Transmedia, Translation and Adaptation: Parallel Universes or Complex System?

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Article abstract

This article explores the relationship between transmedia narratives, translation, and adaptation, and exposes why one can be lead to believe that these disciplines have very little in common. It first gives a definition of complexity and transmedia narratives, and explains the difference between transmedia, crossmedia, and multimedia. It then describes the types of transmedia projects proposed by Christy Dena (2011, n.p.) and illustrates them with the examples of two cult series' narrative universes, that is, *Twin Peaks* and *Skam*. Transmedia stories, which spread on multiple platforms and involve audience participation, are considered by transmedia theorists to be part of story worlds (story universes, or "storyverses"). Yet, most of these narratives can be considered as adaptations, or as multimodal, intersemiotic translations. Despite the evident relationship between translation, adaptation and transmedia, adaptation is reduced to a mere media transfer, and translation is mostly referred to as an interlinguistic operation in recent academic conversations around transmedia and participatory culture. This article examines how the emergence of transmedia narratives illuminates the fact that adaptation and translation must step into the study of contemporary transmedial landscape, and how transmedia, translation and adaptation could gain from it.

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between transmedia narratives, translation, and adaptation, and exposes why one can be lead to believe that these disciplines have very little in common. It first gives a definition of complexity and transmedia narratives, and explains the difference between transmedia, crossmedia, and multimedia. It then describes the types of transmedia projects proposed by Christy Dena (2011, n.p.) and illustrates them with the examples of two cult series' narrative universes, that is, *Twin Peaks* and *Skam*. Transmedia stories, which spread on multiple platforms and involve audience participation, are considered by transmedia theorists to be part of story worlds (story universes, or "storyverses"). Yet, most of these narratives can be considered as adaptations, or as multimodal, intersemiotic translations. Despite the evident relationship between translation, adaptation and transmedia, adaptation is reduced to a mere media transfer, and translation is mostly referred to as an interlinguistic operation in recent academic conversations around transmedia and participatory culture. This article examines how the emergence of transmedia narratives illuminates the fact that adaptation and translation must step into the study of contemporary transmedial landscape, and how transmedia, translation and adaptation could gain from it.

Keywords: transmedia storytelling, translation, adaptation, complexity, transdisciplinarity

Résumé

Cet article explore les relations entre narration transmédia, traduction et adaptation, et met en évidence les arguments pouvant laisser croire que ces trois disciplines ont très peu en commun. Après avoir défini les notions de complexité et de narration transmédia, j'y rappelle ce qui distingue les projets transmédia, crossmédia et multimédia. Les deux types de projets transmédia établis par Christy Dena (2011, n.p.) sont ensuite décrits et illustrés par les univers narratifs de deux séries, *Twin Peaks* et *Skam*. Les récits transmédia, souvent déclinés sur des plateformes multiples, sont considérés par les chercheurs en transmédia comme faisant partie d'univers narratifs exigeant un

engagement actif de la part du public. Pourtant, la plupart de ces récits peuvent être considérés comme des adaptations ou des traductions intersémiotiques multimodales. En dépit des liens apparents entre traduction, adaptation et transmédia, on constate dans les discussions universitaires récentes sur le transmédia et la culture participative que l'adaptation est souvent réduite à un transfert entre médias, et la traduction, à une opération interlinguistique. Cet article examine comment l'émergence de la narration transmédia met en lumière la nécessité pour la traduction et l'adaptation de s'engager dans l'étude des phénomènes transmédiaux contemporains, et quels en seraient les bénéfices pour la traduction, l'adaptation et le transmédia.

Mots-clés : narration transmédia, traduction, adaptation, complexité, trans-disciplinarité

Introduction

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Sherlock Holmes, agents Mulder and Scully, and the Bennet sisters all share a common point with Pikachu and Luke Skywalker: they are part of complex transmedia story worlds. Transmedia narratives spread on multiple media platforms, filling mutual gaps. They actively engage their audience in translational and adaptational processes which go beyond linguistic or audiovisual transfers. They include fan participation, performance, and play as "performative translations," contributing to the growth of "infinite text" (Canalès, forthcoming).

This article investigates transmedia storytelling as a new narrative mode which questions the borders between translation, adaptation, and storytelling on the one hand, author and audience on the second hand, redefining culture production. Though it exposes academic blind spots in Transmedia Studies, Translation Studies and Adaptation Studies, it is all but accusative. In fact, it is a call for interdisciplinary conversations on narrative modes that I consider translational.

