

TRANSMEDIA



Edited by Johannes Fehrle
and Werner Schäfke-Zell

Adaptation in the Age of Media Convergence

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Adaptation in the Age of Media Convergence

Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence

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1. Introduction: Adaptation in a Convergence Environment

Johannes Fehrle

An increased interest in adaptation studies in the early 21st century has generated countless discussions about rethinking adaptations as well as the field of adaptation studies as a whole. The impression has often been voiced, for instance by Thomas Leitch in his essay for the inaugural issue of the journal *Adaptation*, that adaptation studies is “at a crossroads,” in which its methodology and material are in transition from the discipline’s humble novel-to-film-studies beginnings to a broader, if somewhat unclear, future.¹ As part of a moment in the field’s history, in which scholars repeatedly state ambitious research agendas, Linda Hutcheon has likewise described adaptation studies as moving “well beyond [its] familiar film/performance focus” and on to readings that highlight the politics of our time, the “indigenization” of adaptations, and approaches that question notions of priority and anteriority in unprecedented ways.²

There is, however, another major change – the elephant in the room of adaptation studies, so to speak: since adaptation, at least in its most common understanding, describes the transposition of a story or its elements from one medium to another, it is necessarily bound to questions of mediality and remediation.³ Therefore, one of the most important new developments in adaptation studies is constituted by the shift in the global mediascape in light of the rise of digital media since the 1980s and the spread of the internet

1 Thomas Leitch, “Review Article. Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads,” *Adaptation* 1, no. 1 (2008): 63–77.

2 Linda Hutcheon, “Moving Forward: The Next Step in Adaptation Studies.” In *Adaptation and American Studies: Perspectives on Research and Teaching, With an Afterword by Linda Hutcheon*, ed. Nassim Winnie Balestrini (Heidelberg: Winter, 2011), 213, 217.

3 For my example of a “traditional” or narrow understanding of adaptation, I use Irina Rajewsky’s definition of adaptation as “medial transposition.” Irina Rajewsky, “Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality.” *Intermedialités* 6 (2005): 51.

since the 1990s. This transformation amounts to nothing less than a shift from a largely analog, localized, image- and text-based “Gutenberg Galaxy”⁴ to a more rapidly disseminating mixed analog-digital environment. It is a moment that forces us, once again, to re-examine notions of authorship, control, audiences, sources and adaptations, as well as interactions between medium and consumer, or between consumers and producers.⁵ This volume sets out to explore how these shifts relate to adaptation studies and what they mean for the field. It does so by examining new forms of adaptations and their cultural embeddedness both theoretically and analytically, with the help of a range of texts constituting some of the major new forms of adaptations and adaptation environments that have arisen in the wake of the rise of digital media. In doing so, the contributions examine not only new texts and new media themselves, but the political, technological, social, legal, and economic structures that have shaped them and their being in the cultural world.

The contributions in this collection make clear that this scholarly perspective needs to do more than take into account the shifts in the media studied: it must also examine the ways in which the complex relations always involved in adaptation processes (e.g. the unstable relation between “author,” producer, adapter, rights holders, text(s), and audiences, to name just a few) have become further complicated in convergence culture. As part of this complication, new questions that were often relegated to the margins in the analysis of more traditional adaptations have come to the fore. This is why convergence culture, an environment in which “old and new media collide,”⁶ is of particular interest to adaptation scholars: it highlights in new ways the complex interrelations around texts as well as their critical reception and interpretation that have been raised in adaptation studies since its formation into a more cohesive, more independent field in the last decade. A convergence environment, for instance, further destabilizes received notions of anteriority, authorship, and reception by opening the object of inquiry to texts that differ from older ones that were less physically mutable.⁷

4 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968).

5 Axel Bruns has coined the terms “produser” and “produsage” to highlight the blurring of the boundaries between passive consumption and active participation in a digital environment in which non-commercial actors can relatively easily create and share content online. Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* (New York: Lang, 2008).

6 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

7 Observations about the instability of “source” text and “adaptation” have become a critical commonplace in adaptation studies over the past decade with authors drawing on intertextuality studies, Derridean deconstruction, or Bakhtinian heteroglossia to complicate notions of

With approaches that are geared towards analyzing such phenomena, adaptation studies can shed a new light on the material and the dynamics studied in convergence or transmedia studies, as it applies its comparative mode of analysis to different media. One of the strengths of adaptation studies is its eclectic mix of methods, from intertextuality and poststructuralist literary and media theory to cultural studies. These are applied to ask questions about textual relations, mediality, authorship, authority, and authenticity, to name only a few key concerns of pre-digital adaptation studies. However, as the various contributors to this volume show, a perspective that looks at texts through the dual lens of transmedia and adaptation studies does not end at rephrasing questions that have been conceptualized in poststructuralist and intertextual approaches to adaptation studies. Rather, the introduction of a wide range of new media, production, and reception contexts results not only in a significant change in the material under examination, but must – if we take media, mediality, and their different relations to production, authorship, and audiences seriously – also alter the way in which we study such adaptations and transmedia texts. Some new media, for instance, are at least potentially less narratively linear, e.g. web-based adaptations or recent video games. Other forms of adaptation, such as fanfiction, shift the center of creation away from rights holders and professional creators (however that term is defined and whichever gray areas it encompasses). These agents were once the main providers and facilitators of content and, seemingly by definition, were seen to hold the authority over which adaptations were produced and what they looked like. To be sure, such professionals still retain a central position, but today's increasingly dynamic network of production, reception, and distribution of digital or digitalized media are transforming the playing field. This process is taking place not in the sense of the straightforward democratization hailed in the early stages of the internet, however, but in more complex and often more contradictory ways. Moreover, shifts in the global economy on the one hand and the easier connectability between media, on the other, facilitate the rise of new connected textual corpuses on the side of rights holders and licensors and, on the side of consumers, different relations to these texts become possible that open up the potential for new (creative) interactions.

