserving and archiving the augmented literature experience. Other modalities are arranged within the project and aim to correlate the transmedia structure of the work with a 'trans-material' wish to transform the virtual dimension of the Augmented Reality adaptation into material supports and to depict the multiplicity of paths in a single exhibition

³⁸ Iaconesi, Persico 2018, p. 277.

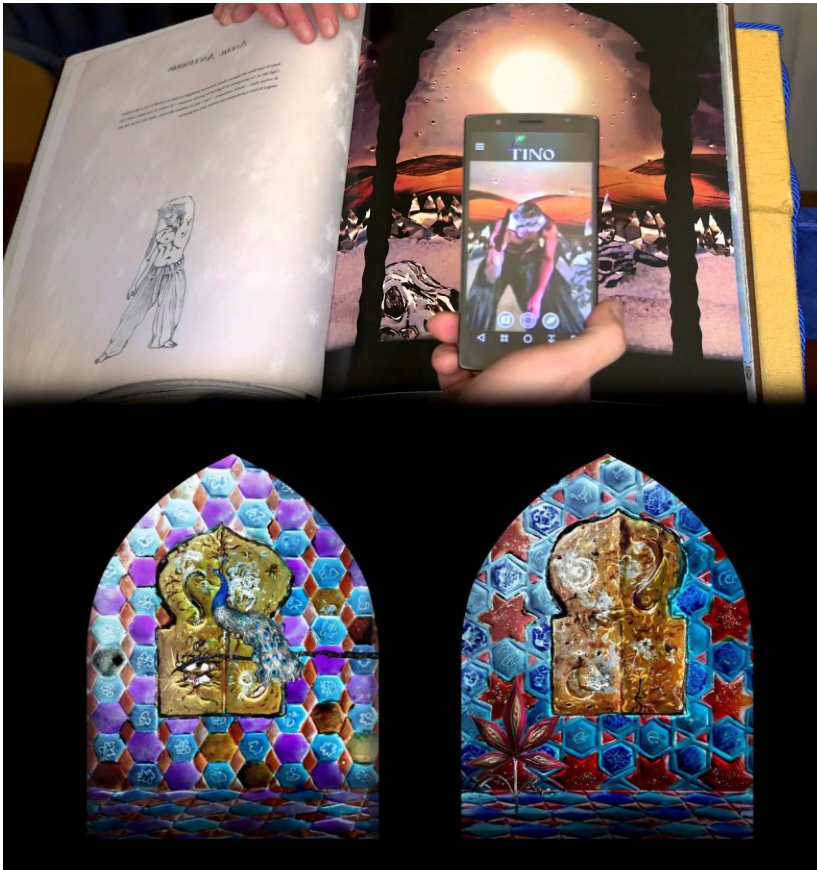


Fig. 7.3. The recomposition of visual materials as book's pages and paintings.

space. The materials of the project (texts, engravings, backstage images, etc.) have been collected in a hand-bound 'artist's book', with a limited distribution, and re-proposing the craftsmanship that permeates not only the creation of the videos, but the entire adaptation. Thus, the book becomes the medium employed in the material archiving of ConiglioViola's virtual operation, re-organizing the non-sequentiality of the reader-diviner's experiences in a progressive arrangement of texts and their contents. Similarly, the twenty-six engravings on copper plates, on which the installation videos were constructed, were exhibited in a number of art galleries; they were removed from the context of urban dissemination and arranged in a conventional exhibition mode, recombining the visual materials as paintings, as individual stages along a route (Fig. 7.3). This return to

the material nature of the book and convergence in a single space does not, however, exclude the component of augmentation of the entire operation: both in the support of the book and in the paintings on display, by framing the images it is possible to resuscitate the videos in Augmented Reality, reproducing in another space and in another medium the disseminated narrative experience, albeit deprived of the performative component.

Disseminated and organized trans-medially in space, the virtual is thus redrafted in forms that transform the ephemeral component into a material construct, into a sort of 'old medium': the page, the painting. In this way, the trans-medial experience of the adaptation of *Tino's Nights* becomes a shining example of how the convergence of diverse, albeit not conceptually opposed media, polarized between the ancient and the contemporary, establishes the literary experience as a privileged praxis for understanding the expressive and alluring possibilities of contemporary digital media.

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PART III

PRACTICES II:
ARTS

8. Turning an Old Masters' Weltlandschaft into a Technological *Tableau Vivant*. Integrated Principles of Adaptation in the Video Installations of Lech Majewski and Lisa Reihana

Diego Mantoan

*... painting employs wholly different signs or means
of imitation from poetry, the one using forms and
colours in space, the other articulate sounds in time*¹.

8.1. Questioning the Principle of Adaptation in the Arts

As expressed in the epigraph quoted at the start of this chapter, the central thesis of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's paradigmatic reflections on the boundaries of painting and poetry implies a fundamental distinction in the modes of adaptation of a subject matter between these different kinds of art. Reacting to Johann Joachim Winckelmann's widely debated interpretation of the celebrated *Laocoön and His Sons*, rediscovered in 1506, which is set as a theoretical kickstart for the rising tide of Classicism during the Enlightenment², Lessing aimed at differentiating the fine arts, on one side, and literature, on the other side, from a structural point of view. In his idea, the material they are working with as well as the methodological approach to that material are fundamentally different, thus, taking Greek mythology as an example, the adaptation of one and the same subject matter necessarily produces divergent outcomes. The products of painting and poetry sometimes even seem at odds with one another as noted by Johann

¹ The quote is taken from the English translation by Ellen Frothingham (1873) of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's celebrated *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerey und Poesie* (Lessing 1957, p. 91).

² Winckelmann 1756.

Wolfgang Goethe in his comments on the Laocoön group³. Lessing's neat separation of fine arts and literature due to the different adaptation strategies they adopt indeed anticipated a distinction that would become paradigmatic in the Modernist understanding of the arts and their specific areas of competence. The so called *bildende Künste*, comprising first and foremost painting and sculpture, deal with bodies (*Körper*), which entail a spatial dimension (*Raum*), while literature and theatre are concerned with actions (*Handlungen*) that rather imply a temporal dimension (*Zeit*)⁴. Hence, even when considering the same subject matter, as in the case of the Trojan priest killed with his sons by the rage of the Gods, they necessarily have diverging adaptive approaches and concentrate on different aspects that resonate in each specific disciplinary field. They adapt, so to speak, the object of consideration to the structural features of their reciprocal domain: the fine arts crystallise a specific moment during an event presenting its spatial features, while literature refers to a single aspect of the body that offers its best image in the temporal unfolding of an action.

This categorical difference appears to be of mere empirical relevance, though the question arises whether it implicates some sort of hierarchy among the different arts and the kinds of adaptation they provide. If an order did exist, this would make one art form superior to the other and the latter necessarily ancillary to the former. Not by chance, the interpretation given by Clement Greenberg to the relationship between different art forms saw fine arts in disadvantage, as it struggled historically to reclaim its autonomy from philosophy and literature⁵. As seen from this perspective, the development of Modern Art from French Bohemia to North American Abstract Expressionism was characterised by a gradual liberation of the fine arts from their ancillary function. Greenberg's claim would thus reassert that, far from being a transmedial process, the adaptive approach to a given subject matter remains anchored to the internal principles of a particular artistic discipline: every art, so to speak, has its own kind and rules of adaptation. This can be said to hold true at least until the inception of Postmodernism, but particularly with the advent of time-

³ Goethe 1960, pp. 129-141.

⁴ Lessing 1957, p. 91.

⁵ Greenberg 1966, pp. 23-37.



Fig. 8.1. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Procession to Calvary*, 1564. Oil on oak wood, 124×170 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

based media and installation art these categories imploded, thus allowing to transit from the canons of fine arts to the expanded concept of the visual arts⁶. The boundaries demarcating the separation between painting and literature, as expressed by Lessing, certainly stopped being impermeable, but the question arises whether that old distinction is still useful to understand how visual artists today can employ different approaches to adaptation of a subject matter in their works. Considering time and space, bodies and actions, as necessary variables with which the visual arts are confronted even now, the next paragraph explores how principles of transmedial adaptation are employed by contemporary practitioners and what Lessing's reflections can teach us to understand projects in media and installation art that recur to adaptive strategies. To further investigate this issue, this chapter addresses recent examples of transmedial adaptation that took place in the field of visual arts thanks to contemporary artists that resolved to transfer artworks by Old Masters into monumental video installations. Two case studies shall be discussed, both of which use transmedial strategies to adapt a celebrated bidimensional

⁶ Foster et al. 2016, pp. 399-403.



Fig. 8.2. Joseph Dufour, *Les Sauvages de La Mer Pacifique* (*The Native Peoples of the Pacific Ocean*), 1804-1805. Woodblock printing, stencilling and hand-brushed gouache on paper, 2,2×10,8 m. Wellington, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

work of the past – specifically, a *Weltlandschaft* – into a new technological setting, thus addressing social and colonial violence in World history.

In first instance comes the multi-channel video installation *Bruegel Suite* (2010) created by Polish film director Lech Majewski⁷, who unravelled Pieter Bruegel the Elder's celebrated *Procession to Calvary* (1564) and further produced the well-known feature film *The Cross and the Mill* (2011). The second example considers the multiple-channel video projection *in Pursuit of Venus* (2012-2017) by New Zealand artist of Māori descent Lisa Reihana⁸, a work which explores the early nineteenth century wallpaper decoration created by Joseph Dufour about the discoveries of Captain James Cook. In order to do so, both artists employed transmediality to create a digital *tableau vivant*, which expands the numerous micronarratives contained and suggested by the quoted artworks, further demonstrating how adaptation is capable of superseding structural differences between various artistic media. The source material of these video installations are paintings from the past, which themselves are adaptations of a literary source: Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary* clearly refers to the Bible (Fig. 8.1), while Dufour's *Les Sauvages de La Mer Pacifique* (1804-05) wallpaper was claimed to be taken from Captain Cook's journal (Fig.

⁷ A photogallery of the artwork's various installations can be found at: <<https://lechmajewski.com/art-2/videoart/bruegel-suite/>> (last accessed 30 April 2023).

⁸ A photogallery of the artwork's various installations can be found at: <https://www.inpursuitofvenus.com/> (last accessed 30 April 2023).



8.2). In a sense, both Majewski and Reihana appropriate an artwork of the past that is already derivative, hence questioning the liminality of definitions such as appropriation art and derivative artwork. Furthermore, as far as the composition is concerned, both referenced artworks were conceived as a sort of panopticon or rather a *Weltlandschaft*, that is an imaginary landscape containing multiple perspectives filled with diverse actions and people, a type which appeared in the Netherlands around 1500 and influenced landscape painting over the centuries⁹. Eventually, these installations were featured as monumental video installations at the Venice Biennale in the 2010s and offer the opportunity to analyse the environmental effect of the kind of adaptation these artists employed to untangle their source material and emphasise neglected aspects of social and colonial violence in the Modern Era. In doing so, the process of adaptation is explored focusing on the practical implications of transmediality in contemporary art practice, thus trying to understand what kind of adaptation can be provided by means of media installations.

8.2. The Laocoön Dispute and its Theoretical Consequences

Winckelmann's comments on the Laocoön group published in his reflections on the Greek masterpieces, ascribing noble simplicity and quiet grandeur to the mentioned sculpture – "eine edle Einfalt und

⁹ Baldwin 1992, pp. 362-363.

eine stille Größe"¹⁰ – were clearly set to be problematic from the start. Indeed, as he pretended to demonstrate that the central figure of the Laocoön is not screaming despite the deadly pain he is suffering, but simply revealing a composed sigh in his face, this could not but unleash a heated debate in the years to come. However, it is true that the distorted body and face of the Trojan priest was already central in the widely participated dispute on the depiction of emotions inside the French Academy in the second half of the seventeenth century¹¹.