The term "transmedia" being widely used to refer to a variety of processes and outcomes, I will start by explaining what this article is not about, namely screen translation, multimedia and localization. I will then define the notions of complexity and transmedia storytelling, and explain the difference between transmedia, multimedia, and crossmedia. In the following part of the article, I will explain in what ways transmedia storytelling challenges translation and adaptation, and why an interdisciplinary conversation is necessary for both disciplines to embrace transmedia complex perspectives and stay visible in the study of today's narrative landscapes. Finally, I will advocate for

considering translation, adaptation, and transmedia as a complex system that could help tackling contemporary cultural problematics while enriching each field of study rather than opposing or overcategorizing them.

A note of clarification

This article refers to a variety of processes and results, but it does not deal with interlinguistic screen translation, multimedia localization, or audiovisual translation. Though it will mention online practices such as gaming, it does not deal with the linguistic aspects of multimedia interactions, video game localization or the challenges of multimodality in screen translation. It focuses on multimodal, intersemiotic, sometimes non-verbal forms of translation happening in transmedia contexts.

While Henry Jenkins (2003) is generally credited for coining the term "transmedia" used as an adjective, a research group in Translation Studies coined a very similar term at the same period. TransMedia (the research group) was created in London in 2004 by Aline Remael, Anna Matamala, Diana Sanchez, Jorge Díaz-Cintas, Josélia Neves, Mary Carroll, and Pilar Orero to study audiovisual translation (AVT) and accessibility from an interdisciplinary angle (TransMedia, n.d., n.p.). The group and its three branches study issues at the intersection of translation and media, including accessibility, audiodescription, and respeaking, and have issued numerous academic publications.[1] The name TransMedia was chosen as a contraction of "translation" and "media." The mere existence of two similar terms to refer to different phenomena shows the existence of parallel academic universes. But let us dig into what this article is about: transmedia storytelling.

1. Definitions

1.1 Complexity, or acknowledging paradoxes

Philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin, while referring to fundamental physics and biology, claimed that "complexity's presence suggests logical paradoxes," one of them being the coexistence of separability and inseparability (2014, p. 18). What is at stake in the relationship between translation, adaptation and transmedia is very similar, because this relation questions traditional academic logic and

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1. Publications by the TransMedia Research Group are listed on TransMedia's main website (https://www.transmediaresearchgroup.com/publications/all-publications/) and on the website of TransMedia Catalonia (http://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/transmedia/content/publications).

calls for new approaches. For Morin, separating academic disciplines prevents us from addressing fundamental problems. Kobus Marais echoes this when he claims that "what is needed is the ability to embrace paradoxical perspectives to supplement new insights to existing ones without replacing what may be of use in the existing perspectives" (2014, pp. 15-16). This applies to translation, adaptation and transmedia. Existing misconceptions, caused by mutual lack of interest, can prevent researchers from tackling new social practices and their results, described in the following sections.

1.2 Transmedia storytelling

Henry Jenkins, aca-fan[2] and founder of the academic concept of transmedia, gave a first definition of "transmedia storytelling" in 2003, and interestingly chose to define transmedia in opposition to a very reductive view of adaptation, as "a new" and much needed "model for co-creation rather than adaptation of content that crosses media" (2003, n.p.). He later broke down the essential characteristics of a transmedia story: its existence in various media, the relevance of each kind of content for the global story arc, the diversity of considered media types (including theme parks or enactment by play), and the autonomy of each story's development:

> A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained, so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole. (Jenkins, 2008, pp. 95-96)

Transmedia scholars do not foretell traditional media's announced death, due to the growing role of new technologies: according to Olivier Aïm, new media on which transmedia narratives spread do not compete with traditional media like television, all of them maintaining continued complex intertextual relationships (2013, n.p.). Aïm's statement echoes the "media convergence" phenomenon defined by Jenkins:

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2. An aca-fan is an academic who studies fans and identifies as one (Cristofari and Guitton, 2015).

By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted. (2008, pp. 2-3)

This content proliferation and fluidity are, according to Jenkins, beneficial to the stories and the brands. He states that "[i]n the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 3).

In the following subsections, I will provide definitions that will enable the readers to establish distinctions between "transmedia storytelling," "crossmedia storytelling," and "crossmedia branding."

1.3 Multimedia, crossmedia and transmedia

Kevin Moloney (2014)—an emerging media design scholar and journalist—differentiates "media form," that is, "the language a story uses," which can be composed of all types of visual, audio or interactive elements, from "media channel," the place where these forms are reproduced. He uses the concepts of form and channel to provide the following shortcuts, in which we can observe that he establishes a distinction between "stories" and "story worlds," making the latter the marker of transmedia storytelling:

Multimedia = One story, many forms, one channel.

Crossmedia = One story, many channels.

Transmedia = One story world, many stories, many forms, many channels. (Moloney, 2014, n.p.)

