

Adaptation as a Transmedial Process

Theories and Practices

edited by

Mimmo Cangiano, Filippo Luca Sambugaro



Collana Studi e Ricerche 137

STUDI UMANISTICI
Serie Media and heritage

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SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ EDITRICE

2023



This volume was published with the support of Bembus. A Knowledge Production Community in the Humanities, within the research project Transmediality and Comparative Studies.

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Sapienza Università Editrice

Piazzale Aldo Moro 5 – 00185 Roma

www.editricesapienza.it

editrice.sapienza@uniroma1.it

Iscrizione Registro Operatori Comunicazione n. 11420

Registry of Communication Workers registration n. 11420

ISBN: 978-88-9377-279-2

DOI: 10.13133/9788893772792

Publicato nel mese di giugno 2023 | *Published in June 2023*



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Impaginazione a cura di | *Layout by:* Marco Sartor

In copertina | *Cover image:* immagine generata con Intelligenza Artificiale DALL-E (<https://labs.openai.com/>).

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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 time¹.

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.

la Biennale di Venezia

54. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte
Eventi collaterali

Lech Majewski / Bruegel suite

June 4th - November 27th

Chiesa di San Lio
(Castello, Campo San Lio)
open every day except Sundays
9am - 5pm

Additional venue: **Campo San Pantalon**
(Dorsoduro 3711)
every day and night

Curator: Michael Francis Gibson

The City of Torun

KATOWICE

mestiere cinema

Arts Councils of Europe

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 aesthetic reappropriation and self-definition of Pacific culture, such as with the photographic project *Digital Marae* (2001) which reimagined 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 *imaginATIVE* 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 Perose⁵⁶, 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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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 blackface, 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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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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ISBN 978-88-9377-279-2



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