There are the poignant comments by Academy teacher Grégoire Huret in his treaty *Optique de portraiture et peinture* of 1670, where he uses the Laocoön as a paramount example of how passions, such as the portrayal of extreme suffering, are made clearly visible by the talented sculptor¹². Huret himself was reacting to a *conférence* held in 1667 that explicitly addressed the Laocoön, a debate among the members of the Academy stirred by a discourse of Gerard van Opstal who focused on the supposed multiplicity of emotions undergoing in the central figure¹³. Reaching further back to the time the sculpture was rediscovered in Rome, it must be noted that the Laocoön had fundamentally affected Italian Renaissance, as can be seen for instance in the reception of the motive by Titian and Baccio Bandinelli, and further in teaching the spectator to understand the visual language of an anguished scream¹⁴. This happened in an artistic context that was already accustomed to the kind of gestural expressionism that can be found in the *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (1463) by Niccolò dell'Arca, which would anticipate the Mannerist *figura sforzata* of sculptors the likes of Giambologna¹⁵.

Still in the mid eighteenth century no one would contend that the Laocoön was not actually screaming, hence Winckelmann's reversal of this perspective clearly depended on the aim to corroborate his specific view on Greek art in a quest to establish the principles of

¹⁰ Winckelmann 1756, p. 21. The established English translation is "a noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" as found in Baeumer 1978.

¹¹ van Helsdingen 1978-79.

¹² Huret 1670, pp. 102-103.

¹³ Félibien 1669, pp. 35-37.

¹⁴ Loh 2011, pp. 413-414.

¹⁵ Cole 2001, pp. 520-521.

beauty and posture that could affect the classicist position of his contemporaries¹⁶. Despite its whimsical rhetoric, the strength of authority Winckelmann gained in the art field did not allow direct confrontation, such that later art criticism could neither ignore nor plainly deny his view at once. Even Goethe tried to come to terms with Winckelmann's interpretation by highlighting how the Laocoön group demonstrated Greek art's ability to appease contrasting concepts, such as pain and beauty, that is: "den Sturm der Leiden und Leidenschaft durch Anmut und Schönheit mildern"¹⁷. Similarly, in his essay Lessing does in no way deny the nobility of character displayed by the Laocoön, further confirming the absence of a proper scream, though he makes a difference in avoiding to make Winckelmann's perspective a valid rule for all artistic disciplines¹⁸. Lessing makes the case for the existence of two modes of representation – painting and poetry – which reveal each its capabilities and characteristics when configuring the same essential human matter¹⁹. Winckelmann himself appears to have been aware that Lessing's critique radically superseded his arguments, thus allowing art theory and literature studies to advance separately from one another²⁰. Indeed, they did go separate ways for almost two hundred years, but Lessing's reflections have been extremely influential on both the criticism of art and literature²¹, such that they need to be scanned for elements useful in analysing today's interdisciplinary practices, particularly the use of new media in the visual arts and, thus, transmediality.

The principal distinction highlighted by Lessing is the opposition between space and time, which has already been referred to: in his view, painting works with bodies and can thus represent only the most pregnant moment of a subject matter, while poetry addresses actions and therefore focusses on an aspect of the body in the succes-

¹⁶ Rudowski 1986, p. 238.

¹⁷ Goethe 1960, p. 132: "[...] mitigate the storm of pain and passions by means of grace and beauty" (my translation).

¹⁸ Rudowski 1986, p. 236.

¹⁹ Schneider 1999, pp. 287-288.

²⁰ Multhammer 2015, p. 200.

²¹ Goodyear 1917, pp. 238-239.

sion of time²². This categorical distinction is though problematic since both painting and poetry are understood as the echo of an originary event they try to represent each with its own means²³. In this sense, they must then be seen as two different forms of adaptation of one and the same subject matter that retains the quality of original human endeavour. Precisely because of this, Lessing's achievement helps underscoring how the medium employed by an artist necessarily influences the way a given subject matter is to be represented – that is, how it is adapted from the original²⁴. Hence, every medium has a potential of its own, things it can do and things it cannot do, such as Lessing puts it with the task of making the invisible visible, which is something that he maintains poetry can do in an abstract way, while figurative painting at his time of course could not provide²⁵. This distinction however is not merely of theoretical advantage, because it also demonstrates that art and literature – and thus every other artistic genre – are in a kind of social relationship: in fact, Lessing's rational laws of genre specification may seem insurmountable, but they rather make border-crossing and genre-blurring all the more intriguing and attractive, such as in the case of William Blake who deliberately set forth to blend words and images²⁶. Undermining Winckelmann's view on the Laocoön allowed Lessing to shift attention from the mere empirical reception of an artwork – be it painted or written – to the mode of adaptation of a subject matter through a specific artistic means. Eventually, when separate artistic means converge, genres collapse and adaptation strategies fuse together, like in a sudden blur of time and space.

8.3. Lech Majewski's Multiple Events on the Way to Crucifixion

The starting point of Lech Majewski's acclaimed feature film *The Mill and the Cross* (2011), starring Rutger Hauer and Charlotte Ram-

²² Multhammer 2015, pp. 202-203.

²³ Schneider 1999, p. 279.

²⁴ Rudowski 1986, p. 235.

²⁵ Jacobs 1987, pp. 506-507.

²⁶ Mitchell 1984, pp. 110-111.

pling, was the encounter with the masterpieces of Pieter Bruegel the Elder preserved in Saal 10 at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, particularly the *Procession to Calvary* (1564). Seeing its picture plain as a world full of life, the Polish film director aimed at accessing the realm of the sixteenth century Flemish master via motion picture²⁷. The goal was not simply paying tribute to Bruegel, but also analysing and adapting his multiple narratives via a transmedial process that produced another relevant outcome, that is the multi-channel video installation *Bruegel Suite* (2010) presented at the Louvre in Paris, at the Muzeum Narodowe in Krakow, and finally at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011 (Fig. 8.3)²⁸. This video installation was created during the filming of the visually arresting *The Mill and the Cross*²⁹ and it appears of particular importance for the scope of this chapter, given the necessity to set the artwork in a three-dimensional space, which was most conveniently arranged in the last display at the Church of San Lio in Venice where it could interact with a sacred space and the tradition of the *Via Crucis* stations. The multiple narratives contained in the original artwork would thus simultaneously surround the spectator and offer a twofold plot: Christ's way to the Mount Golgotha on the right side, paralleled on the left side by the torture on the Catherine's wheel of a poor Christ ideally drawn from Bruegel's sixteenth century world³⁰. This environmental installation was further enriched by a digital reconstruction of the Flemish master's painting turned into a *tableau vivant* with several groups of actors playing out the numerous scenes scattered around the landscape of the *Procession to Calvary*³¹.

To better understand the kind of integrated adaptation strategy adopted by Majewski it is paramount to first contextualise the masterpiece by Bruegel that was painted at the height of the repressive

²⁷ See *The Mill and the Cross*. Interview with Lech Majewski, available at: <<https://lechmajewski.com/film-2/the-mill-and-the-cross/>> (last accessed 30 April 2023).

²⁸ For the exhibition history see <<https://lechmajewski.com/art-2/videoart/bruegel-suite/>> (last accessed 30 April 2023).

²⁹ Kern 2011, p. 65.

³⁰ Cordioli 2011.

³¹ This particular video piece was displayed on a monitor on the staircase at the Louvre in Paris, then it was projected on a wide screen in a darkened room in Krakow and finally on monitor in a shop window on the public square of San Pantalon in Venice.



Fig. 8.3. Public poster for the video installation *Bruegel Suite* (2010) at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011), Chiesa di San Lio, Venice (Italy).

measures, which were carried out by the Spanish rulers in the Netherlands due to Philip II's religious intolerance, such that the *Proces-*

sion is crowded with visual references to these historical events³². Nevertheless, the painting should not be interpreted as a hidden act of denunciation, since the painter's environment, audience, and admirers rather belonged to the late Hapsburg elite and Bruegel himself was very familiar with the contents of Catholic theology, especially Marian devotion, to which he frequently gave artistic form³³. Hence, the presence of the gallows and Catherine's wheels scattered around the landscape of the *Procession* connect the Passion of Christ to the more general contemporary visual culture of the Flemish civic power that resided in the display of the tortured criminal body, as can be found in numerous depictions of the Early Modern Age³⁴. Not by chance Bruegel resorted to this subject in other paintings, where gallows and wheels stand as reminders of death (*memento mori*) though at the same time being the object of gruesome irony: such is the case of a man defecating on the gallows in the upper right corner of the *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559) and that of the peasants merrily dancing underneath *The Magpie on the Gallows* (1568). Rather than contesting the violent religious clash in his country, by setting Christ's way to the cross in a contemporary Netherlandish human and natural landscape, Bruegel was referencing the Flemish painterly tradition and trying to innovate two genres at once. Indeed, it must be stressed that the *potpourri* of images conveyed on the canvas is derivative of the so-called world landscape (*Weltlandschaft*) of Flemish tradition, in which Bruegel however expands the number of iconographic citations – ranging from Bosch to Raphael, from Mantegna to Patinir – which are interwoven into multiple narratives balancing between the vernacular and classicising style³⁵. The *Procession* was also intended as the inversion of another Flemish genre, that of the worship image (*Andachtsbild*) that presents the viewer with a devotional composition expressing immediately discernible Christian truths: for this reason, Bruegel puts the Christ bearing the cross at the centre of his painting, though diminished in dimension, such as to hold together the spinning world of the painter's contemporary people activated by the

³² Gregory 1996, p. 218.

³³ Büttner 2018, pp. 105-106.

³⁴ Gobin 2018, pp. 21-22.

³⁵ Meadow 1996, p. 193.

procession and thrust upon a comparable destiny³⁶.

Distancing himself from his earlier eclectic sub-Surrealist style, for the Bruegel project Majewski employed computer-generated imagery (CGI) to create a new kind of video which occupies the landscape of the painting and incarnates the numerous events frozen on the canvas, thus translating it into a three-dimensional space where the people of the Flemish master's time come to live³⁷. In doing so, the Polish director operates through transmediality to free the painted scenes from their stasis, as well as from liberating each *Handlung* from its supposed most pregnant moment in time, to speak with Lessing, thus leaving it to flow in a narrative way³⁸. Especially in the feature film *The Mill and the Cross*, one can appreciate how Majewski expanded the narrative contained in the Bruegel painting, working in an imaginative way to play out the plenitude of episodes captured on the canvas³⁹. Interestingly, Majewski's first act to dive into the painting was to remove all people from the landscape, in order to get a clean backdrop, thus surprisingly discovering that Bruegel had used seven different focal points⁴⁰. These different pieces of interwoven landscapes offered the Polish director the opportunity to play with a varied range of perspectives when filming – from close-ups to bird's-eye view – thus constantly questioning the artificiality of composition as it grapples to represent life and, ultimately, humankind's destiny⁴¹. However, the feature film shares the same structural limits enunciated by Lessing, that is, the necessity to create a linear narrative of subsequent events, although of multiple nature, as is with literature. The video installation in Venice achieves instead simultaneity of time and space because the viewer moves inside the church according to the symbolic tradition of religious architecture: four monitors on the aisles lead up to the two projection screens beside the high altar, spatially mimicking the ascendent movement of the Stations of the Cross. Moving inside the

³⁶ Gregory 1996, p. 209.