By the same token, remixes and mashups, new forms of parodies and rewritings, and many other offshoots of this digitally networked dynamic can productively be conceptualized as adaptations. Many of these are

textual stability, fidelity, and authorial control even in the case of comparatively straightforward adaptations from, say, novel to film.

produced for and within fan cultures that are themselves in processes of transformation, with some becoming bigger and more accepted in the cultural mainstream (as suggested by major newspapers like *The Guardian* devoting articles to fan theories about the newest developments in *Game of Thrones*), others increasingly diversifying, and still others forming niche groups that stand not only in relation to one another but have been integrated into commercial processes through media content that follows an intensified “narrowcasting” logic.⁸ Fan-based and largely fan-targeted adaptations, which were still somewhat hermetic when Camille Bacon-Smith and others produced their early work in fan studies, are now shared in communities that have become much more accessible.⁹ *In toto*, the rise of digital media and the effect it has had on patterns of production, reception, and interaction in a convergence environment, in which new and older media coexist and interact, quite possibly constitutes the single most important development in the material we study as adaptation and (trans)media scholars since the advent of film and photography in the 19th century.

The Blurring of Practices... and Definitions

Looking at texts in a convergence environment from an adaptation studies angle (or at adaptations from a transmedia perspective) raises questions of how the concepts of adaptation and convergence culture are connected, where they can be productively brought into contact, how far they might overlap, and where they should best be kept separate to retain their respective analytical strengths. Such questions are not only difficult (some would say impossible) to answer but also decidedly unpopular in an academic environment and a field like adaptation studies that remains deeply committed to a poststructuralist deconstruction of categories.

To be sure, neither this introduction nor the collection offer final answers to the question of definitions, differences, and overlaps, in part due to its contributors’ diverse materials and perspectives. One position that all contributions share, however, is the conviction that the more fluid and dynamic ways in which texts are being appropriated and re-appropriated in a convergent environment necessitate an expansion of the concept of

8 Cf. Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 5.

9 Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

adaptation beyond the original notion of a more or less unidirectional transposition from one medium to another. This conceptualization, which was always problematic, promises finally to be laid to rest by the more dynamic media environment of convergence culture, as the simultaneous shifts in the mediascape and in the field of adaptation studies have led to a marked increase in the type of processes and texts that many scholars (including the contributors to this volume) are willing to regard as adaptations. These scholars point to shifts in the media environment and new textual (inter)relations that call into question what seemed a relatively intuitive and clear-cut process of “translation” between neatly separated media and practices.

To exemplify the blurring of conceptual boundaries that undermines all sharp distinctions, including those between the three analytical categories I will propose below, we can turn to transmedia franchises and how their worlds are constituted. There is today a greater tendency than in a pre-digital environment by both intellectual property holders and fans to form interconnected clusters of texts that explore what Matt Hills has called the “hyperdiegesis” of a fictional creation, i.e. a “vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered.”¹⁰ With an eye to official materials being created for and distributed across multiple media platforms, critics have labeled this phenomenon variously as “transmedia storytelling” (Jenkins), “transmedia worlds” (Lisbeth Klastrup and Susanna Tosca), “world-building” (Mark J.P. Wolf), “franchise storytelling” (Clare Parody), or – closing the circle between convergence, franchise practices, and adaptation studies – “transmedia adaptations” (Siobhan O’Flynn).¹¹

10 Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 137, cited in Dan Hassler-Forest, *Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Politics: Transmedia World-Building beyond Capitalism* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 3. On the prevalence of transmedia narratives, cf. Dan Hassler-Forest’s observation that “we’ve seen how transmedia franchising and world-building has really surged over the past two decades, to the point where fantastic fiction seems to dominate the media industries and our cultural landscape more and more.” In Henry Jenkins, “Science Fiction World Building in a Capitalist Society: An Interview with Dan Hassler-Forest (Part One),” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, March 22, 2007, accessed February 15, 2019, <http://henryjenkins.org/2016/09/science-fiction-world-building-in-a-capitalist-society-an-interview-with-dan-hassler-forest-part-one.html>.

11 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*. Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca, “Transmedial Worlds – Rethinking Cyberworld Design.” In *Proceedings International Conference on Cyberworlds 2004*, ed. Masayuki Nakajima, Yoshinori Hatori, and Alexei Sourin (Los Alamitos: IEEE Computer Society, 2004), 409–416. Mark J.P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-Creation* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Clare Parody, “Adaptation Essay Prize Winner: Franchising/Adaptation,” *Adaptation* 4, no. 2 (2011): 210–218. Siobhan O’Flynn, “Designing for the Interactant: How Interactivity Impacts on Adaptation.” In *Adaptation and American Studies: Perspectives on Research*

Many instances of what these critics have labeled as transmedia storytelling, world-building, or transmedia worlds, are not adaptations in the narrow sense of an attempt to recreate existing stories in a new medium. Rather, they expand on the original instantiation of a storyworld, expanding its hyperdiegesis as they adapt, transform, and add to what Klastrup and Tosca call the “core elements” of a fictional world.¹² In most cases of transmedia storytelling, “a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” and even more clearly in less tightly orchestrated transmedia expansions, we have texts which relate to each other, in some cases depend on each other, and often mark this relation very clearly and explicitly.¹³ Despite the linked feature of intertextuality, Jenkins has nevertheless excluded adaptations from his concept of transmedia storytelling, insisting on a distinction “between ‘extensions’ to the core narrative or the fictional universe and adaptations which simply move content from one medium to another.”¹⁴

In contrast to Jenkins, the contributions in this volume suggest that there are benefits to conceptualizing transmedia franchising and the related

and Teaching, With an Afterword by Linda Hutcheon, ed. Nassim Winnie Balestrini (Heidelberg: Winter, 2011), 83.