Although Jenkins disapproves of reducing transmedia to "a story across multiple media" (2011, n.p.), Moloney's condensed formulas can help in delimiting these kinds of complex texts. With these formulas, we can understand that a DVD with sound and images (single interactive media support) can be qualified as multimedia, whereas a story originating in a book and recreated for a cartoon can be referred to as crossmedia (which is very similar to the common definition of adaptation, hence the common simplification: adaptation = crossmedia).

1.4 Crossmedia branding, transmedia branding and transmedia narratives

The combined use of crossmedia and transmedia strategies by big movie franchises for branding purposes can be confusing. This may be the reason why Marie-Laure Ryan wrote that "many of the phenomena regarded as instances of transmedia storytelling are more or less disguised forms of product placement" (2017, p. 537). Even if franchises' purposes are commercial, transmedia stories are not more commercial than any story issued in a capitalist society. Fan re-creations can serve altruistic representation needs. In fan art, for example, classics are reinterpreted with main characters from underrepresented (or ill represented) minorities.

If, for Jenkins, a transmedia project needs (1) to spread across multiple media platforms, (2) to add understanding to the narrative universe, and (3) to require involvement from fans, a cereal box featuring the image of a beloved cartoon character is a *crossmedia* product. It does not add to a storyline and exists solely for commercial purposes; it can then be considered as part of a *crossmedia branding* strategy. On the other hand, Marvel's 2017 cereal-box collection, with pin codes enabling customers to download previously unpublished digital comic books (customers had to perform an action to acquire an addition to Marvel's story world), can be considered as *transmedia branding* and *transmedia storytelling*. It participates in a wider transmedia narrative and is a case of narrative "extension" that can also be considered an adaptation (Hutcheon and O'Flynn, 2013, p. xxiv). With these distinctions in mind, it is easier to understand Christy Dena's definitions of transmedia project types, as well as her point about how hard it is to consider them without considering adaptation.

2. Dena's categorization of transmedia projects

Transmedia scholar and story designer Christy Dena defined two main types of transmedia projects: (1) "collections of mono-medium stories"; (2) "collections of media that tell a story" (2011, n.p.). I will illustrate them with examples of popular storyworlds.

2.1 A collection of mono-medium stories: *Twin Peaks*

The first kind of transmedia project described by Dena implies a franchise-like system, where a single team of authors continues an existing story on different media while maintaining a creative unity

and control on what Dena calls the "overarching 'story world'"[3] (2011, n.p.). *Twin Peaks* (Lynch *et al.*, 1990-1991; Lynch and Frost, 2017) seems a good example of such a narrative set; it encompasses various official objects on different media:

- a television series with three seasons: *Twin Peaks* (Lynch *et al.*, 1990-1991) and *Twin Peaks: The Return* (Lynch and Frost, 2017);

- a movie prequel: *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (Lynch *et al.*, 1992);

- novels: *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* (Lynch, 1990), *The Autobiography of F.B.I. Special Agent Dale Cooper: My Life, My Tapes* (Frost, 1991), *The Secret History of Twin Peaks* (Frost, 2016), and *Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier* (Frost, 2017);

- a parodic tourist guide of the imaginary town of Twin Peaks: *Welcome to Twin Peaks: An Access Guide to the Town* (Lynch, Frost and Wurman, 1991);

- a set of audio cassettes (now reedited in audiobook version) of Agent Cooper's messages to his assistant: *Diane... The Twin Peaks Tapes of Agent Cooper* (Frost, 1991);

- collectible cards with information on the show's plot: *Twin Peaks Collectible Cards* (Star Pics, 1991);

- action figures (by Funko, 2017).

In this case, the same team of authors has carefully created (or validated the creation of) a varied, yet consistent story world over a period of almost thirty years. While a part of an intricate narrative, each product can be enjoyed separately without previous knowledge of the plot, and adds understanding to the overarching story by telling a part of the story from a different angle.

For example, in the first two seasons of the series, FBI agent Dale Cooper tape-records daily reports for his assistant Diane, who is never seen. Listening to the full recordings (Frost, 2016 [1990]) enables the auditors to dive into Cooper's thoughts and to get complementary insights on the story. Being able to read the diary of Laura

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3. A story arc is, according to Jenkins, a "structure of television narrative in which subplots are developed across multiple episodes, sometimes even across an entire season, or in more extreme cases, across the full run of a series" (2008, p. 298).

Palmer (Lynch, 1990), the murder victim, is also a way of seeing the whole story from her point of view rather than from that of the investigators and to discover plot secrets not revealed in the series' first two seasons. In this, *Twin Peaks*' narrative universe is a textbook case of what Jenkins deems an "ideal" transmedia universe (2008, pp. 95-96). Its fan community, who has shown an unprecedented level of commitment to the series, will be mentioned later.