³⁷ Atkinson 2012, p. 63.

³⁸ Cordioli 2011.

³⁹ De Mambro Santos 2015, p. 530.

⁴⁰ Again, see *The Mill and the Cross. Interview with Lech Majewski*.

⁴¹ Atkinson 2012, p. 64.

church space, only after a while the multiple videos surrounding the spectator disclose their profound meaning, reflecting a universal experience of human violence very much in the tradition of living spectacles of the *Via Crucis*⁴².

8.4. Lisa Reihana's Unfolding Events in the Process of Colonisation

The encounter with another sort of *Weltlandschaft* of the past was the starting point for Māori artist Lisa Reihana in her plurennial work in *Pursuit of Venus* (2012-2017), which re-elaborates the exoticizing landscape of the Pacific presented in the wallpaper *Les Sauvages de La Mer Pacifique* printed by Joseph Dufour at the height of British and French colonial expansion in the early nineteenth century. Since the 1980s an exemplar dated 1805 is preserved in its full ten-meter-length at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra⁴³, where Reihana stumbled against the classicizing attire of the natives which seems so distant from reality and, in her view, needed amendment after two hundred years⁴⁴. Having previously worked on the aesthetical reappropriation and self-definition of Pacific culture, such as with the photographic project *Digital Marae* (2001) which reimaged deities and ancestral figures, this encounter with the perspective of early colonial power sent her on a quest to adapt the Dufour wallpaper to the native imagination, such as to invert the narrative of Western colonisation and make pictures that reclaim a personal Māoritanga identity⁴⁵. Exploiting CGI, the artist set forth not simply to make a film inspired by the prints originally designed by Jean-Gabriel Charvet, but rather to adapt its narrative through a transmedial process that offered the chance to re-enact and re-invent the micronarratives con-

⁴² Cordioli 2011.

⁴³ More recently, another exemplar of *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* (*The native peoples of the Pacific Ocean*), 1804-5, Mâcon, by Mr. Jean-Gabriel Charvet and Mr. Joseph Dufour (registration number: 2015-0048-1) was purchased in 2015 with Charles Disney Art Trust funds for the Museum of New Zealand (Te Papa Tongarewa).

⁴⁴ See: Tagata Pasifika, *Interview with Lisa Reihana* on the occasion of the opening of *iPOV [infected]* at AAG in 2015; available at: <<https://youtu.be/GW7-zKBQksY>> (last accessed 30 April 2023).

⁴⁵ Zeplin 2010, p. 36.



Fig. 8.4. Public banner for the exhibition *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries* at the New Zealand pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennale (2017), Arsenale, Venice (Italy).

tained in the original work setting them straight on the backdrop of a digitally enhanced Pacific landscape in a continuous multi-channel installation⁴⁶. The general structure of the work remains that of a continuous landscape drawn from the wallpaper with images scrolling towards the left and subsequent scenes of native or early colonial life in the Pacific unfolding one after another in a sliding *tableau vivant*. Interestingly, the project evolved over a period of five years and was itself adapted several times to the exhibition space: it started as an 8-minute video on two adjoining monitors in 2012, either housed in an elegant antique vitrine or positioned onto a classicist table⁴⁷; then it was projected as a single channel video at the *imagineNATIVE* Film + Media Arts Festival in Toronto in 2013; later it expanded to a 32-minute loop titled *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* projected as a linear or bent panoptical multi-channel projection, first for the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki in 2015 and then finally for the Venice Biennale in 2017 as the representative of New Zealand (Fig. 8.4)⁴⁸.

To dig deeper into the integrated adaptation strategy employed by the Māori artist, it is again necessary to recognise the artistic tradition the Dufour wallpaper belongs to, both at a stylistic level and as a serial product for spectacular decoration of elite homes. A printer by profession who graduated at the prestigious *École de dessin* in Lyon,

⁴⁶ Nepia 2017, pp. 224-228.

⁴⁷ The vitrine was used at Alberton House in Auckland in 2012 and without it in 2013 at the Museum Van Loon in Amsterdam on the occasion of the group show *Suspended Histories*.

⁴⁸ The exhibition history and the development of the video installation can be conveniently traced back on the official website of the project: <<https://inpursuitofvenus.com/>>.

curiously Joseph Dufour was rather an anti-elitist man who had taken part to the territorial spread of the revolutionary Republic, later establishing an ambitious workshop in Mâcon, Burgundy, for *papiers peints* at the inception of Napoleonic rule⁴⁹. In 1802 he produced the first of a long series of panoramic wallpapers – the so-called *panoramique* – that presented a long scenic view of an English Garden complete with follies, temples, and columns, drawing on the earlier idea of 360-degree panorama employed by Robert Barker for his spectacular rotunda in Leicester Square, London⁵⁰. Besides various wallpapers depicting ancient myths or cityscapes, the most successful panorama he ever produced was indeed *Les Sauvages de La Mer Pacifique*, which built on the notoriety of James Cook's exotic voyage and reached far beyond France with exemplars to be found in North America and Australia⁵¹. Technically speaking it is not an optical image as in an eye-fooling 360-degree panorama, but a colour printed *décor* made from over one-thousand woodblocks, though partially hand-painted with gouache through stencils, meant for serial production to be applied as wall decoration referencing exotic phantasies in a Classicist manner⁵². At a conceptual level, the Dufour wallpaper drew on the notion of the noble savage enunciated by Jean Jacques Rousseau, while it stylistically adopted the rhetoric and iconography developed by Neoclassicism⁵³. In fact, the posture, and gestures of the three dancing native women on the left panel are reminiscent of the Classical *Three Graces*, as much as the celebrated *Portrait of Omai* (1776) by Joshua Reynolds resembles the *Belvedere Apollo*, since the aim was not a realistic representation of the native peoples but rather delivering a stereotyped image useful to contextualise and justify imperialism⁵⁴. The Dufour wallpaper was not intended to document Oceanic people, but for the entertainment and imagination of a Western elite through which spectators could physically access the colonial discourse and even reinforce the role of nineteenth century women

⁴⁹ Biard 2013, p. 219.

⁵⁰ Hyde 2015, p. 321.

⁵¹ Jayne 1922, p. 16.

⁵² Hyde 2015, p. 322.

⁵³ Biard 2013, p. 220.

⁵⁴ Postle 2005, p. 218.

– strictly confined at home in Europe, but desirable and available in the imaginary Pacific⁵⁵.

Rather than activating the unrealistic scenes contained in the Dufour wallpaper, as they were loosely based on the journals of Captain Cook and other sailors of the time such as Jean-Francois de Galup, Count la Perouse⁵⁶, Reihana decided to keep an improved version of the original landscape as a backdrop for a transmedial re-enactment of Pacific culture. The picture plain is slowly moving leftwards, thus spectators can stand still and the space is virtually moving around them, while the events onscreen are dramatically unfolding one vignette after another, reconstructing actual and imaginary encounters – that is ‘infections’, in the artist’s view – between indigenous Pacific Islanders and early Western explorers⁵⁷. Adopting dramatic re-enactment instead of plain documentation is an adaptation strategy deeply characteristic of an indigenous aesthetic, as can be found also in Inuit artist Zacharias Kunak, since it connects to the way native life is being experienced by its very community⁵⁸. In fact, Reihana’s principal aim is challenging received notions of Pacific identity, though not so much for the re-education of gallery-goers, but with the intent to address the negative impact of Western stereotypes on native’s self-perception⁵⁹. The digital video and installation practices of the expanded 32-minute version appear to heighten both the narrative and immersive effect of Reihana’s intent, thus integrating the two distinct categories enunciated by Lessing – time and space. On one side, the scrolling micronarratives deepen sensory contact with local culture and myth, allowing to explore lived history in its temporal unfolding⁶⁰. On the other side, the real-life dimension of the environmental installation flowing in front of the spectator determines the possibility to gain physical access to and psychological involvement in the indigenous perspective through spatial contiguity.

⁵⁵ Mamiya 2007, p. 117.

⁵⁶ Jayne 1922, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Nepia 2017, p. 228.

⁵⁸ Hopkins 2006, p. 342.

⁵⁹ McKinney 2010, p. 48.

⁶⁰ O’Reilly 2006, p. 339.

8.5. Integrated Adaptation through Simultaneity and Reappropriation

The video installations of Lech Majewski and Lisa Reihana discussed in this chapter served to verify whether the basic categories enunciated by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing still hold some meaning in the contemporary use of time-based media in an artistic environment. *Bruegel Suite* and *in Pursuit of Venus* clearly demonstrate that adaptation strategies employed to transfer a static representation of time into a moving image installation must make an integrated use of the concepts of space and time: on one hand, they emphasise the spatial situatedness of the work such as to involve the audience at a physical level; on the other hand, they activate the micronarratives contained in the original work in order to expand their temporal scope and play out the scenes and manifest their implicit dramatic consequences. Majewski presents us with a double-tire history of human violence, the one perpetrated on Christ the Lord and the other reflected on a poor Christ, underlining the universality of evil that befalls humankind for religious, political, or social reasons. Reihana's adaptation in contrast is more subtle since the scenes of Oceanic life don't spill over into a main plot of violence, though at the same time her solution is more radical suggesting the pervasiveness and ineluctability of colonial oppression brought onto entire populations and trickling down irreversibly like a poisonous infection.

Besides these different takes on the subject matter, Majewski and Reihana both achieve complete integration of space and time through a transmedial process that transforms the original artwork into a panopticon of people and actions or, so to speak, a mediatic *tableau vivant* that adapts the concept of *Weltlandschaft* to the technological era. This achievement is due to the skilful use they make of the landscape background of the referenced artworks, the *Procession to Calvary* and *Le Sauvage de la Mer Pacifique*, which is kept as the backdrop that glues the diverse episodes together in diachronic order. In fact, while Bruegel's painting and Dufour's wallpaper have the landscape as a unifying space [*Raum*] onto which different scenes are placed like vignettes of a sketchbook, the two video artworks adapt the landscape to become a theatrical or cinematic scenography in which the action [*Handlung*] takes place. Furthermore, being situated as envi-

ronmental installations, the works of Majewski and Reihana involve the spectators at a physical and psychological level inside a monumental *tableau vivant* that plays out the consequences of human violence and oppression – either in the form of religious and political violence in Modern Era Europe or in the form of ethnic and territorial exploitation at the inception of worldwide Imperialism.

Still, there is a subtle difference in the way that the two considered artists employ the categories of time and space to create their respective technological *tableau vivant*. On his part, Majewski seeks temporal simultaneity of the scenes drawn from the original artwork through the adaptation of a key element that is present in the Bruegel masterpiece, which is the physical closeness of events, thus overwhelming the spectators with the simultaneous vision of religious violence and surrounding them with six screens inside the sacred space of a church architecture. On the contrary, Reihana seizes temporal dilation of the depicted scenes and people through the adaptation of a key element from the Dufour wallpaper, that is the sequential unfolding of events lined up on the all-surrounding *décor*, thus employing spatial scrolling on the wide frontal screen to let the viewer gradually slip into the aesthetic – that is, also sensory – perspective of the indigenous population who are being contaminated by Western colonists. Although with different aims, both artists achieve the adaptation of the original *Weltlandschaft* by means of a transmedial process that performs the contained events on the screen and physically involves the audience in the environmental installation. In doing so, to speak with Lessing, Majewski and Reihana make an integrated employment of the different signs or means of imitation that belong both to painting and poetry – at the same time using forms and colours in space, as well as articulating sounds in time.