It is worth considering to what extent the separation between official products and ancillary fan productions, which at least implicitly underlies most critics’ focus on official (i.e. commercial) creation, is helpful and where it is either unnecessary or even hinders our understanding of texts and practices. I discuss this question below with regard to fanfictions, but it seems worth pointing out here that one of the effects of concepts such as “transmedia storytelling” is a championing of commercial productions. Mark Wolf, for instance, only mentions fan creations towards the end of *Building Imaginary Worlds*. While he acknowledges the long history of “unauthorized sequels” and muses that such “fan productions can be seen as an extension of what audiences do all the time while experiencing a world; filling in gaps as world gestalten occur,” Wolf nevertheless ultimately relegates them to the margins. Brushing fan creations, engagement, and interpretation off, he proclaims that such “theories and gap-filling ideas” are thought by “many fans” to be “canon, when they actually [!?] are not” (Wolf, *Building*, 279). What is clear from Wolf’s wording is that he grants commercial culture a primacy that de-authorizes fan work and seems to allow fan creations to become canon only when it is officially recognized and even then it “is usually only accepted at a lower level of canon” (Ibid., 280).

12 Klastrup and Tosca, “Transmedial Worlds,” 413.

13 Henry Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling 101,” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, March 22, 2007, accessed February 15, 2019, http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html. The concept of transmedia storytelling has been contentious from the beginning, cf. from a narratological perspective: Marie Laure-Ryan, “Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword of New Narrative Experience?” *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 7.2 (2015): 1–19.

14 Henry Jenkins, “The Aesthetics of Transmedia: In Response to David Bordwell (Part One),” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, September 10, 2009, accessed February 15, 2019, http://henryjenkins.org/2009/09/the_aesthetics_of_transmedia_i.html.

building of transmedia worlds from an adaptation studies perspective. Perhaps the main benefit of such an approach is that we do not need to draw a line between transmedial clusters of connected texts that expand and adaptations that retell, a line that risks becoming pedantic and counter-intuitive in light of current production practices. To take only one example: should we treat the various versions of the *LEGO Star Wars* video games as adaptations because they allow us to reenact the plot of the various movies somewhat “faithfully” (to use that loaded term), while disregarding that they do so in a manner modified by their action-adventure genre, the fact that the characters are now LEGO figures in an environment made of LEGO blocks, and that they poke fun at the movies through slapstick elements? These alterations essentially transform the genre of a movie like *Star Wars* from epic adventure to comic farce. If we focus exclusively on the medial transposition of plot, character, and setting, we would have to include the *LEGO Star Wars* games as adaptations on the basis of their rather direct transfer of main points of the story and characters – and this certainly makes sense. However, following the same narrow definition, we would have to exclude the older video games *Dark Forces* (1995) or *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II* (1997), which are much closer to the original trilogy in terms of atmosphere, genre, and representation of the fictional universe, because their plot and characters are not part of any of the films. If we turn to Linda Hutcheon’s definition of adaptation (or Julie Sanders’ rather similar one), we can also find the basis for a wider definition: both games transpose “a recognizable other work,” they involve “a creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriating/salvaging,” and “an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work.”¹⁵ They therefore qualify as adaptations, as do many fan works which similarly expand the hyperdiegesis.

As this example shows, boundaries between adaptations and franchise expansions are blurry and bound to become artificial or even counterintuitive and counterproductive in cases in which different instantiations of a fictional franchise draw on the same storyworld. They furthermore, at least implicitly, exclude most fan creations, thereby reintroducing a cultural hierarchy through the back door. Rather than stick to a preconceived notion of transposition versus expansion (which, moreover, ignores that every adaptation necessarily expands the story it adapts), we should instead ask ourselves why we look at text A, which directly identifies a novel or film as a primary source text, but not at text B, which is as clearly connected to that film, novel, or comic, being linked textually and paratextually to

15 Hutcheon, *Theory*, 8. Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006).

the same franchise and fictional universe. As the contributions in this collection suggest, there is, in fact, much to be gained by widening both our area of inquiry to include convergence texts and our understanding of what constitutes an adaptation. As I want to suggest, a way to avoid niggling discussions such as the one outlined above and to catch all contributions collected in this volume is to reconceptualize adaptation in a convergence environment in a way that the elements that can be adapted include not only plot, character, and other traditional story elements, but also *storyworlds*.