2.2 A collection of media that tells one story: *Skam*

Unlike the first kind of project described by Dena (sets of "self-contained" stories), this second kind of project is "designed to be transmedia from the beginning," and "to have a reader, audience member or player consume all of the media to understand a single story" (2011, n.p.). This kind of transmedia project is more recent than the first one and is mediated through new technologies and social media. The hugely popular Norwegian series *Skam* (Andem, 2015-2017), produced by NRK (the Norwegian public television channel), is a successful example of this new narrative form. This hit teen drama played by amateur actors follows Norwegian teenagers in their daily life in Oslo. It tackles problems such as interpersonal relationships, love, religion, sexual orientation, body image, bullying, and more.

The episodes of *Skam* are aired without a set schedule and in imitation of real time. For example, if a main scene is set during a high-school afternoon class, the corresponding full episode will be posted online in the afternoon. If the main action is set at an evening party, the episode will be aired at night—which is not actual live, but enhances the audience's immersion in the characters' world by creating the feel of live broadcasts. The actors all have social networking accounts (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat) where they announce the airing of some episodes, interact with the audience, and post pictures of themselves in character. The public's response has been so positive that in 2018, *Skam*'s adaptations have been released in France, Italy, Spain, the USA, and one is said to be due in Canada (Collard, 2017, n.p.).[4] Transmedia researcher and storyteller Max Giovagnoli calls participative projects of this kind "polymorphic narratives" that bring fiction "closer to games" by synchronizing narrative time and performance, which fosters a strong emotional commitment from the public (2011, p. 98).

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4. The adaptation of such an intricate transmedial translational/adaptational product is a process worth studying.

3. Adaptation in Transmedia Theory

Until recently, most Transmedia publications have ignored the existence of or have reproduced "the constant critical denigration of the general phenomenon of adaptation" deplored by Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn (2013, p. xx), except for Dena, who introduced nuanced elements of reflection and a fluid vision of the relationship between narratives, adaptation, and transmedia.

3.1 Adaptation made invisible

Due to his influence, Jenkins's first views on adaptation are still widely shared. For example, filmmaker and transmedia storyteller Jorik Jakubisko includes "making-ofs, soundtracks or compilations of botched scenes" in his definition of adaptations and states that they are not narrative extensions, but just "retell [the] same story" as the original (2016, n.p.), without explaining what he means by sameness or change. Similarly, transmedia storyteller and scholar Geoffrey Long does not use the term "adaptation" or acknowledge the existence of Adaptation Studies; he instead writes about "reboots," "remixes," "re-imagined" story worlds or "reworks" (2017, n.p.).

3.2 Adaptations as points-of-entry

Dena's work started a shift in this perception—or absence thereof—by transmedia theorists through questioning transmedia scholars and practitioners' oppositional position to adaptation. In her PhD dissertation, Dena often referred to adaptation, notably discussing Hutcheon and Flynn's work. She interestingly stated that "adaptation is not always (or ever) redundant" and is one of the various ways to "create (and experience) a transmedia project" (Dena, 2009, p. 160). She also wrote that the way adaptations offer "points of entry" to stories "resonates with the spirit of transmedia" (*ibid.*, pp. 155-156). She later compared adaptations to classical transmedia projects (previously described as "collections of mono-medium stories") and opposed them to the more recent and innovative types of transmedia projects ("collections of media that tell one story") (Dena, 2011, n.p.). Though I will question this second point later, unlike previous dominant claims in the field of Transmedia Studies, these statements not only emphasize the similarities between adaptations and transmedia narratives, but also acknowledge the discipline of Adaptation Studies, opening a door to an academic conversation about their intricate relationship.

3.3 Adaptation as part of a flow

In *Transmedia 202: Further Reflections* (2011), Jenkins, following Dena's claims, refined his assertions about transmedia and adaptation. He admits that it was drastic to say that "[b]asically, an adaptation takes the same story from one medium and retells it in another" whereas "[an] extension seeks to add something to the existing story as it moves from one medium to another" (Jenkins, 2011, n.p.). He also recognized that adaptations are more complex than a *mere* transfer, in that they can bring additive comprehension to stories and can be considered as transformations of existing narratives, an observation very similar to Hutcheon and O'Flynn's idea of a fluid "continuum of adaptative relationships" encompassing transmedia narratives and adaptations (Hutcheon and O'Flynn, 2013, p. xx). Story architect Lance Weiler wrote for his part that he "challenge[s] a lot what is called transmedia" and would rather call it a "narrative flow" (interviewed in Giovagnoli, 2011, p. 93), which makes room for the continuum described by Hutcheon and O'Flynn.