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9. *Found in transition.* Uno sguardo ai musei d'arte attraverso l'Intelligenza Artificiale

Stefania De Vincentis

9.1. Il preconconcetto del museo virtuale

In termini di adattamento, il contesto del museo digitale è un paradigma dalle molteplici declinazioni. Abbiamo la reinterpretazione di un luogo fisico in chiave virtuale, aspetto che non implica una mera replica delle informazioni o delle collezioni visibili dal vero in veste digitalizzata¹, ma che prevede, con modalità e indirizzi differenti, la creazione di un luogo complementare al reale². Nel caso dei musei d'arte la preoccupazione che il visitatore possa incorrere in una confusione tra i due luoghi, o in una preferenza di un contatto virtuale rispetto all'avvicinamento reale, è una condizione in fase di superamento³. Le tecnologie da un ruolo di tramite e facilitatore per le attività di comunicazione intervengono per attivare una assimilazione creativa delle collezioni e delle opere conservate nel museo⁴. Politiche di *open access*, piattaforme che personalizzano l'accesso alle collezioni, strumenti per la creazione e la condivisione di nuovi contenuti cultu-

¹ Sul concetto di museo virtuale e in generale di museo digitale, Hoptman 1992; Schweibenz 1998; Schweibenz 2004; Hutamo 2010; Parry 2010.

² L'interesse per le forme di accesso alle collezioni digitalizzate attraverso supporti interattivi ha animato il dibattito degli ultimi dieci anni. Tra le analisi più complete: Windhager et al. 2018; Manovich 2011 e 2012; Smitte et al. 2015.

³ A partire dai suggerimenti per una curatela delle collezioni in chiave performativa in Graham, Cook 2010 alla più recente disamina sull'importanza di imparare dal pubblico di visitatori come una delle strade per il futuro del museo digitale in Giannini, Bowen 2021.

⁴ Hess 2012; Bertacchini et al. 2012.

rali, da remoto e *in situ*, contribuiscono a generare una percezione panica del museo, di un luogo dove convergono e si esplicano i termini di inclusività e immersività⁵. Non è un caso che nel definire l'oggetto artistico, grazie anche alla sua riproduzione in Digital Art Work (DAW) per le piattaforme che rilasciano Non Fungible Token (NFT), si consideri la sua forma *phygital*⁶, sia reale che digitale, suggerendo un valore aggiunto di cui si carica l'opera d'arte.

In questa sede si vuole presentare la duplicità assunta dall'oggetto artistico attraverso la lente dell'Intelligenza Artificiale (IA) prendendo in esame come tale tecnologia intervenga all'interno del museo, sia affiancando la creazione artistica, sia collaborando all'investigazione delle collezioni.

Gli ambiti di applicazione dell'IA sono molto vasti: i più noti interessano le attività di restauro del bene culturale⁷; altri intervengono nel supportare l'accessibilità alle collezioni, supplendo a mancanze sensoriali e fisiche del visitatore e interagendo con esso⁸. Le conseguenze dell'emergenza pandemica da Covid-19 hanno avuto un impatto tale sull'universo delle collezioni museali da coniare una nuova realtà, quella del 'Covid museum'⁹. Questa accezione ha superato i confini d'uso legati alla contingenza del momento critico, fino a consolidare le riflessioni già in corso sul tema del museo digitale, rinnovandone l'attualità e proponendo nuove sfide. Il museo sconfinava nell'universo del ricreato digitalmente, delle realtà virtuale, dell'esperienza aumentata ed estesa, ibridando le modalità di accesso alle proprie collezioni. Il museo nel metaverso¹⁰ rappresenta un'opportunità per il visitatore e per l'artista, ma reca il rischio di perdere i tratti che stabiliscono la propria unicità. Si tratta degli ele-

⁵ Sono molteplici i progetti che in maniera ludica e interattiva stimolano l'interazione del visitatore all'interno del museo privilegiando *storytelling* nella presentazione delle collezioni. Per una disamina dei principali si considerino: Pujol et al. 2012; Back et al. 2018; Petrelli et al. 2014.

⁶ Debono 2021.

⁷ A titolo esemplificativo è interessante la collaborazione tra Google Art&Culture e il museo del Belvedere a Vienna per l'esperimento di ricostruzione cromatica delle parti danneggiate nei dipinti di Klimt. Si veda Wallner, Cazier 2021.

⁸ Gaia et al. 2019, pp. 309-330.

⁹ Debono 2019.

¹⁰ Manovich 2021.

menti propri della singolare estetica del luogo, della eccezionalità delle sue collezioni e dell'esclusivo valore simbolico che, come istituzione, riveste nella società, capace di accrescere il capitale culturale del singolo individuo. A difesa di questa peculiarità concorre l'invito affinché l'assimilazione tecnologica mantenga l'intento di preservare la consistenza fisica e reale del luogo museale¹¹. "To be successful in digital space, museums have to create new physical/digital hybrids – and in doing this, pioneer new forms of communication and experience that don't yet exist anywhere else"¹².

Ulteriori posizioni critiche nei confronti dell'invasione digitale del museo interessano la sfera della ricerca all'interno delle collezioni. Le insidie principali sono individuate nell'eccesso di materiale digitalizzato, nella moltitudine di opportunità di interazione, nell'infinita rete di collegamenti ipertestuali che confondono le capacità di misurare adeguatamente la reale entità del valore aggiunto offerto dalla nuova esperienza.

I wonder if illusion or delusion is the outcome, or whether this is the opportunity to contribute to the single most forceful instrument for cultural memory production ever conceived¹³.

Le insidie del museo che si apre alla *cyberculture* si soffermano su due istanze che riguardano da un lato le modalità per curare il rapporto con il digitale, dall'altro la necessità di assumere delle posizioni etiche sulla sostenibilità di questo ripiegamento digitale, valutando attentamente i costi e i benefici di tale soluzione.

Nel presentare, in breve, il più recente scenario di questa transizione museologica ho scelto di concentrare l'attenzione su alcuni progetti legati dall'uso di un sistema di Intelligenza Artificiale che, per vie diverse, dal lato dell'artista e dal lato delle collezioni, offrono un ponte tra la nuova medialità, la creazione artistica e la ricerca storica. L'interesse in questa sede è di soffermarsi su una precisa intersezione dove l'IA partecipa alla ricerca sulle collezioni d'arte, collabora con gli artisti ed è infine generatrice di nuova arte a partire da

¹¹ Sulle potenzialità di un ricorso responsabile all'AI, si veda Manovich 2019, p. 18.

¹² Manovich 2021.

¹³ Drucker 2019, p. 14.

quelle collezioni il cui studio si propone di avvantaggiare.

9.2. Un dialogo tra artisti e documenti attraverso l'Intelligenza Artificiale

L'occasione per una prima indagine sul rapporto tra creazione artistica e IA è offerta dalla mostra *Secret. Artificial Intelligence and Luc Tuymans* (BOZAR, Brussels 03/04/2021-02/05/2021)¹⁴. La mostra è l'esito di un progetto di ricerca coordinato dal BOZAR LAB e da GLUON con l'obiettivo di rispondere alle domande sull'opportunità rappresentata dalle tecnologie per l'IA nel processo di creazione artistica e sul rischio che l'IA riesca, un giorno, a sostituirsi alla visione umana. I protagonisti di questo studio sono Luc Steels, fondatore dell'Artificial Intelligence Laboratory VUB e l'artista belga Luc Tuymans, entrambi già attivi in una collaborazione all'interno progetto di ricerca FLOW attorno all'opera dell'artista, *Secrets* (1990).

Il dipinto raffigura il ritratto di Albert Speer¹⁵, capo architetto del partito nazista e del ministro degli armamenti e della produzione bellica del Reich. Il processo interpretativo svolto dallo storico e dal conoscitore d'arte porrebbe a confronto l'originale fotografico, a cui l'opera si ispira, con i diari di Speer per ricostruire l'intenzionalità dell'atto creativo e la modalità interpretativa adoperata dall'artista nel leggere un brano di memoria storica condivisa. Il metodo, invece, messo in atto dai ricercatori dell'IA si propone di studiare i processi che governano sia le metodologie di ricerca storica, sia quelli che guidano l'atto creativo; essi cercano di sintetizzare tali intuizioni in una serie di applicazioni pratiche da tradurre in algoritmi.

Gli esiti di tale progetto sono stati riportati in uno studio¹⁶ volto ad analizzare come attraverso l'AI sia possibile stabilire dei punti focali in un'opera d'arte mediante il confronto con il modello di immagine di riferimento. L'analisi ha seguito un processo a ritroso risalen-

¹⁴ Per una presentazione della mostra, vd. <<https://readymag.com/u3083945729/secrets-guide/airesearchprocess/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

¹⁵ Luc Tuymans, *Secrets*, 1990. Olio su tela, collezione privata. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Anversa. Foto: Paul Hester. Consultabile al seguente link <<https://www.wikiart.org/en/luc-tuymans/secrets-1990>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

¹⁶ Sinem, Steels 2021.

do all'originale fotografico a cui l'artista si è riferito nella sua interpretazione, con lo scopo di scandire le fasi del processo creativo. La combinazione di tecniche di *computer vision* e *pattern recognition* ha avuto l'obiettivo di rintracciare le deviazioni e le deformazioni operate dalla mente dell'artista sull'immagine originale, trasformate in centri di interesse, *focal region*, dell'opera. Le tecniche computazionali impiegate si sono servite di algoritmi a rete neurale nell'allineamento tra i due modelli, originale fotografico e dipinto, per il riconoscimento delle differenze cromatiche e delle deformazioni nelle linee di contorno tra le due immagini. La rete di nodi neurali intessuta a partire dalle informazioni estrapolate dall'opera partecipa, inoltre, a creare un modello narrativo semantico in grado di aprire a inesauribili nuovi scenari e ulteriori reti di conoscenza.

"What happens when AI algorithms look at paintings?"¹⁷. È questo, forse, l'unico quesito tra i molti posti dai ricercatori di FLOW a riassumere come l'intento ultimo del lavoro congiunto di artisti e specialisti dell'IA suggerisca l'apertura di un ulteriore ambito nel vasto campo delle Digital Humanities: proiettato verso una migliore comprensione dei processi e delle strutture che facilitano la comprensione dell'arte e dei processi che determinano il modo in cui essa viene vissuta e interpretata. Le ricadute possibili si delineano nell'ideazione di nuovi strumenti per l'educazione artistica, la curatela e la storia dell'arte.

9.3. Musei e intelligenze artificiali in mostra

Un ulteriore e non trascurabile aspetto riguarda il modo in cui cambia l'accesso a questa rete di conoscenza che oltrepassa la cornice dell'opera e apre una prospettiva di conoscenza più vasta e reticolare, accessibile dallo spazio espositivo. Tra gli eventi che negli ultimi anni hanno testimoniato questo genere di attenzione, nel 2018 il Frankfurter Kunstverein ha presentato la mostra collettiva *I am here to learn: On Machinic Interpretations of the World*¹⁸; nel 2019 si è tenuta la mostra

¹⁷ La citazione è tratta dalla scheda di presentazione della mostra *Secrets* (cfr. *supra* la nota 14).