Media Convergence: The Transformation of Texts, Contexts, and Audiences

Before going into how new media and the new convergence environment impact on adaptations and transmedia texts, it seems appropriate to re-examine Henry Jenkins' concept of convergence culture and how it relates to adaptations. Whereas convergence culture results from the rise of new media, Jenkins' discussion already indicates that its impact transcends mere technological innovation. To begin with, he defines convergence culture not in terms of new media fully replacing older media, but as the coexistence and mutual influencing of old and new media. This in turn creates new forms of texts and interactions between participants in the creation, consumption, and interpretation of these texts. But technology is only one aspect of this transitory moment. As Jenkins writes, a convergence environment is one in which "old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways."¹⁶ While convergence thus originates from a shift towards digital media, for Jenkins research should include the actors, particularly recipients and their interactions with texts, with each other, and with professional creators. After all, "[c]onvergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others."¹⁷

This focus on consumer reception and interaction to complement questions of mediality is crucial. It serves as a reminder of the more openly participatory nature of cultural production and reception in a convergence environment that understands new media as not only part of a new text base with new medial allowances and ontologies but part of a new *praxis*: what people do with texts and how they do it is at least as important as what the texts

¹⁶ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

themselves do. This approach can serve as an important corrective for adaptation studies, which has too often remained at the level of comparative textual analysis. Jenkins' concept thus challenges adaptation studies to approach not only texts but the contexts of their creation, distribution, and reception.

It is in this vein that the contributors to this volume situate their theoretical models and approach their case studies. They avoid the temptation of reading the texts as traditional adaptations that simply add new media into the mix and situate them instead in their cultural framework while also taking into account the dynamic interactions of their environments, be that YouTube cover culture (Constandinides), showrunners interacting with fans (Poore), fanfiction and mashup writers who turn towards commercial publishing (Soller; Voigts), or the cultural and legal frameworks in which the media industry operates (Schärfke).

Considering new trends in convergence culture and connecting them to previous research positions, this collection suggests that the transformations of media and the media industries most relevant for adaptation studies can be described as falling into three main developments:

1. the rise of new media as containers for adapted stories (e.g. computer games, networked text bodies such as wikis, online versions of older media like video or text formats, etc.) and the novel potentialities they bring with them (e.g. a greater interactivity between user and text, an ability to connect texts more closely across different media, means of expression that converge across new and old media, and so forth);
2. the transformation of audiences, regarding both their willingness and their ability to participate, and their self-conception as empowered, contributing consumers vis-à-vis media producers;
3. the transformation of production, distribution, and marketing structures under globalized neoliberal capitalism, including the rise of a franchising logic impacting (adaptive) text clusters in their form, content, production, marketing, and reception. The spread of franchised expansions that connect text corpora can take the form that Jenkins has called "trans-media storytelling," but a looser connection is much more common. Following Derek Johnson, Claire Parody, and others, I will call this "franchising" or "media franchising."¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid., 95–134. Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101;" Johnson, *Media Franchising*; Parody, "Franchising/Adaptation," 210–218.

Going through these developments one by one, the most obvious and basic novelty is without doubt constituted by new (digital) media. Various internet platforms or digital entertainment formats such as video games offer new outlets into which texts from older media can be adapted. This can happen in more or less traditional ways, e.g. by retelling a plot in a different medium – with all the complications and dimensions adaptation theory continues to spell out for such seemingly simple “retellings” even in more stable, “old” media – or it can take new forms that build more strongly on these media’s affordances. Whereas older media likewise depend on reader or viewer interaction in the form of interpretation as well as more material, embodied interaction with a text, digital media “do not simply place us in front of a static text; they situate us inside a system that continually produces a dynamic object.”¹⁹ Therefore, one thing that is new about many of these new media forms is that they offer ways of interaction between consumer and “text” that transcend those of older media. This can take the form of interaction with the work in its narrow sense, as is the case in video games in which users are allowed to impact on the ways in which they experience the story (at least to the extent that games’ rule-based structure allows for), or on a broader textual level, as in the case of platforms which allow participation or immediate feedback (as, for instance, in the YouTube covers, which Costas Constandinides examines in his contribution).²⁰ In many of these media, the consumer’s influence on the unfolding of the text goes beyond the insistence of poststructuralist and reader-response inspired adaptation theory that recipients are always and by necessity co-creators, even in media which allegedly put them in the role of “passive” recipients (the classic examples being television or film, particularly as conceptualized by apparatus theory). As such, new media facilitate new ways of engagement and new forms of storytelling, and this is one direction in which adaptation theory in a convergence environment can orient itself.

In one early attempt to integrate the increasingly prominent modes of interactivity into an adaptation framework, Linda Hutcheon proposed the concept of “modes of engagement” to address the various ways in which users interact with a variety of media. She suggests three modes of engagement:

19 Marie-Laure Ryan, “Digital Media.” In *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 329–330.

20 Here I invoke, and somewhat bastardizing, the distinction of work and text introduced by Roland Barthes in “From Work to Text.” In *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), 155–164. Whereas Barthes is interested in the role of the reader of traditional printed works and their intertextual involvement with it, participatory culture adds to this possibilities of actual textual environments and ways of interaction, such as recombining, commenting etc.

telling, showing, and the interactive mode, which she finds among other media in novels (telling), film and TV (showing), and video games and theme parks (interactive). Hutcheon argues that while “no one mode is inherently good at doing one thing and not another [...], each has at its disposal different means of expression – media and genres – and so can aim to achieve certain things better than others.”²¹ This fruitful area of research is one in which adaptation studies can build on related fields such as transmedial narratology, for just as new media call for a new narrative theory, so too do more interactive media necessitate a rethinking of adaptation studies. This new direction in adaptation studies will, however, also require critical perspectives from other disciplines, such as game studies, which have developed alongside these media and can therefore shed light on their particularities. In order to fully grasp what such new media adaptations do, newer approaches have to challenge and complement categories and ways of thinking developed in the more traditional, hermeneutically oriented, narratological, literary or film studies approaches that still dominate adaptation studies.²²

Secondly, the networked digital media environment of convergence culture facilitates fan creations in unprecedented forms and numbers that range from fanfiction and videos to machinima (videos or films created using computer

21 Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 22, 24.

