

On Transcodification: A Proposal for a Code-Oriented Approach to Adaptation and Intermediality

Mattia Petricola, Department of Humanities, University of L'Aquila, Italy

Abstract

My paper proposes to look at intermedial processes as part of the larger set of transformations through which the “elements” (memes, concepts, characters, narratives, etc.) that make up our culture migrate from one knowledge system to another. I will thus try to define and to interrogate the notion of *transcodification*, that first appeared in Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation*, as a potentially useful contribution to the field of adaptation/intermedial studies.

I will start by observing that the novels of J.R.R. Tolkien have not only spawned an incredibly complex intermedial network, but have also become the basis of a spiritual belief system – and that something similar has happened to the storyworlds of *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*. Can fiction-based religions be considered adaptations? And do such phenomena fall within the scope of intermedial studies? I will suggest that they do, provided that we look at adaptation less in terms of media than in terms of *codes*. To emphasize such a shift in focus, I will propose to define these exchanges between radically different semiotic realms as falling under the notion of *transcodification* – a category which both includes and transcends adaptation.

I will then discuss some examples of transcodification, ranging from the relation between Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Tournier’s novel *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* to that between Freud’s psychosexual theory and the Oedipus myth, and from Erwing Goffman’s application of the language of theatrical performance to sociology to Hilary Putnam’s study of the “brain in a vat” scenario (a classical trope of science fiction) from the perspective of the philosophy of consciousness.

I will conclude by sketching some hypotheses about what transcodification is and how it can be used as a tool to map the transfer of semiotic and aesthetic resources across cultures, knowledge systems, and disciplines.

Keywords

Theory, Adaptation, Intermediality, Transcodification, Transdisciplinarity

Bio

Mattia Petricola teaches literary theory at the University of L'Aquila (Italy). His research interests sit at the crossroads of intermedial studies, thanatology, and speculative fiction. He authored, with Massimo Fusillo, an essay on intermediality in the European baroque published in the *Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*. He has published on the intermedial reception of Dante's *Divine Comedy* from the 1990s to today, as well as on Peter Greenaway, Philip K. Dick, Bill Viola, and the notion of spectrality in intermedial studies.

ORCID-ID/Websites

ORCID-ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7992-6118>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.fr/citations?user=3sIowM0AAAAJ&hl=en>