¹⁸ Per una presentazione della mostra, vd. <<https://www.fkv.de/en/exhibition/i-am-here-to-learn-zur-maschinellen-interpretation-der-welt-2/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile

della House of Electronic Arts Basel (HeK) dal titolo *Entangled Reality – Living with Artificial Intelligence*¹⁹; nello stesso anno il Kunstverein Hannover ha indagato fino a che punto gli artisti si spingano nell'adozione delle tecnologie di Intelligenza Artificiale per la loro pratica all'interno della mostra *Artistic Intelligence*²⁰, mentre lo ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe ha ospitato una conferenza sul tema *Art and Artificial intelligence*²¹. Uno degli ultimi esempi di esposizioni sullo stesso argomento è dato dalla mostra al Deutsches Hygiene-Museum di Dresda *Artificial Intelligence. Machine Learning Human Dreams* (06/11/2021-06/11/2022)²². Queste esperienze si distaccano dalle produzioni che indagano il valore estetico delle creazioni digitali e soprattutto insistono sul rapporto con il visitatore e lo spazio pubblico, al fine di interrogare il valore culturale o auratico delle nuove opere²³.

Sul versante strettamente legato alle collezioni museali, l'adozione di metodi di analisi computazionale ha accresciuto l'interesse verso il *medium* digitale da parte di specialisti del *machine learning* e conservatori museali. La principale opportunità risiede nel consentire a visitatori, curatori e storici dell'arte di ottenere nuove informazioni sulle collezioni attraverso l'analisi dei dati e di sviluppare sistemi di visualizzazione dettagliati e interattivi. Uno studio sui *dataset* delle collezioni digitalizzate del Brooklyn Museum ha adottato la *Formal Concept Analysis*²⁴ quale tecnica scientifica per un'analisi delle collezioni

2023).

¹⁹ Al riguardo, vd. <<https://www.hek.ch/en/program/events/eroeffnung-entangled-realities>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

²⁰ Per la mostra, vd. <<https://www.kunstverein-hannover.de/en/exhibitions/2019/artistic-intelligence.html>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

²¹ Il progetto in questione è descritto su <<https://zkm.de/en/project/artificial-intelligence-and-art>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

²² Scheda di presentazione della mostra all'indirizzo <<https://www.dhmd.de/en/exhibitions/artificial-intelligence>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

²³ In Italia, Palazzo Strozzi ha ospitato la mostra *Let's Get Digital! NFT e nuove realtà dell'arte digitale* che, nel comprendere un campione sui nuovi indirizzi intrapresi dall'arte digitale, ha dedicato largo spazio alle nuove estetiche frutto di intelligenze artificiali e del loro rapporto con lo spazio pubblico. In altri casi, come per la mostra *Aura* (29/10/2021-09/01/2022) presso la Fabbrica del Vapore a Milano curata dal collettivo Pepper's Ghost, si insiste sul rapporto uomo macchina e sull'esperienza data dalla visione.

²⁴ Cole et al. 2019, p. 17.

di arte digitale e tracciare le relazioni implicite tra oggetti, opere d'arte e le loro caratteristiche. È ormai facile rintracciare come questi metodi computazionali si appropriino delle teorie warburghiane sui rapporti di buona vicinanza nello studio delle manifestazioni artistiche lungo i secoli²⁵. La ricerca ingegneristica integra i riferimenti teorici puntando alla scalabilità dei propri *software*, che sono così in grado di acquisire e adattarsi alle molteplici variabili delle collezioni digitali²⁶.

Sempre in ambito statunitense, l'Harvard Museum of Art ha realizzato nella primavera del 2022 un'indagine visiva sulle proprie collezioni nella forma di una installazione digitale, la *Surprise Machines*. Lo scopo del progetto è di aprire panorami inaspettati sugli oltre ventimila oggetti che compongono le collezioni del museo offrendo nuovi stimoli e vie interpretative sia alla curatela che alla creatività²⁷. L'accesso alle opere attraverso un pannello multisensoriale si serve di un'interfaccia coreografica, la *Lightbox*²⁸. Sviluppata dal MetaLab dell'Harvard University, questa tecnologia permette di visualizzare una determinata opera in collezione rispondendo al solo movimento del visitatore, senza altro genere di *input*, e realizzando in tal modo degli incontri a sorpresa. Il progetto, che riprende i meccanismi dell'*Imitation Game* di Alan Turing²⁹, sfrutta algoritmi a 'scatola nera' i cui processi, una volta avviati, non possono essere previsti dal programmatore. Sul versante tecnico l'installazione attinge alle Application Programming Interface (API) del museo che adottano l'ambiente IIIF (International Image Interoperability Framework) per l'accesso ai

²⁵ Lo stesso Bilderatlas ha recentemente avuto la sua realizzazione digitale: *Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), per cui cfr. <https://www.hkw.de/de/programm/projekte/2020/aby_warburg/bilderatlas_mnemosyne_start.php> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023). Si veda anche Bonisch 2021.

²⁶ Alle indagini sulle collezioni del Brooklyn Museum erano stati applicati i programmi ImageSleuth, The Virtual Museum of the Pacific e A Place for Art, che adottano l'algoritmo NearestNeighbours per implementare il rapporto di vicinanza concettuale tra le opere delle collezioni digitali, soprattutto nei casi di importanti *corpora* di dati, e in questo modo aumentare la scalabilità della ricerca. Cfr. Cole et al. 2019, p. 17.

²⁷ Cfr. <<https://dariorodighiero.com/Surprise-Machines>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

²⁸ Considerazioni su questa installazione realizzata nel 2015 all'interno dell'Harvard Art Museum sono espresse in Battles, Maizels 2016.

²⁹ Turing 1948.

dati e ai metadati sulle immagini³⁰. Un software di *image matching*, PixPlot, sviluppato dallo Yale University DHLAB³¹ permette di disporre le immagini su un piano cartesiano e di uniformarne e appiattirne la multidimensionalità. L'accesso alle opere avviene all'interno di un'ambiente *hi-tech*, la Light Box Gallery progettata da Renzo Piano, che ospita una parete multischermo e una telecamera nello spazio antistante. Un primo esito di questo progetto è la mostra *Curatorial A(i)gents*³² che, al di là del pretesto ludico, si propone di indagare i confini del *machine learning*, coinvolgendo artisti, ingegneri informatici, umanisti digitali e curatori museali.

Col termine apprendimento automatico si indica un gruppo di sistemi che si serve di precisi algoritmi al fine di estrarre modelli a partire da un variegato insieme di dati senza che sia indicata un'istruzione iniziale. Questa modalità inferenziale ha stimolato la creatività di artisti e *media maker* che traggono alimento dal repertorio museale per generare nuove opere d'arte e lanciare nuove sfide all'IA esplorando nodi cruciali nel dibattito tra tecnologia e cultura. Scopo della mostra allestita all'interno dell'Harvard Art Museum è stata la sperimentazione nell'uso dei dati delle collezioni per finalità espressive. I temi elaborati nei vari progetti presentano di volta in volta una prospettiva giocosa, analitica o critica diretta allo studio delle interazioni con il visitatore, alla riflessione sul mercato dell'arte in epoca digitale e a offrire una panoramica dell'intero museo.

La mostra ha voluto fondere nell'alveo museale creazioni, spettacoli, nuovi vocabolari coreografici per interrogare il *medium* digitale, preferendo conversazioni su temi emergenti piuttosto che insistere su conoscenze consolidate³³. In una precedente versione, l'installazione *Lightbox* rivelava il tentativo di mettere in atto una svolta critica, una interrogazione non tanto sulle stesse opere d'arte, ma sui *media* digi-

³⁰ <<https://iiif.io/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

³¹ Per il software, vd. <<https://dhlabs.yale.edu/projects/pixplot/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

³² La mostra ha avuto una sua prima pubblicità durante il periodo del Covid-19; si veda a proposito Derry et al. 2022.

³³ Le opere, così come le riflessioni che hanno accompagnato l'evento nei mesi di esposizione, sono state raccolte in un catalogo-prologo a cura di Michael Maizels (Maizels 2020).

tali attraverso cui vengono più frequentemente conosciute ³⁴. L'esposizione attuale, invece, coinvolge il museo stesso come parte di questa riflessione e le opere d'arte tornano protagoniste, oggetto di indagine storica e di interpretazione critica. "Like our digital machines, museums engender wonderful experiences – and they're also engines of bias, power, and invisibility"³⁵.

9.4. Collezioni museali e creazioni digitali

Artisti digitali che adottano nel proprio lavoro algoritmi basati su IA hanno tratto alimento dalla riflessione tecnologica che sta interessando il museo in ogni sua componente per avviare un pensiero critico sulle modalità di percezione della cultura storico-artistica accessibile grazie a questo nuovo contesto multimediale.

Nel 2018 la vendita presso la casa d'aste Christie's dell'opera *Portrait of Edmond de Belamy* realizzata dal collettivo francese Obvious³⁶ ha contribuito a dare popolarità alle creazioni di arte realizzata tramite IA. L'opera in questione è parte della collezione *La Famille Belamy*³⁷, una serie di undici ritratti realistici creati attraverso un ambiente a reti neurali tra loro competitive denominato General Adversarial Network (GAN)³⁸. Sfruttando gli algoritmi elaborati con questo metodo di apprendimento automatico, il gruppo di artisti, *media maker* e ingegneri informatici composto da Hugo Caselles-Dupré, Pierre Fautrel e Gauthier Vernier ha istruito un sistema attingendo ai dati di quindicimila ritratti di nobiliari tra XIV e XX secolo. L'operazione presenta una duplice lettura: da un lato si propone di visualizzare l'evoluzione del genere ritrattistico lungo varie epoche e ambisce, in tal modo, a sollecitare una diversa via di avvicinamento alla conoscenza delle collezioni storico-artistiche; dall'altro lato l'intera collezione, i cui ritratti sono disposti secondo un ipotetico albero genealo-

³⁴ Battles, Maizels 2016, p. 330.

³⁵ La citazione è tratta dalla presentazione della mostra *Curatorial A(i)gents*, <<https://mlml.io/p/curatorial-aigents/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

³⁶ Il sito web del collettivo è <<https://obvious-art.com/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

³⁷ Si tratta di <<https://obvious-art.com/la-famille-belamy/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

³⁸ Goodfellow et al. 2014, pp. 2672-2680.

gico, è una riflessione sul futuro della creatività attraverso l'IA³⁹.

Insieme a Obvious, gli artisti che operano nel mondo dell'Intelligenza Artificiale attingono a un bacino culturale di dati condivisi tramite cui si rielaborano concettualmente le opere d'arte al fine di suscitare nell'osservatore che le ritrova esposte nel museo un sentimento di sorpresa, di aspettative disattese e di confusione. Possono considerarsi in linea con questo pensiero opere quali le *Imposture series* (2017) di Mario Klingemann⁴⁰, gli *AI portraits* (2019) di Mario Martino, quelle del *cyber-artista Ai-DA* (2019) creato da Aidan Meller⁴¹, fino alle *Machine Hallucination* (2021) di Refik Anadol⁴². Nel complesso, il potenziale creativo della tecnologia a cui fanno riferimento è una risorsa che si propone ai musei mediata anche dalle interpretazioni dei nuovi artisti digitali, dei cui progetti il museo stesso può farsi garante, promotore e coautore.

L'IA, nei suoi vari sviluppi attraverso reti neurali, sta vivendo un periodo fertile in ambito creativo: può dotarsi di un inesauribile bacino di dati e informazioni culturali che permettono ai processori meccanici di lavorare in maniera combinatoria ed esplorativa. Al fare umano compete, invece, l'atto trasformativo che completa il ciclo della creazione⁴³; per quanto performante, infatti, il *machine learning* sarà sempre privo dello stimolo fisico e degli errori o imperfezioni ad esso connessi e che ne definiscono l'unicità⁴⁴.