22 In 2004, Marie-Laure Ryan attempted to answer the question “Will New Media Produce New Narratives?”. She highlighted three shifts in narrative that follow the rise of new media: “new models of user involvement and new things to do with narrative,” “new ways to present stories,” as well as the challenge of finding the best fit between a medium and the “form and substance of the narrative content” best suited for that medium (Marie-Laure Ryan, “Will New Media Produce New Narratives?” in *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 354–356). Ten years later, Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon collected attempts to formulate a “media-conscious narratology” to meet these demands (Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, eds., *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014)), a project which Thon has since extended into a monograph (Jan-Noël Thon, *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016)). While such attempts at developing a transmedial or media conscious narratology are, without doubt, productive, an approach that focuses primarily or even exclusively on narrative may produce its own blind spots for an analysis of media that work not only, and sometimes not even primarily, through narrative. This is a point I explore in my attempt to take seriously the media potentiality of video games and their ludic quality and to caution adaptation scholars against reading the medium from a perspective that looks only at representations (Johannes Fehrlé, “Gaming into the *Heart of Darkness*: Adapting Conrad/Coppola,” *South Atlantic Review* 80, no. 3–4 (2016): 234–253). Taking a different approach, Werner Schäfke-Zell has highlighted the challenges and chances of examining video games as texts from a philological perspective in Werner Schäfke, “Videospiele als Text aus der Perspektive der Editionswissenschaft,” *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* 32 (2010): 343–353.

graphics engines, usually of video games), mashups, and countless other forms of user engagement with commercial and non-commercial fictional creations, an engagement that, in turn, also influences the logics and aesthetics of commercial creations. This kind of participation is not a new phenomenon, but rather, as Martin Butler argues, “has been an integral part, if not a defining characteristic of popular culture.”²³ Nevertheless, it has become more widespread, visible, and accepted in recent years. For this reason, fan culture needs to be taken into account to gain a full perspective on the range of texts and adaptations in convergence environments, as well as what people do with them.

Looking at transmedia phenomena from an adaptation studies perspective raises the question of where it is helpful to treat texts as adaptations and where applying a different framework may be more productive. The transformations of audiences and audience positions force us to think through how to reformulate our understanding of adaptation in order to do justice to this new cultural and medial environment while maintaining a certain sharpness of our critical focus and tools of analysis. One crucial difference in examining fan-created vis-à-vis commercial adaptations is that the goal of fan adaptations is usually not the monetary one of industrial productions. Fan creation instead participates in an alternative economy that traditionally defines itself as a “gift economy.” This makes fan culture a social space that functions according to a different symbolic economy. While fans welcome corporate recognition to an extent, many are suspicious of attempts to monetize their creative force in ways that are too openly commercial or that enforce restrictions violating the field’s rules.²⁴ The reflection on various motivations behind the production of texts, as well as the unwritten rules by which they are made, shared, and consumed, are only some aspects in relation to which fan creations are different. They nevertheless point both to productive new questions for adaptation studies and to the questions raised above: which texts generate productive new questions and insights when they are conceptualized as adaptations (and hence approached from an adaptation studies’ angle), and where are texts more usefully conceptualized under a different concept, such as “appropriation,”²⁵ or a separate part of convergence culture that does not benefit from an adaptation studies perspective?

23 Martin Butler, “Net-Works: Collaborative Models of Cultural Production in Web 2.0 Contexts.” In *Precarious Alliances: Cultures of Participation in Print and Other Media*, ed. Martin Butler, Albrecht Hausmann, and Anton Kirchhofer (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), 19.

24 Cf. Roberta Pearson, “Fandom in the Digital Era,” *Popular Communication* 8, no. 1 (2010): 84–95.

25 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*.

As Julie Sanders has argued, adaptation “signals a relationship with an informing source text or original,” whereas appropriation “frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain.” In this sense, one could ask what lies behind the classification of fanfictions as adaptation or appropriation. Such texts, while they announce their relationship with a source text paratextually, could, in some cases, be argued to move the characters, settings, and so forth “into a wholly new cultural product and domain.” Far from reinstating preconceived boundaries between official and unofficial (and by implication more or less valid) adaptations, we should rather ask what is gained and what is overlooked by regarding e.g. Watson/Holmes slash fiction, i.e. fanfiction that depicts a homosexual relationship between Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, as adaptation as opposed to appropriation (or vice versa)? Such fan works establish a clear relationship to an original – often the BBC show *Sherlock* (2010–) – but transform it according to the rules of their community. But does this mean that their rewriting no longer “remains ostensibly” *Sherlock* and therefore falls out of Sanders’ definition of adaptation?²⁶ If not, where do they move into the territory of appropriation or beyond it? Should we even care? What critical benefit and analytical sharpness can we draw from such a distinction? And finally, where does our question come from: are economic interests, the authorial or corporate control over a text, central for our question or do we simply perpetuate a certain cultural hierarchy surrounding “official” texts? Why should we accept Bollywood adaptations of Jane Austen, which transform the text to fit generic patterns and audience expectations, but not fan adaptations, which likewise transform a fiction according to dominant genre conventions, merely subcultural and less recognized ones like the slash or hurt/comfort genre?²⁷ Rather than trying to (re-)establish a boundary between official texts that remain “faithful” and unofficial (and by implication less valuable) fan works, a distinction that has haunted mainstream discussions of fandom for too long, the goal needs to be to see what is gained from discussing different fan works as acts of adaptation.