4. Transmedia storytelling by translation and adaptation theorists

The existing definitions and ambiguities of translation and adaptation seem to have a lot in common with those of transmedia narratives. Georges L. Bastin (1993), Yves Gambier (1992), Hugo Vandal-Sirois and Georges L. Bastin (2012), and Julie Sanders (2016) refer to "strategic" adaptations[5] as global adaptations for a different situation (which can imply a new public). Since Hutcheon's first edition of *A Theory of Adaptation* (published in 2006), adaptation scholars have started to study transmedia narratives. However, what is considered to be *transmedia* varies and has paradoxically resulted in relatively few publications yet considering that most stories are transmedial today.

To gain a rough estimate of the interest of translation and adaptation scholars in transmedia storytelling, I decided to count the number of publications with "transmedia" as a keyword in a selection of peer-reviewed journals. The results are presented in Table 1. When the search brought results, the articles did not always deal with transmedia storytelling as defined here in a context of media convergence. For example, the articles in *JAT* (*Journal of Audiovisual Translation*) addressed accessibility, usability, and localization. Sometimes there were no results although the term "transmedia" was mentioned in the

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5. As opposed to "punctual" adaptations, as described by Vinay and Darbelnet (1977, p. 267).

articles, but not as a keyword (see Chaume, 2018). It must also be noted that, unlike their transmedia counterparts, when translation and adaptation scholars write about transmedia storytelling, they duly mention the current research in transmedia by transmedia theorists.

Table 1: Peer-reviewed publications containing the term "transmedia" – 25 April 2020[6]

Journal	Total	Articles	Book reviews	Other	Time range
Adaptation	29	21	4	4	2011-2019
Target	-	-	-	-	2012-2019
Translation Spaces	1	-	-	-	2012
Meta	-	-	-	-	-
TTR	-	-	-	-	-
JoSTrans	-	-	-	-	-
JAT	6	-	-	-	2018-2019

Similar searches with the terms "audiovisual translation," "game localization," or "film" brought dozens of results (articles, books, book reviews). For instance, a search on the keyword "film" in articles brought 295 results in *Adaptation*, 128 results in *Target*, 311 results in *Meta*, and 90 in *TTR*.

5. Challenges

The study of transmedia narrative universes raises a lot more questions than it brings answers, which proves its relevance. It indeed calls for reconsidering translation, adaptation and transmedia "rewritings" as a system, and not as separate universes.

5.1 Translation or adaptation?

Today's narratives, even those of literary classics, are not strictly verbal or monomodal; most belong to story worlds composed of multiple transmedial recreations. Are these "rewritings"—in Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere's words (1990)—translations or adaptations? Transmediality emblematizes the ambiguities deplored by Yves Gambier (1992) and echoed by Aline Remael, who writes:

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6. My aim was not to provide an exhaustive quantitative study; I only wanted to give a quick overview of the current publication landscape.

> [t]he current inundation of text production modes and the ubiquity of image and/or sound in texts have made it virtually impossible to adhere to […] a limited concept of translation. (2010, p. 14)

For Frederic Chaume, transmedia, which he relates to audiovisual translation, is trying the limits of the current definitions of translation. It "obliges the concept of translation to remove its straightjacket in order to embrace these new narratives and products, which are appearing in the audiovisual world" (Chaume, 2018, p. 98), thus questioning the limits between translation and adaptation.

Are not all translations indeed re-creations by nature? Where do we set the cursor that determines what Bastin (1993) describes as a new communication situation? In this article, I refer to Translation Studies and Adaptation Studies, but should there be a line between them? Marais's call to consider translational processes as intersemiotic by nature, from a complexity-based perspective, deserves to be echoed. Marais provides relevant insights on the need to avoid binaries and the fact that the tendency to overcategorize is nefarious to the understanding of complex study objects (2019, pp. 142-143). Transmedia story worlds can be seen as translational *and* adaptational; they evoke Ubaldo Stecconi's mention of translation as a "wave" of "semiotic relationship" (2010, p. 58).

Unlike Chaume (2018), I do not consider transmedia stories as audiovisual but as intersemiotic, multimodal translational universes that include "performative translations" (Canalès, forthcoming). Such translations form "infinite texts" that grow organically with no single beginning and no end (*ibid.*), which rely on forms of repetition as underlined by Chaume, but that I consider ever changing, transformative, performative repetitions. My purpose in this article, however, is not to draw more lines, but to respond to Kobus Marais and Reine Meylaerts's call to abandon translation binaries (2019) and reconceptualize translation from a complexity-based perspective, as advocated by Marais (2019). Translational transmedial phenomena indeed seem to perpetually defy categorization.