La nuova immagine generata dalle reti neurali scaturisce dal confronto con una moltitudine di immagini simili, utilizzate per addestrare la macchina a selezionare le più adatte a interpretare un *input* non visivo, ma concettuale o testuale.⁴⁵ Il progetto DALL-E (ora nelle versioni DALL-E2 e Crayon) sviluppato dalla OpenAI di Elon Musk si serve di una rete neurale che adotta il metodo di *text-to-image generation* (o *synthesis*) per creare immagini partendo da una didascalia

³⁹ Obvious 2018a, p. 3 e Obvious 2018b.

⁴⁰ Klingemann 2020.

⁴¹ Cfr. <<https://www.ai-darobot.com/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁴² Al proposito, vd. <<https://refikanadol.com/works/machine-hallucinations-nature-dreams/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁴³ Boden 2009.

⁴⁴ Elgammal et al. 2017.

⁴⁵ Per un'introduzione ai temi sollevati dal rapporto tra arte e Intelligenza Artificiale, si veda Barale 2020; Mazzone 2020; Pedrazzi 2021.

testuale espressa verbalmente⁴⁶. Strumenti simili, come Midjourney⁴⁷ e altri di prossimo libero accesso quali Dream Studio AI della Stable Diffusion⁴⁸ o Imagen di Google⁴⁹, stanno mutando radicalmente lo scenario artistico rendendo le possibilità creative di tali ambienti accessibili a una platea di utenti generalizzata.

Come si è già precedentemente accennato, il consenso museale nei confronti di un diffuso impiego dell'IA appare al momento orientato a un fine strumentale, dove spicca l'impiego dell'IA nelle operazioni di restauro laddove sono previste complesse attività di ricostruzione di porzioni di dipinti. Una tra le più note ha interessato la *Ronda di notte* (1642) di Rembrandt al Rijksmuseum⁵⁰. In questo caso è stata impiegata una rete neurale per apprendere gli elementi fisici e stilistici dell'opera, replicando la mano dell'artista e sostituendosi a quella umana⁵¹.

L'attenzione dei musei si concentra sull'intervento del digitale nella riproduzione realistica delle opere d'arte, rispondendo alle richieste del proprio pubblico di visitatori a cui può offrire repliche digitali (*Digital Twins*) dei propri capolavori. Seguendo le piattaforme NFT adottate dai cryptoartisti, alcuni tra i più importanti musei del mondo hanno scelto di servirsi della tecnologia *blockchain* per creare dei Digital Art Work (DAW): riproduzioni autorizzate e certificate tramite NFT delle opere conservate nelle proprie collezioni. Una tale apertura ha spinto realtà imprenditoriali come Cinello ad attivare forme di collaborazione con i musei alimentando un mercato di copie digitali di opere d'arte⁵². La monetizzazione di opere digitalizzate in

⁴⁶ Per il progetto, vd. <<https://openai.com/dall-e-2/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁴⁷ Cfr. <<https://www.midjourney.com/home/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁴⁸ Vd. <<https://stability.ai/blog/stable-diffusion-announcement>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁴⁹ Vd. <<https://imagen.research.google/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁵⁰ L'intera operazione di restauro è stata seguita dai visitatori fisicamente all'interno del museo, ma ha avuto una sua narrazione e approfondimento grazie a una esposizione virtuale accessibile attraverso un ambiente VR360: <<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/stories/operation-night-watch/story/missing-pieces>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁵¹ L'algoritmo utilizzato dal Rijksmuseum è quello sviluppato nel 2016 dal team di specialisti informatici The Next Rembrandt per creare copie 3D di opere d'arte utilizzando algoritmi rete neurale: <<https://www.nextrembrandt.com/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁵² Celebre è la conversione del *Tondo Doni* di Michelangelo alle Gallerie degli Uffizi, ma

NFT sta diventando un fenomeno diffuso e una strategia adottata dai grandi musei, quali l'Hermitage Museum per la *Madonna Litta* (1490) di Leonardo o il British Museum nel caso l'*Onda* (1831) di Hokusai, per sostenere le proprie attività, arginare l'iperproduzione di artefatti digitali e contribuire alla nascita di nuove imprese creative⁵³.

Un ultimo scenario che lega musei e creatività digitale, e a cui occorre seppur in breve accennare, è favorito dalle politiche Open Access e Creative Common Zero (CC0) per l'utilizzo delle immagini digitalizzate all'interno del catalogo online delle proprie collezioni. Sono note le piattaforme di realtà museali come il Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA), il Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) e il Rijksmuseum che hanno adottato questo programma per mettere a disposizione parte del proprio catalogo di opere digitalizzate a favore di una libera e creativa interpretazione digitale⁵⁴. *Media maker*, neofiti e professionisti attingono alle opere liberamente accessibili online per trasformarle e adattare alle proprie intuizioni creative e condividerle sui *social network* dei musei. L'elemento partecipativo⁵⁵ è quello su cui insistono gli istituti, ma l'esperienza pare maggiormente limitata a un pretesto ludico piuttosto che conoscitivo, premendo per rendere l'arte e la storia dell'arte un elemento familiare e parte della quotidianità⁵⁶.

Questa attitudine *phygital*⁵⁷ del museo, che consiste nell'avvicinare il digitale mantenendo saldo il rimando all'oggetto reale, rivela una forma di tutela del museo stesso, una resilienza alla pressione eserci-

tre le collaborazioni figurano anche la Pinacoteca di Brera e il Mart di Rovereto. Vd. <<https://www.cinello.com/it/>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁵³ Il British Museum dal 2022 ha attivato una collaborazione con la *start-up* La Collection che gestisce due piattaforme NFT per l'acquisto di riproduzioni digitalizzate di una selezione di capolavori del museo. A questi esempi fa riferimento l'articolo di Debono 2022a.

⁵⁴ La piattaforma Rijksstudio attiva dal 2013 è forse la più nota applicazione che ha trasformato il catalogo online in una *community* dove gli iscritti condividono la propria personale idea di collezione museale. Vd. <<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio>> (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁵⁵ Sul tema del museo partecipativo si veda Frieling 2014.

⁵⁶ Emblematiche sono le campagne Riksstudio Award (<<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/144597--entries-rijksstudio-award/creations>>) o il Getty Museum Challenge (<<https://www.getty.edu/news/getty-artworks-recreated-with-household-items-by-creative-geniuses-the-world-over/>>) (ultimo accesso 30 aprile 2023).

⁵⁷ Debono 2021.

tata dai nuovi *media* nel mutare la fisionomia dei propri luoghi, in attesa di adottare lo scenario tecnologico che meglio possa rispondere alla propria realtà. “The phygital museum scale merely serves the purpose of helping museums understand much more the scope and purpose of the digital in relation to the physical”⁵⁸.

9.5. In conclusione

La nuova definizione di museo rilasciata dall’ICOM introduce per la prima volta il termine ‘interpretazione’ tra le funzioni a favore del patrimonio materiale e immateriale⁵⁹. L’IA e la nuova creatività digitale intervengono nel riflettere sulle modalità di accesso alla conoscenza storico-artistica e, attraverso l’analisi dei processi di apprendimento sperimentati dalla macchina, contribuiscono ad aprire nuovi orizzonti di studio del patrimonio storico-artistico. I casi e gli scenari riportati rispondono all’esigenza di interpretare il museo sia nella sua componente estrinseca spaziale, sia intrinseca, legata alle proprie collezioni. Il fenomeno di resilienza digitale, che è emerso in seguito all’emergenza pandemica, ha permesso al museo di superare la resistenza al digitale e di proiettarlo verso un progressivo adattamento al nuovo scenario dove, comunque, la scala del digitale in rapporto al fisico necessita di essere calibrata in base alle necessità delle singole realtà.

In questo contesto il ruolo del curatore diventa chiave non solo nel valutare le scelte di investimento tecnologico, ma anche nel prendere parte ai processi creativi, nel generare nuova conoscenza attraverso un’operazione artistica, da sempre ponte di ogni transizione, anche digitale.

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⁵⁸ Debono 2022b.

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PART IV

APPENDIX

10. Interview to Michael Bielický

Mara D'Aloise, Filippo Luca Sambugaro

Michael Bielický was born in Prague in 1954. After dropping out of medical school and exploring the medium of photography in New York, between 1984 and 1989 he began his artistic career at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dusseldorf, under the guidance of Nam-June Paik. In 1991 he returned to Prague, a city that remained a point of reference in the following years; here he was founder and professor of the Department of New Media Art at the Academy of Fine Arts. In 2006 he also became professor and head of the Department of Media Art at the University of Art and Design in Karlsruhe, another nerve center for his research, and for over 25 years he participated in numerous international exhibitions, festivals and symposia. Since the late 1980s, through works such as *Perpetuum Mobile*, he has employed devices such as U-Matic and stop-motion, investigating the relationships between different artistic mediums – as demonstrated by video-installations. This dedicated interview explores his roots as an artist, his ideas and idiosyncrasies regarding the use of the latest devices and software for artistic production, and his relationship with old and new media.

1. Studying your CV, we can find that you have a lot of different interests, from videoart to performance and photography, and yet your education between 1975 and 1979 was in medicine. Why did you choose that path initially, and how (and why) did you change it in such a radical way?

Well, I came from a family of doctors: my father was a professor, a researcher, but also a musician, so he has a strong artistic issue. I grow up with his music, but he was still a doctor, and my brother be-

came a medical doctor, so I think it was kind of automatic.

I come from Prague with my family, we escaped the country and then I realized that it has too many limitations in my need for freedom. So, I quit after several years and I was looking for a new creative potential, but still I was not able to find it, and then I went to New York; there I had a very 'existential reality', but truthful at the end. Then I applied to an art school in Dusseldorf, and I was accepted by the famous photographer Bernd Becher. But then I quit, I met Nam-June Paik, and I thought he was much closer to me. He was not so 'German', he was somebody who early reflected on global issues, and of course influenced by Marshall McLuhan.

So, I don't think I wanted to make artistic career: I wanted freedom, being able to decide and to control my life to all levels: this was the main reason to go to art school.

2. It's clear that Nam-June Paik was kind of a fundamental figure for your education: what are the main teachings come by one of the pioneers of videoart? And who do you look at the most for reference and inspiration for your works?

It is difficult to answer this question because Paik was everything else than a teacher in a traditional way; he was everything else, he was more present in his absence.

He lived in New York, he would come time to time, he would invite us in New York for shows, he did very important things, but he was not a professor. He was this 'image' and he also has a very twisted idea about himself as an artist, and therefore I feel so close to him. He came from music, he was a very free spirit, but as I said, he was everything else than a professor or an artist: he was an anti-professor, an anti-artist, and this is so interesting about him.

3. Starting from Perpetuum Mobile (1986) (Fig. 10.1), you're using some devices (like stop motion and U-Matic) to induce 'aesthetic mistakes': what is changed in time during your production, compared to this first work? And what do you think about possibilities that new contemporary devices offer to us for art?