26 Ibid., 26.

27 On the point of pornographic (fan) adaptations and the generic questions of locating them, see Kyle Meikle, “Pornographic Adaptation: Parody, Fan Fiction, and the Limits of Genre,” *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* 8, no. 2 (2015): 123–140. On slash fiction and its relation to official products more broadly, as well as the different questions fan studies raises when studying media franchises, see e.g. Vera Cuntz-Leng, *Harry Potter que(e)r: Eine Filmsaga im Spannungsfeld von Queer Reading, Slash-Fandom und Fantasyfilmgenre* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015).

One instance where adaptation studies can clearly benefit from fan studies are cases in which audience participation generates new forms and means of expression, which can then re-enter commercial culture, as the very different examples of E.L. James and Cassandra Clare, mashup novels, and *The LEGO Movie* discussed by Soller, Voigts, and Goggin make clear. Yet again, context is essential. Whereas participatory culture introduces new modes and forms of interaction, their integration into commercial culture sometimes reduces them merely to a simulation of a participatory ethos, gestures of participation ironically broken, decontextualized, and fed into a marketing machine that makes them fall short of the more flexible and processual aspects of fan creations. Such examinations hint at an aesthetic and economic entanglement of commercial and fan culture that is also the focus of some recent work in fan studies.

Fan studies has significantly complicated the view of fans as a resistant community operating against those in power or a wholly independent field operating according to its own subcultural capital. Instead, scholars now examine fandoms as intricately, and often contradictorily, interwoven with economies of production and distribution that partly question and partly contribute to major media companies' economic mechanisms. Moreover, fan communities uphold the social status quo in some areas while questioning it elsewhere.²⁸ A perspective that treats as its subject matter fannish or "audience-driven adaptations"²⁹ therefore needs to take into account the multiple and sometimes contradictory layers of legal, technological, economic, and cultural dynamics that order and regulate the dialogue and exchanges between fan culture and the media industries.

Finally, the third major direction for adaptation studies in a convergent environment is related to and overlaps with the two tendencies already outlined. Over the last few years, a number of what Siobhan O'Flynn calls "multiple, transmedia adaptations" have emerged. She refers to texts that have been adapted into multiple media in rapid succession. O'Flynn uses Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass* as an example, but the list can easily be expanded to include the countless products in the *Star Wars*, *The Lord of*

28 Sophie Einwächter's insightful dissertation follows this process of regarding fans as economic actors, Sophie G. Einwächter, *Transformationen von Fankultur: Organisatorische und ökonomische Konsequenzen globaler Vernetzung*, PhD, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, 2014. Other examples can be found in Vol. 15 (2014) of the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* that examines "Fandom and/as Labor" and specifically raises questions of free labor and the exploitation of fan work, cf. Mel Stanfield and Megan Condis, "Fandom and/as Labor," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 15 (2014).

29 Meikle, "Pornographic Adaptation," 130. Cf. also Simone Murray, *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 189.

the Rings, *Game of Thrones*, *Tomb Raider*, or *Alien* franchises. In these cases, novels, films, and video games coexist with commercial radio and stage play adaptations, board games, and so forth, as well as countless unofficial fan adaptations/appropriations. These interconnected text clusters as much as the phenomena of new narrative media and fan creations demonstrate “that the definition and practices of adaptation are changing with the evolution of new forms.”³⁰ Just as adaptation studies approaches can draw on newer forms of television or video game studies in studying the first, and on fan studies’ approaches in coming to terms with the second development, here, too, adaptation scholars come into contact with those working under the labels of transmediality or convergence culture, transmedial narratology, and other fields. The clustered adaptations produced within a franchise logic of excess and multiplicity challenge concepts of narrative cohesion, sequence, and so forth; a phenomenon which, as Rüdiger Heinze demonstrates in his contribution, benefits from a narratologically informed adaptation studies perspective.

As this discussion makes clear, adaptation studies needs to build on a variety of disciplines to view convergent adaptations and franchise media not only in their intertextual, but also in their societal framework. Factors that come to the fore are related to social changes, changes in the structures of production and distribution, and so forth. Literary and film studies, the disciplines that have traditionally informed adaptation studies methodology, only offer limited tools to describe and conceptualize these. To the extent that adaptation and transmedia studies ground themselves on a cultural materialist approach, the historical and industry transformations that production studies focuses on need to influence the direction from which we approach adaptations in a convergent environment.³¹ Approaches that already incorporate such elements as how Hollywood industry structures impact the shape of certain film adaptations suggests that the field can easily do so.

This Volume

The contributors to *Adaptation in the Age of Media Convergence* both individually and collectively expand the horizon of the fields of adaptation and

30 O’Flynn, “Designing for the Interactant,” 83.

31 Johnson, *Media Franchising*. Derek Johnson, “Battleworlds: The Management of Multiplicity in the Media Industries.” In *World Building: Transmedia, Fans, Industries*, ed. Marta Boni (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 129–142.

transmedia studies to come to terms with those changes laid out above. The contributions make clear that a project of rethinking adaptation in a convergent environment means that not only old and new media, but also old and new questions and research methods need to “collide” and be brought together in new ways.³² To come to terms with the rise of digital media as media with new affordances, the transformation of the dynamics of contribution, control, and brand management, as well as the transformation of economic and legal structures of production, profit, and exploitation, contributions therefore draw on a wide variety of fields and approaches, and adapt their methodology to the material studied. As the contributions show, such methods can range from 19th-century theories such as pragmatist philosophy or the theory of evolution (Schober), via 20th-century narratology (Heinze), film studies (Goggin), and legal studies (Schäfer), to 21st-century theories developed in media and fan studies (Poore; Soller; Constandinides). They can also include re-evaluations of previously marginal concepts from literary studies such as Gérard Genette’s notion of paratexts, which scholars such as Jonathan Gray and Dorothee Birke and Birte Christ have in recent years brought to bear on non-print media (Voigts).³³

As the authors engage with the sometimes new, sometimes seemingly novel but merely transformed phenomena that emerge in a convergent environment around adaptive phenomena, they map the challenges of new media, fan engagement, and content and rights management by franchise holders, as well as the creation of interconnected transmedial texts and franchises. In this fashion, they offer remappings of adaptational practices within new media and the field as a whole.