5.2 Adaptation "run amok" or freed from its past ghosts?

Adaptation scholars are starting to embrace the study of transmedia storytelling. Hutcheon and O'Flynn were the first to write about it from an adaptational point of view, the phenomenon seeming to puzzle them as much as it fascinates them. In the preface of *A Theory of Adaptation*, they qualify these emerging forms of adaptation as

adaptation run wild. They write: "Adaptation has run amok. That's why we can't understand its appeal, and even its nature if we only consider novels and films" (Hutcheon and O'Flynn, 2013, p. xiii). This latter statement is echoed by Eckart Voigts and Pascal Nicklas, who state that the existing dominant focus on film is detrimental in adaptation and encourage researchers to "overcome the 'discursive self-enclosure' of the 'film culture' paradigm" (2013, p. 140).

According to Jennifer Camden and Kate Faber Oestreich, "recent work in Adaptation Studies has broadened our understanding of what constitutes an adaptation in ways particularly relevant for transmedia storytelling" (2018, p. 6). They mention, among others, Costas Constandinides's work on blockbusters and his definition of "post-celluloid adaptation" (Constandinides, 2010, p. 24, quoted in Camden and Faber Oestreich, 2018, p. 6), and Voigts's research on memes as appropriation (2017).

In her study on video game localization, Minako O'Hagan underlines the tendency of translation theorists to "hold technology at arm's length" (2012, p. 137). She advocates for interdisciplinary discussions and for considering translation as entertainment (*ibid.*), a call we can put in parallel with Giovagnioli's statement that transmedia enhances the similarities between fiction and games (2011, p. 98). But play is often met with defiance by translation and adaptation theorists, although it can be considered as multimodal, intersemiotic re-creation. If theme parks can be seen as "immersive" extensions of a story which physically engage the audience (Hutcheon and O'Flynn, 2013, p. 133), this same view can be extended to massively multiplayer online games (MMO or MMOG)[7] and live action role-playing games (LARP)[8], which are already studied (and claimed as transmedia experiences) by transmedia theorists, and could also be observed from translational and adaptational points of view.

5.3 The apparent chaos of fans and "bastardaptation"

Lance Weiler provocatively claimed that the "[a]udience is dead," mentioning the shift from a passive audience to a pool of active collaborators who massively contribute to modern storytelling (Weiler

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7. "Massively multiplayer online games are environments in which thousands of users are simultaneously absorbed into a game. Connected to a game server via the Internet, players can interact in real time with other users worldwide" (Cypher and Richardson, 2006, p. 258).

8. "LARPing basically involves coming up with a character, giving it a background, making costumes and props for it, and then acting out a story" (Snyder, 2018, n.p.)

interviewed by Giovagnoli, in Giovagnoli, 2011, p. 135). Yet, translation scholars show limited interest (or polite disinterest?) in the booming social practice of fan creation and, more globally, in what is not institutional authorship or does not strictly correspond to a Jakobsonian "translation proper" (Jakobson, 1959). Though fandom and games are legitimate study objects for transmedia scholars, they remain under their translation counterpart's radar. This can be attributed to the illegality of some fan creations or to a refusal to associate informality with worthiness or quality. Acknowledging amateurs as co-authors and co-creators challenges authorship and intellectual property. It also uncontrollably extends and complexifies the existing top-down content-production industry, a process described for software and referred to as "bastard culture" by Mirko Tobias Schäfer (2011). Voigts references Schäfer when he calls the comparable process of fan-creation "bastardaptation," a "[c]reative jazz of collective intelligence" that does not simply consume cultural products but digests them and produces new canons (2015, pp. 93-94). For Voigts as for Schäfer, these unmaterialistic, transgressive collective processes and practices are not as motivated by a desire to appropriate as they are by one to participate; they coexist with the traditional culture production structure without jeopardizing it (Voigts, 2015, pp. 94-95). As an introduction to his interview of Schäfer, Jenkins writes that "there is an urgent need for researchers from different critical and disciplinary perspectives to be working together to refine our understanding of the current media landscape" (2013, n.p.).

5.4 Story worlds as "transtext"

In Dena's logic, a series like *Skam* (that is, a "collection of media that tells one story"; Dena, 2011, n.p.) does not rely on adaptation. Do we, as translation scholars, agree with this? Shall we study social-network posts as narrative extensions? I am very inclined to think so. Such extensions can be considered as transtextual expressions or, in other words, what Gérard Genette defined as transcended text, subsuming and going beyond all forms of textual relationship, the "*a fortiori* of literariness" without which no text can exist (1997, p. 8).