Of course, I am a witness of a radical revolution of technology. I am not a real nerd, I have not technology under control. I know what

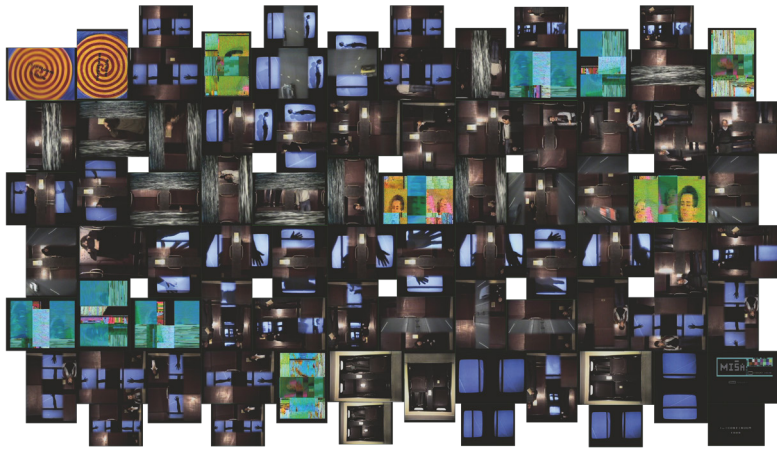


Fig. 10.1. Michael Bielický, *Perpetuum Mobile*, 1986. For a presentation of the artwork, visit <<https://www.bielicky.net/projects/perpetuum-mobile-1986>> (last accessed 30 April 2023).

technology can do but I am not somebody who program and so on. But I am very interested in the ‘soul’ of technology, because I think it can really express many things and it is an amazing and powerful tool to use metaphors, even religious ones. I know what machines can do and I am always fascinated, especially since what happened in the past few years. It is a miracle: this device, this phone that you see here [shows his personal mobile phone at the camera] is for me the perfect metaphor for it. Today you can produce in 4K resolution, you can make movie, you can make sound, you can make games: it is like a magic box, a production tool for universal contemporary media art.

But the funny thing is that I am jealous of the generation of today for these tools which I have never had. Technology nowadays has become emancipated and democratized: everybody has it, so everybody can become a producer and that is nice and democratic. But obviously it is not so easy to do it, or maybe the work goes lost in the sea of the mostly non-sense works.

4. Initially, you dedicated yourself a lot to photography: how this type of art influenced in the past and nowadays your works?

In the early days I published my first book (that was not a catalogue)



Fig. 10.2. Michael Bielický, *Menora*, 1989. For a presentation of the artwork, visit <<https://www.bielicky.net/projects/menora-1989>> (last accessed 30 April 2023).

and in this book I was thanking a few people. When I had the crisis that led me to left medicine and I don't know what to do with my life, I went to New York, and I met this photographer. I already photographed since early days – I was 19 years old, so very early – and I developed photographs in dark rooms at friend's house. I have always photographed, but sometimes there was very kitschy and stupid things, but I was lucky at that time to see all those people, all those pioneers of media art and photography.

So, to make the story short, the photograph has always been part of my art, but I do not consider myself as a photographer: it is a way of life, and, to be honest, when other people ask me: "Are you an artist?", I feel very strange to say "Yes" because it's always a cliché! "Oh! You're an artist! You create artefacts, you make exhibition, you have a show...". I don't know! I do some research, of course, but I do not want to belong to this category of artists because I think it is full of cliché, full of fakes.

5. I think we can describe Menora (1989) (Fig. 10.2) as an ironic reflection on religion and how medias show religion: do you think this work of art is still topical or, perhaps, even prophetic about this theme?

It takes many layers. One is very personal: the background of my family (that is Jewish), the loss of my grandparents in concentration

camps, my parents (also not in life anymore). I did *Menora* in Germany when I was in art school, where also nobody knew about my Jewish identity, so it's kind of coming out for me: this is the first level, the very personal one.

Another one is because I was already interested in these new technologies (like video, monitors) that you can also use for religious, philosophical, or mystical concepts: you can perfectly use these technologies to communicate certain issues. So, this work has a very personal level, and a philosophical one. And, funny enough, this work is now in ZKM, the Center for Art and Media (Karlsruhe, Germania), and this was the first collected piece, its collection number is 001 and I am very proud of it. But I was also a student when I did it and when I presented it in a school exhibition, I also got lots of aggressive and unexpected reaction by some visitors. They felt provoked and I could not defend myself because I did not expect this.

But I know it was a powerful piece and it became an iconic piece. Regarding this, Daniel Libeskind, the architect of the Jewish Museum in Berlin (who also built the Ground Zero Memorial at the One World Trade Center in New York), saw this piece and asked me to make another one for him.

6. What do you believe are the advantages and the disadvantages (from a creative point of view) of video-installations productions?

First of all, I think it is interesting that there was a moment when we called video-installation 'video-sculpture' for a while in Germany, but it was a very short moment. What is a video-installation, after all? I still do some but using other technology. It is a very blurred definition.

Video-installations in 80's, 90's were often objects, like televisions. But now most of the times they are projections: everything is very dematerialized. So, I think it is a very tricky question, because definitions shift a lot, especially in this area of art, and every single artist construes and interprets his personal vision of it.

7. You cooperate from 2005 with Kamila B. Richter: how did you meet and how did you come to your idea of 'data-based storytelling'?

She was one of my students in Prague (I was the youngest profes-

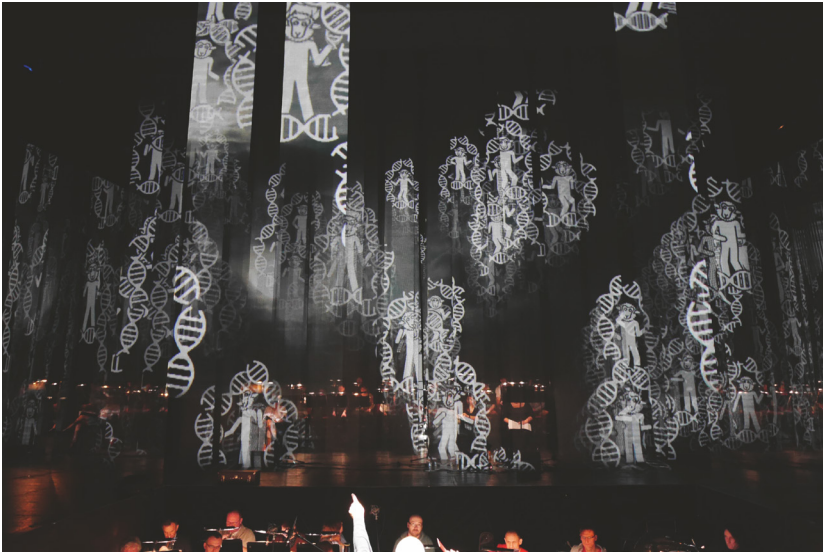


Fig. 10.3. Michael Bielický, *Lost Objects*, 2015. For a presentation of the artwork, visit <https://www.bielicky.net/projects/lost-objects-prag-2015> (last accessed 30 April 2023).

sor there), but it was not the classic professor-student relationship. At one time she married and went to South Africa, and then we met again many years later, we became a couple and we started also to work together. We started to use data, but not in a traditional way. Many artists use data for data visualization to represent something, but we tried to use them in a more 'dadaistic', absurd, and *anti-* way.

8. *Lost Objects* (2015) (Fig. 10.3) is a very complex project, that combine typical tools of video-art and opera. Can you talk a little bit about how you came with this idea and especially how this work dialogue with theatre?

We were very lucky. We met this opera producer in a hotel, and he asked us if we would be able to create something new for him. We got this opportunity, and he told us we can be the directors. We hang this kind of mosquito net, in stripes, in many layers; we had already our production tool, where you can use data and tools we created. So, we have a database of animations, and we can connect it to a data flow in real time. We did this and we were like in trance. We had no experience about it, and it was very radical: some people gave us very good critics and some people not, maybe because they were more conservative. But we felt very honored, in any case.

But I must say I was a second time lucky recently, during the pandemic. This prominent conductor in Germany, Kent Nagano, asked to us and to other prominent artists to produce something for his music but online, on YouTube, and it was really an amazing experience.

9. We can clearly see that a lot of recent projects, art works and productions are going towards a precise direction that Jenkins called in 2006 'convergence culture': different type of medias and arts combining and merging to create unique products. Do you think that this kind of blending is a good thing for art or not?

Well, we have recently created our first NFT project and I think it is interesting thinking about what Walter Benjamin wrote in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) in relation to this new type of art. We have almost a paradoxical reverse of Benjamin's idea, because now we have this unique identification number of NFTs and other ones, even if identical, are not real piece of arts. So, it is a very interesting age for art and for evolution in art crafting and, even if we are living in very hard and tough times, I am still positive not only about new art forms, but more widely about how and where people are going towards: everything is new and exciting.

10. To end this interview, we would like to ask you: what are your thoughts about adaptation between different medias or forms of art? Is it something that you perform and/or you're interested in?

Well, for me there are materialized and dematerialized media. The only dematerialization in 80's was on the TV screen and then started to show up slowly projector and so on. I have made sculptures, video-sculptures (that was still physical), but I was also into monitors and dematerialized reality.

Watching to all my life, I was always back and forth between materialized art and dematerialized art, and I am interested sometimes in switch between them. I am also thrilled to see and create the connection between analog and digital reality, because we are now in a sort of digital world, but we still have physical, human features, of course. So, we are not completely digital and spirit, and we are not completely physical and independent from the dematerialized world. We are

somewhere in between, and I think that the beauty is to switch, travel and create sometimes between these two forms of reality.

Abstracts and Contributors

1. Nassim W. Balestrini, *Boundaries and Crossings: Why Adaptation and Transmediality Theories Should Dialogue*

Combining adaptation theory and transmediality theory can produce nuanced readings of adaptations that cross media boundaries. The advantage of applying both vantage points is shown through Lorraine Hansberry's 1961 screenplay of her drama *A Raisin in the Sun*. A playwright's adaptation of her own work facilitates neglecting the original-vs-adaptation focus and challenges readers to fathom which differences between the two works are genre-based or related to other issues. Hansberry demonstrates her clear sense of cinematic possibilities in the attempt to heighten the argumentative prowess of her stage play through film.

Nassim W. Balestrini is Full Professor of American Studies and Intermediality at the University of Graz, Austria, where she also heads the Centre for Intermediality Studies in Graz (CIMIG). Before 2014, she taught at the universities of Mainz, Paderborn, and Regensburg (in Germany) and at the University of California, Davis. Within her focus on US-American and Canadian literatures, her research addresses intermediality and adaptation theories, life writing across media, hip hop (particularly rap as poetry and contemporary Indigenous and Alaskan artists), African American literature, and contemporary theatre and poetry. Contemplating borders and mobility – be it between nations, cultures, languages, or media – informs much of her work.

2. Thomas Harrison, *The Two-Text Phenomenon: Thoughts on Adaptation and Transmediality with a Discussion of the Blues of Roberto Ciotti, a Film on Carlo Michelstaedter, and Other Case Studies*

This essay reflects on transmedial adaptations as operations that do not just achieve new ends, but signally transform their beginnings. By producing creative changes to their source, adaptations introduce to it subtexts, pretexts, and offscreen features. In the process, the relationship between primary and secondary works – or the “two-text phenomenon” – becomes a key issue for readers familiar with the pre-adapted source, finding its site of reception along a mobile axis of interpretation. After theoretical reflections on the presuppositions of adaptation and transmediality, the essay examines case studies that include the blues of Roberto Ciotti, the back-and-forth adaptations of *Il generale Della Rovere* by Indro Montanelli and Roberto Rossellini, Dante rap, a film by Paolo Magris, and the literary rock of Glass Wave.

Thomas Harrison is Professor in the Department of European Languages and Transcultural Studies at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles) where he specializes in aesthetics, intellectual history, literature, and the related arts. He is the author of *Of Bridges: A Poetic and Philosophical Account* (University of Chicago, 2021), *L'arte dell'incompiuto* (Castelvecchi, 2017), *1910: The Emancipation of Dissonance* (University of California, 1996), and *Essayism: Conrad, Musil & Pirandello* (Johns Hopkins University, 1992).