Regina Schober proposes a model that regards adaptations not as a unidirectional process from “original” to derivative text, but instead as a set of dualisms between “source medium” and “adaptation” on one side, and “producer” and “recipient” on the other. To make her point, Schober draws on evolutionary theory and pragmatism. She combines this with recent network theory to develop a model that accounts for the inherently complex, non-linear, and decentralized dynamics of cultural processes, including adaptations. Adopting Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory, she highlights shifting connections between human and non-human actors. Adding biological conceptions of adaptation to this Latourian network

32 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 2.

33 Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010). Dorothee Birke and Birte Christ, “Paratext and Digitized Narrative: Mapping the Field,” *Narrative* 21, no. 1 (2013): 65–87.

perspective, Schober proposes to reconceptualize success in adaptations as a process of survival in a new cultural environment through (evolutionary) adaptation.

The following contributions by Bettina Soller, Eckart Voigts, and Costas Constandinides examine texts whose production and aesthetics either emerged in fan circles and then became commercialized or are positioned, commercially or aesthetically, between the professional and non-professional sphere. In her chapter, Bettina Soller analyzes what she calls “layered adaptation,” a process through which texts that began their lives as (erotic) fanfiction of successful novels can be transformed first into books that stand on their own, then adaptations that finally launch their own separate franchises. Both of her primary examples, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (originally a piece of *Twilight* fanfiction) and *The Mortal Instruments* (originally *Harry Potter* fanfiction) were shared in the online fanfiction community before being rewritten for commercial publication as independent works. In her article, Soller discusses a range of topics, from issues of intellectual property to questions of collective versus individual authorship that become even more complicated in fanfiction with its processes of beta-readers and community feedback. In this fashion, Soller traces the networks of actors involved in adaptations, as well as the evolutionary/commercial flourishing of their products that Schober theorized in her contribution, by analyzing concrete examples. Instead of dwelling on these theoretical issues, Soller therefore traces how fans can “change sides” and turn into authorial and authoritative figures by shaping their own franchises. Her examination of the ways in which E.L. James, in particular, tries to stage her persona as a writer by strategically managing her past as a fanfiction writer, points to a re-emergence of the role of the author as a figure whose presence organizes a text. It is no coincidence then that similar issues of an uneasy transition from fan to writer reappear in Benjamin Poore’s discussion of Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, creators of BBC’s *Sherlock*, who likewise alternate between building on their credentials as fans and setting themselves apart from their audience.

Eckart Voigts sheds a different light on fannish ways of production that make their way into the commercial mainstream. He examines a genre peculiar to an age of media convergence: the (quirky) mashup novel. He sees these books as adaptations of techniques deriving from fan production, particularly mashing and remixing, that depend to a large degree on the paratextual management of authors and publishers. Novels such as *William Shakespeare’s Star Wars**, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, or *Two Gentlemen of Lebowski* combine high culture with popular texts and phenomena.

As Voigts notes, while these texts paratextually revel in their supposed quirkiness and subversiveness, their practices of textually upholding both the cult status of the texts they “sample,” as well as their adherence to intellectual property laws, make them much less subversive than their authors and their participatory aesthetic suggest.

Costas Constandinides discusses a form likewise peculiar to convergence culture: YouTube cover songs. He conceptualizes these as new forms of adaptation that have already developed their own generic patterns. Building on his older concept of para-adaptation,³⁴ Constandinides describes these videos as “user-generated creative contributions that, on the one hand, are associated with a specific industry-created product and, on the other, wish to feature creative talents or responses in a way that is not limited to paratextual or fan video functions.” In order to highlight the stylistic distinctiveness of YouTube cover songs as a form of convergence culture adaptation (or para-adaptation), Constandinides explores the covers and distinctiveness the videos of cover songs from a media studies perspective. In doing so, he highlights their oscillation between a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) aesthetic that resonates with other forms of online communication, such as vlogs, and attempts to professionalize the recording and video quality. Blurring the boundary between amateur consumers and professional producers, his case studies show how the aesthetics of music videos by both professionals and non-professionals range between appropriating the style of fan-produced content on sharing platforms such as YouTube and the aesthetics of commercial productions, such as aspects of the studio setting popularized by professional music videos. Constandinides’ chapter thus adds a different facet to Sollers’ analysis of the “professionalization” of fan-produced content via publishing works that try to erase fannish elements (partly for legal reasons). Instead, cover song videos strategically highlight aspects of their DIY status as a sign of the para-adaptation aesthetics he identifies in YouTube cover songs. This fannish marker, in some ways, brings these videos closer to those texts that Voigts examines, which likewise depend on a fannish gesture to succeed commercially and comedically, rather than to the polished novels deriving from Clare’s and James’ cleaned up, stand-alone work.