6. Why join the conversation about transmedia?

We have seen that transmedia narratives—and more generally convergence culture—challenge Translation Studies in their tackling of textuality, cultural-content meaning, production and hierarchical approach. It appears that the paradigms of Adaptation Studies,

Translation Studies, and Transmedia Studies, the latter ironically sharing the same initials as well as a syllable, are parallel universes that sometimes use identical terms to describe identical or similar topics, while showing little evidence of mutual interest. Translation Studies still mainly focuses on verbal text and on top-down approaches to authorship, Adaptation Studies is only starting to embrace transmedia narratives, whereas Transmedia Studies takes textuality in a broader sense, fully embracing participatory culture. By doing so, Transmedia Studies appropriates the conversation about transmediality and becomes the only visible reference in the matter. Jenkins appealed to new, interdisciplinary perspectives on today's media world (2013, n.p.). What would be the interest of such an exchange?

6.1 Visibility

Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer echo Michaela Wolf's concern about the appropriation of the term "translation" by other disciplines, as well as the absence of reference to Translation Theory (2016, p. 34). For Kobus Marais, translation scholars are partly responsible for this, because they stick "to an extremely narrow conceptualization of translation as interlingual" (2019, p. 34). A similar dynamic seems to have grown between transmedia and adaptation. A cross-analysis of recent academic publications shows that misconceptions about adaptation in Transmedia Studies, combined with the existing focus on linguistic translation in Translation and Adaptation Studies, result in (1) an almost systematic misuse of the term "adaptation" and (2) an appropriation of transmedial rewritings by Transmedia Studies, invisibilizing Translation and Adaptation Studies in the research on contemporary narrative modes. While not a novel concept, Transmedia is a recent academic discipline, which, in the urge to define itself, has borrowed some categorizations and terms from other disciplines (i.e., Translation and Adaptation Studies). Combined with a growing visibility, this contributes to the erasure of adaptation and the enclosing of translation in an interlinguistic paradigm.

For example, in the lexicon of *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Jenkins gives the following definition of "transcreation":

> [A] term coined at Marvel Comics to talk about their *Spider–Man: India* project, referring to the process of reinventing and localizing an existing fictional franchise to make it more acceptable and attractive to a particular national market. (2008, p. 293)

The terms "extension" and "expansion" are used by Hutcheon and O'Flynn (2013) as synonyms of "adaptation." Until recently, however, they were used by Jenkins to define transmedia stories as the opposite of adaptations (2003, n.p.). We could go on with the definitions of stories vs. story worlds, authors vs. recreators, intermediality and transmediality, adaptation and appropriation, transmedia and transmediation, etc., for which we could appeal to Narratology, Communication, Film, Intertextuality, Transmedia and Translation Studies to dissipate the current, sometimes misleading terminological and conceptual blurs. The richness and complexity of today's media context, its agents and dynamics, emphasizes the need for thick interdisciplinary points of view. The study of cultural content production benefits from interdisciplinary exchanges, without which we are all at risk of endlessly reinventing existing concepts and creating unfounded antagonisms.

6.2 Relevance

As previously explained, transmedia narratives emphasize the need to consider interactions with the public and fan creations from a translational point of view, to accept the chaotic, ever-evolving relationship of fandom with creative work. As I am writing this paper (in May 2020), a Google search on the words "Twin Peaks fan fiction" brings about four million results, and "Twin Peaks fan art," more than thirty million. This is a fair number of creations for a thirty-year-old story world. A similar search with four-year-old series *Skam* brings respectively two and twelve million results. Public participation in story-world building is a phenomenon that is here to stay and that translation and adaptation scholars must for this acknowledge. The lack of academic interest for this still-exploding social practice, which is becoming canonical, is contributing to adaptation and translation's current lack of visibility in the academic conversation sparked by the emergence of transmedia storytelling.

The definitions of "translation" and "adaptation" are flexible enough to embrace a relationship with the audience and with fans. The theoretical tools of these disciplines, as those laid out by Patrick Cattrysse in *Descriptive Adaptation Studies* (2014), initially established for the *film noir*, could be, for example, extended to the study of fandom. Cattrysse offers a methodology based on Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystems theory, which some could find interesting to apply to fan-generated content as an organic growth of the TV or web series

polysystem. In the preface of *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon and O'Flynn deplore the absence of change in the academic perception of adaptation since the book's first edition in 2006 (2013, p. xxviii). It is urgent that translation and adaptation scholars react, or they risk excluding themselves from academic conversations on contemporary social practices and new storytelling standards. Today, collective creation expressed through new media is more influent than books, and transmedial narratives are a canon, emphasized by media convergence, which deserves attention. Seeing transmedial matters as problematic and jeopardizing to translation and adaptation, and hence refusing to embrace them as challenging research topics only anchors research in translation and adaptation in a linguistic literary past.