3. Serena Guarracino, *Looking for Beauty. Regieoper as Transmedial Adaptation*

In the varied landscape of contemporary theatre, Western opera may feel like a relic of a past era, a time when emotions were powerful, costumes lavish, black men were portrayed by singers in black-face, and women could be killed by their partners in a shower of tears and applause. Itself a genre born out of the practice of adaptation – operas from the main repertoire often adapt novels and/or plays – today the genre represents a fraught legacy for directors who still feel the need to engage these works without removing contemporary issues and concerns. Starting from a diachronic assessment of the inter-

sections between opera and director's theatre, this contribution offers some preliminary groundwork on *Regieoper* as adaptation; in particular, Ai Weiwei's 2022 staging of Puccini's *Turandot* will be analysed to unpack the role of transmediality in stagings that aim to contaminate opera with other visual arts (cinema and video art especially) to tackle the complexity of staging it for contemporary audiences.

Serena Guarracino is Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of L'Aquila. Her research interests encompass theatre in English with a focus on theatre translation and adaptation, and queer literature and performance, with a methodological preference for gender and cultural studies. Her work on the reception of opera in contemporary English-speaking culture is published in *La primadonna all'opera. Scrittura e performance nel mondo anglofono* (Tangram Edizioni Scientifiche, 2010) and *Donne di passioni. Personagge della lirica tra differenza sessuale, classe e razza* (Editoria & Spettacolo, 2011), as well as in several essays in journals and collections. Her work on feminist translation for the theatre resulted in the Italian translation of Caryl Churchill's *Traps* and the book *La traduzione messa in scena. Due rappresentazioni di Caryl Churchill in Italia* (Morlacchi, 2017). She is a member of the Società Italiana delle Letterate, AISCLI (Italian Association on English Language Cultures and Literatures), CIRQUE (Inter-University Centre for Queer Research), and the Centro Studi sulla Transcodificazione (University of L'Aquila).

4. Alessandro Cinquegrani, *Kubrick modernista? Lettura di Eyes Wide Shut*

In order to understand the relationship of the film *Eyes Wide Shut* with its source, Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle*, it is necessary to analyse Kubrick's relationship with the cultural milieu of the early 20th century and modernism. Kubrick has been called the last modernist author, but in what sense can we accept this definition? This essay, through a close reading, relates the film to the philosophy of Foucault and Weininger and shows that the filmmaker through this film wants to close the modernist era and the 20th century.

Alessandro Cinquegrani is Full Professor of Contemporary Italian Literature at the University Ca' Foscari Venice. He has dedicated most of his studies to the 20th century and 2000s novel, especially re-

garding the relationship with cinema, e.g. in *Literature and cinema* (La Scuola, 2009, then Scholé, 2020). Other studies have dealt with literary and film narration at the end of the century (*L'innesto*, Mimesis, 2014) or with representations of the Shoah (*Il sacrificio di Bess*, Mimesis, 2018; *Romance e Shoah*, Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2021). For some years he was a collaborator of some important film critic magazines such as «Duel», «Itinerari mediali» and «Filmcronache».

5. Lucia Faienza, *Pensare per le scene: l'adattamento di Lacci, tra teatro e cinema*

The purpose of this study is to show, thanks to the novel *Lacci*, some features of Domenico Starnone's narrative: the scarce exploitability of the narrative material for mass-market productions and the renunciation of the epic tone which would make the story paradigmatic of an historical period or of a particular geographical context; but also the use of typifications and thematic elements constitutive of the "bourgeois novel", which characterize the appeal for the general public. In *Lacci*, the reflection about the twentieth-century theme of identity is related to the adaptability for the theatrical and cinematographic scene, where the analysis of the character is translated respectively into the monologic voice of the protagonist and into the "voice-off" device.

Lucia Faienza is an Adjunct Professor in Contemporary Italian Literature at the University of L'Aquila, and in Literature for Social Integration at LUMSA, in Palermo. Her main research interests concern the relationship between genre literature and non-fiction and the novel of the second half of the twentieth century. She collaborated in the curatorship of the volumes *Pasolini y el tercer mundo* (EDUNTREF, 2022) and *Oltre l'adattamento? Narrazioni espanse: intermedialità, transmedialità, virtualità* (il Mulino, 2020). She also published the volume *Dal nero al vero. Figure e temi del poliziesco nella narrativa italiana di non-fiction* (Mimesis, 2020).

6. Federico Pagello, *Adaptation as a Transmedia Serial Process: Transmedia Storytelling, Superhero Universes and the Cultural Logic of Popular Seriality*

The essay discusses the idea of transmedia storytelling and its re-

relationship with the process of adaptation by emphasizing the role of serial narratives in the context of contemporary popular culture. By revisiting the development and impact of Henry Jenkins' concept of transmedia storytelling on media studies, it argues that the analysis of the strong connection between transmediality and seriality helps understand both the potential and the limits of that notion, also revealing its ideological background. In its final section, the essay highlights how the history of the superhero genre and its unfolding over different media in the course of more than 80 years offer a variety of telling examples of how serial narratives have long provided the ideal material for transmedia storytelling, and that they adopted a set of innovative narrative strategies which are now used in contemporary media.

Federico Pagello teaches Film and Media Studies at the University of Chieti-Pescara. His current research focuses on popular serial narratives and transmedia circulation, with a particular attention to the crime genre. His most recent volume is entitled *Quentin Tarantino and Film Theory: Aesthetics and Dialectics in Late Postmodernity* (Palgrave, 2020).

7. Mirko Lino, "Tearing Up the Pages of the Book". *The Transmedia Adaptation of Else Lasker-Schüler's Tino's Nights in Baghdad According to ConiglioViola: an Example of Augmented Literature*

This chapter intends to analyse the process of a transmedia adaptation, in the hands of the video-artist duo ConiglioViola (Brice Coniglio and Andrea Raviola), of the book *Tino's Nights in Baghdad* (*Die Nächte der Tino von Bagdad*, 1907) by the German author Else Lasker-Schüler. In the first part of the chapter, there will be a brief survey of the relationships between transmedia and adaptation studies, providing several theoretical coordinates for reference. In the second part, an attempt will be made to frame the video-artists' work as an experience of *augmented literature* (organised around Augmented Reality technology for the visual translation of the original text into a moving image), and *locative media* for a narrative texture strongly focused on the spatial dimension. The wealth of practices and techniques employed in this particular adaptation makes ConiglioViola's artistic operation a complex media work, the analysis of which cannot be ex-

hausted by focusing solely on the transition from one medium to another, but which needs us to consider the convergence between narrative techniques and media experiences, between the transience of experience and its preservation.

Mirko Lino is Senior Lecturer at University of L'Aquila, where he teaches History of Film and Cinema and Media. He published the book *L'apocalisse postmoderna tra letteratura e cinema. Catastrofi, oggetti, metropoli, corpi* (Le Lettere, 2014). He edited the following books: with S. Ercolino, M. Fusillo, L. Zenobi, *Imaginary Films in Literature* (Brill-Rodopi, 2016); with S. Antosa, *Sex(t)ualities. Morfologie del corpo tra visioni e narrazioni* (Mimesis, 2018); with M. Fusillo, L. Marchese, L. Faienza, *Oltre l'adattamento? Narrazioni espanse: intermedialità, transmedialità, virtualità* (il Mulino, 2020). He also edited with H.-J. Backe, M. Fusillo the special issue of *Between Journal, Transmediality / Intermediality / Crossmediality: Problems of Definition* (vol. 10 no. 20, 2020). He is member of ICLA Research Committee on Literatures, Arts, Media (CLAM).

8. Diego Mantoan, *Turning an Old Masters' Weltlandschaft into a Technological Tableau Vivant. Integrated Principles of Adaptation in the Video Installations of Lech Majewski and Lisa Reihana*

The paper addresses adaptation strategies bridging fine arts and new media by focussing on contemporary projects that transfer the bidimensional work of Old Masters into monumental video installations. The approach to adaptation is thus explored as a transmedial process capable of integrating theoretical categories that originally differentiated various disciplines, especially the fine arts from literature as in the perspective of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Lech Majewski's *Bruegel Suite* (2010) and Lisa Reihana's *in Pursuit of Venus* (2012-17) serve as case studies that employ transmediality to create a technological *tableau vivant* expanding the numerous micronarratives contained in the referenced artworks, respectively Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Procession to Calvary* (1564) and Joseph Dufour's James-Cook-inspired wallpaper. Integrating seemingly diverging principles of adaptation, Majewski and Reihana blend the spatial and temporal dimension, further emphasising aspects of human violence that shine through the chosen *Weltlandschaft* of the past.

Diego Mantoan is a Tenure-Track Faculty in Contemporary Art

History at the University of Palermo, with a PhD Magna Cum Laude at FU Berlin, focussing his research on art market studies and arts management, media and performance art, as well as digital and public humanities. He published with publishers of international renown such as Palgrave, Bloomsbury and Marsilio, further holding speeches at top ranking institutes like Bibliotheca Hertziana di Roma, Sotheby's Institute of Art, University College London, New York University, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. His book *The Road To Parnassus* (Vernon Press, 2015) was long listed at Berger Prize 2016. He was director assistant and jury secretary at the Venice Biennale. Later he curated the archives of Douglas Gordon (Berlin), Sigmar Polke (Cologne) and Julia Stoschek (Düsseldorf). He collaborated with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, ArtVerona and La Fenice Theatre. He is an author for the documentary programme *Wikiradio* on Rai Radio 3.

9. Stefania De Vincentis, Found in transition. *Uno sguardo ai musei d'arte attraverso l'Intelligenza Artificiale*

The digital strategies adapted to the museum place correspond to a technological reading of it in a panic key, seen as a total inclusiveness together with a complete immersion in the place of conservation and artistic creation. It is no coincidence that, in defining the artistic object, thanks also to its reproduction in DAW (Digital Art Work) for NFT platforms, we consider its “phygital form”, both real and digital, establishing the added value of the art work. This article aims to present this duplicity assumed by the artistic object through the lens of Artificial Intelligence, by examining how this technology intervenes within the museum, alongside with historical research; investigating the process of artistic creation; supporting the visitor in the process of recognition and interpretation of the cultural asset.

Stefania De Vincentis is a Tenure-Track Faculty at the University Ca' Foscari Venice, in the Department of Humanities, where she teaches History of Contemporary Art, Digital and Public Art, Digital Iconography and Iconology Studies. She is also a member of the Venice Center for Digital and Public Humanities (VeDPH). Her interests and research include digital museography, virtual access to the museum environment, description models for digitized collections, technologies to support art historical research and digital art history.

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edited by Mimmo Cangiano, Filippo Luca Samburgaro

This miscellaneous volume aims at offering a fresh and updated view of adaptation and transmedial practices. In the wake of Linda Hutcheon's groundbreaking study, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), it discusses theories and exemplary case studies from different critical perspectives and points of view assessing past and present trends, and envisioning future prospects. The volume is divided in three macro-sections: *Theories* explores some methodological and theoretical facets of adaptation; *Practices I* includes analyses of literary, cinematographic and theatrical texts; *Practices II* discusses transmedial examples relating to arts. The book ends with the interview with the Czech-German artist Michael Bielický, a pioneer in the use of multiple media (especially digital ones).

Mimmo Cangiano teaches Literary Criticism and Comparative Literatures at University Ca' Foscari Venice. He has mainly dealt with European modernism, Marxism and far-right culture.

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