Bringing in yet another critical perspective on the tensions between official and non-official culture, Benjamin Poore examines how Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, the co-creators and lead writers of BBC’s

34 Costas Constandinides, “Para-adaptation: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Convergence Culture,” *Adaptation* 6, no. 2 (2013): 143–157.

contemporaneous Sherlock Holmes adaptation *Sherlock*, stage themselves as *auteurs*. His interest lies particularly in how this self-staging impacts upon their interactions with certain parts of the show's fan base and how this strained relationship is, in turn, reflected in the main narrative of the TV show. As Poore argues, the various tactics through which Gatiss and Moffat try to maintain full control over the popular show and its interpretations take place both within the show's narrative and in public appearances in which Moffat in particular tries to set a legitimate range of engagement and interpretation. This negotiation is caught up in contradiction, because the show at once depends on fan investment, which – like most truly successful contemporary television shows – it caters to with added value hidden in a “drillable” text,³⁵ while at the same time, having its showrunners adamantly delimit the fans' range of authorial/adaptive and interpretative involvement. As Poore writes, “[t]o take fandom any further than one-way consumption is to risk the lead writers' mockery.” According to Poore, this keep-your-hands-off-our-show approach geared at both fans and journalists encapsulates the show's true politics.

While complex television's lead writers can exact strong control over their work, as Poore's discussion of *Sherlock*'s lead writers shows, the expansion of the fuzzier and more diversified *Alien* franchise that Rüdiger Heinze examines opens up multiple “gaps” which – from a primarily narratological perspective – result in the continuity between individual works becoming much looser. As Heinze shows, each contribution to a franchise, no matter how closely its makers try to fit it into a preexisting canon, also includes contradictions. Even as they fill narrative gaps, these franchise contributions create new loose ends, and thus new spaces for further elaboration, facilitating both further franchise production and spaces for fan interpretation and participation. As Heinze contends in his conclusion, which Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss would do well to heed, it is impossible to fully control a fictional universe and its commercial and cognitive receptions.

Focusing on *The LEGO Movie*, Joyce Goggin examines the toy-turned-transmedia franchise to argue that LEGO in general and *The LEGO Movie* in particular project a master builder trope that at once encourages creativity and at the same time closely regulates this creativity. Goggin sees this trope as germane to the greater context of political and economic neoliberalism, in which employees are encouraged to build their careers and lives in a brick-like manner to fit the ever-greater pressures of deregulated labor

35 The notion of drillable media goes back to Jason Mittell, “Forensic Fandom and the Drillable Text,” accessed February 09, 2017, <http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/mittell/>.

markets. What is particularly remarkable is how the film, in a case of what Fredric Jameson would call postmodern “blank parody” or pastiche,³⁶ self-consciously parodies its own rhetoric, while ultimately endorsing as inevitable the very notions of corporate control it both evokes and pokes fun at. From an economic perspective, the film functions to boost sales for all products in the LEGO franchise and other franchises incorporated into it, while it displays a cultural self-awareness that works to cushion LEGO’s moneymaking machinery in an aura of self-aware irony that is not unlike a magnified version of the pseudo-subversive stance taken by the mashup novels examined earlier by Voigts.

In the collection’s final chapter, Werner Schäfke-Zell brings yet another layer into the examination of adaptations and franchises in an increasingly globalized environment. Schäfke examines how legal frameworks limit and influence storyworlds in different national media cultures.³⁷ Looking at the popular *Wolfenstein* video game franchise, he shows how the makers of the various *Wolfenstein* games manage the content to facilitate its international distribution. Schäfke describes legal limitations in the German market that influence depictions of National Socialism and the Holocaust, as well as marketing limitations linked to the self-inscribed “family-friendliness” of the Nintendo Entertainment System. Turning to the games themselves, Schäfke argues that the process of “narrative filtering,” which removes or recodes references to the games’ Nazi antagonists to avoid complications with German laws, actually amplifies a mythologization of Germany’s Nazi past that is already embedded in the original game’s *Verfremdung* (transformation) of historical reality. Ironically, this mythologization becomes much stronger through some of the filtered, superficially de-Nazified alterations released on the German market. As such, a legal framework established to prevent a positive depiction of National Socialism could, in the case of the *Wolfenstein* franchise’s adaptation to legal limitations, actually work to strengthen the games’ “appeal of the forbidden.”

36 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 17.

37 Recently Roberta Pearson has pointed to the function of laws as foundational for the material we study in adaptation and transmedia studies. As Pearson writes, “the beloved fictional worlds we study rest upon the legal and business practices that create, sustain, and protect them” (Roberta Pearson, “World-Building Logics and Copyright: The Dark Knight and the Great Detective.” In *World Building: Transmedia, Fans, Industries*, ed. Marta Boni (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 110).

Taken together, the chapters highlight the diversity of issues around adaptation that arise in a convergence environment. As the contributions individually and collectively make clear, the breadth of disciplinary approaches that are necessary to grasp what happens to adapted texts and franchises in convergence culture transcends even the already broad scope of more traditional adaptation studies. The range of material in convergence culture that can be described as adaptive in some form therefore points to a need for new, sophisticated questions and models that allow us to conceptualize the flows of production, marketing, authorial self-stylization, reception, interaction, participation, and interpretation – to name only some of the most important aspects – which a new media environment raises, restructures, or more clearly lays open. The various branches of the interdisciplinary field of adaptation studies have developed a broad range of powerful approaches and theories to analyze some of these aspects. Given the often openly derivative nature of many convergence cultural products, adaptation studies is well advised to further widen its approaches to continue to be a productive focal point through which a mapping of interrelated texts can be undertaken in a 21st-century media environment.

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