6.3 "Paradoxical perspectives"

We have seen that Transmedia Studies brings to our attention a multitude of "transtextual" phenomena. Whether you call them "re-creations" (Bastin, 1993), "extensions," "expansions" (Hutcheon and O'Flynn, 2013), "variations" (Sanders, 2016), "remixes," "re-imagined" stories (Long, 2017), or "points of entry" to narrative worlds (Dena, 2011), the object you will refer to will most likely belong to a complex system. Continuums have beginnings and ends, whereas complex systems have potential for organic growth and leave space for what Marais refers to as "paradoxical perspectives" (2014). I like to think that complex systems, like the universe, can be infinite and still have the potential to grow.

6.4 To reach transdisciplinarity

We cannot help but notice the irony of Transmedia, Translation, and Adaptation Studies as disciplines which are, by nature, interdisciplinary, even transdisciplinary, conducting research in parallel academic dimensions while they could productively be challenging each other. Translation and adaptation scholars could answer Jenkins's and Dena's call, starting conversations on fiction, adaptation, translation, performance, and link them to accessibility, sustainability, and other relevant topics. We have an opportunity to establish connections between transmedia storytelling and transmedialities as studied in translation, and to open new debates. Such an endeavour requires getting out of academic comfort zones; it takes embracing bottom-to-top or horizontal approaches to creation, and more chaotic research topics than the canonical book-to-film adaptations or interlinguistic

translation challenges. There are innovative points of view and a methodological depth in translation and adaptation that are worth sharing with other disciplines.

Routledge published its first *Companion to Transmedia Studies* in 2019, with contributions from media, communication, and film scholars. In her chapter called "Transmedia Adaptation: Revisiting the No-Adaptation Rule," Dena states that excluding adaptation is "potentially harmful" to Transmedia Studies (2019, p. 202) and also quotes Jenkins who wrote that "those who study adaptations ask a related [to transmedia] set of questions" (Jenkins, 2017; quoted in Dena, 2019, p. 203). Would it not be interesting to include a collaboration with translation and adaptation scholars in the next edition of the *Companion to Transmedia Studies*? It would contribute to a better understanding of the complex system encompassing translation, adaptation transmedia storytelling, among others. We would all gain from it. I can only imagine how stimulating it would be to gather transmedia, translation and adaptation scholars in international transdisciplinary events. I am convinced it would inspire researchers in all disciplines.

6.5 To transcend verbal text

The study of transmedia storytelling from a translational and adaptational point of view is an opportunity to transcend textuality and take translation and adaptation to their own "second degree," to use Genette's words (1997, p. 5). In this way, a complexity approach to transmedia, translation, and adaptation can be a *trans*disciplinary *trans*textual one, encompassing the textual relationships laid out by Genette—intertext, paratext, metatext, architext, hypertext (1997)—and combining them with performative text as performative rewriting of stories (Canalès, forthcoming).

Conclusion

This article has provided definitions of transmedia-related concepts and categorization of transmedia narratives. It has shown that transmedia storytelling's academic debut was marked by a radical opposition to adaptation as a process, no mention of adaptation as a discipline, and no connection with translation. This state of fact has contributed to the impression that transmedia, translation, and adaptation scholars conduct their research in parallel academic dimensions, whereas the phenomena they study are very much connected. Translation

and adaptation scholars share part of the responsibility in this lack of acknowledgment. Because of a certain reluctance to embrace convergence culture, new technologies, and non-verbal text, they have left room for other disciplines to appropriate these matters.

In the second part of this article, we have seen that the study of transmedia narratives challenges existing definitions of translation and adaptation, and questions the existence of borders between them. Transmedia narratives compel translation and adaptation scholars to research outside of their respective comfort zones, interlingual translation and book-to-film transfer. There is a growing interest in such phenomena, though still with a linguistic approach in translation, and not majoritarian in adaptation, despite transmedia narratives' influence and omnipresence. Transmedia narratives defy existing categories, calling for the embrace of paradoxical, transtextual points of view. They reveal the paradox of calling a field of study interdisciplinary while resisting interdisciplinarity out of fear of dilution through excessive crossovers.

Considering translation, adaptation, and transmedia as a complex transtextual system instead of trying to oppose or overcategorize them does not jeopardize them: it reveals their transformational potential. It can only be productive to address modern day narratives and their relationship with the public as active agent. Owning *trans*formation, *trans*creation, *trans*textuality *trans*disciplinarity, and approaching them from a complex point of view is a much-needed change and, in my opinion, the next turn in Translation and Adaptation Studies is *trans-*.

Acknowledgments

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