Intermedialität and Literature. What is Filmic Rewriting?

Cătălin CONSTANTINESCU[*]

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This research is based on my multiple readings and re-readings of the novels of George Orwell for almost two decades. Orwell's *1984*, at least, is not just a very influent writing on our perceptions regarding surveillance: "Big Brother" is everywhere as discursive instance in our days; this may be a political and sociological starting point of discussion. Besides, it is a good example for discussing various aspects of how literature is used by readers – implying a whole debate upon the functions of literature.

My reading of the filmic rewriting of Orwell's *1984* (discussed in another study) revealed profound mutations in analysing the film as medium. It provided grounds for comparison, but not just for the sake of comparison ("comparaison n'est pas raison", as Rene Etiemble emphasized in '60s). It is a fruitful starting point, as I try to focus on the relationships not only between film and literature, but also on dialectics of various approaches on the relationship between these media. The main goals are to observe and to evaluate what "degree of theoreticity" is admitted in our critical reading of adaptation. Comparatists should also investigate – as Claudio Guillén stated in *Entre lo uno y lo diverso: introducción a la literatura comparada* (1985) – how far can we go with categories or classes when they are subject of a comparative reading.

In analysing the relationships between film and literature, one must not forget Susan Sontag's claim in affirming that film, the narrative film namely (use of plot, characters, setting, dialogue, imagery, manipulating time and space) shares with literature the most.

1. Fidelity or not: Adaptation

At a first glance, "film *adaptation* is the transfer of a printed text in a literary genre to film" (Desmond, Hawkes 2006: 1). Even when the transfer is *close* to the text (there are also *loose* or *intermediate* adaptations), the film is another medium, having its own conventions, artistic values and techniques, and the direct implication is that the original story is transformed into a different work of art. But the American

[*] "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi, Romania & "Johannes Gutenberg" Universität Mainz, Germany.

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authors call this adaptation *interpretation*, as this process always involves a *choice*. Somebody chooses what to transfer, how to actualize the elements of the literary text in images and sounds. Intertextuality defines adaptation: "Film adaptations are by definition *intertextual* [C.C.] since they refer to an antecedent text" (Desmond, Hawkes 2006: 46). The authors recognize the complexity of the problems of defining relationships between film and literature: it is very difficult to investigate all the important intertextual relations a film has. For that reason, they consider *hypertextuality* more relevant for this discussion, adopting Gérard Genette's definition: any relationship uniting one text to an earlier text (film to literary text, in this case). It is curious how the American authors are continuing to use the terminology of Genette and Julia Kristeva, in spite of having a terminology that covers better the whole range of complex relationships (as witnessed in the European space).

According to Walter Hagenbüchle or Helmut Kreuzer, *Verfilmung* (Adaptation) may be classified in five types: 1) *stofforientierte* (theme-oriented, interested mainly in story, the theme being secondary), 2) *handlungsorientierte* (action-oriented/activity oriented, taking "story" and "plot" in consideration), 3) *analoge* (analogue), 4) *interpretierende* (interpretation), 5) *freie transformation* (free-transformation) (see Hagenbüchle 1991).

Film should be seen as a system of signs (*Zeichensystem*): a system of images in film; the montage sequence produces a system itself: film images, music, noise, spoken language, mimic, decor etc., all these elements having specific meanings closely related to cultural and social codes.

Julie Sanders points out that the complex diversity of defining adaptation led to use of various terms: intertextuality and *bricolage* (Julia Kristeva 1980; 1986), *hybridity* (Homi Bhaba 1995). Sanders discusses adaptation in direct connection with appropriation. Adaptation

> can be a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself. [...] Adaptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a sourcetext. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the 'original', adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized. Yet adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating. This can be seen as an artistic drive in many adaptations of so-called 'classic' novels or drama for television and cinema (Sanders 2006: 18–19).

Appropriation is derived from the very fact of taking one source-text or original and making a "wholly new cultural product or domain" (Sanders 2006: 26), a product that requires interpretation (critical or creative) and intellectual juxtaposition.

Sanders is quite ironic and pessimistic in entitling her chapter of conclusion as 'Afterword': all creative work in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries would in postmodernist accounts necessarily come 'afterwards' because nothing new, nothing original. Such a conclusion is merely subversive for the whole range of theories on the mutual relationships between film and literature. Her diagnostic may be accounted for such a sincere stand, but I think it's full of risks, as it ignores a

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dialectal process in the series of adaptations: we have not only one creative filmic rewriting of a book, but a second, a third etc. Such a position ignores the restraints and characteristics of various media, the *meta-* or *intertextual/ medial significances* of the work of art.

The analysis of the phenomena of contamination and transfer that are implied in the process of adaptation represent a challenging issue for researchers. In defining adaptation, one may prefer the hypothesis of rewriting, which proceeds by duplicitous reflection or an identity-destruction: literature comes to be represented into another art, cinema. Marie-Claire Ropars affirms that

> This system of double input, which subverts the partition of the arts, relies on the practice of an artistic deflection which would alone be capable of disrupting the written object, by amplifying it: nor is this an external mirror, as is da Vinci for Valéry, but instead an internal remodelling arising from a dual practice of the languages of literature and film, one by the other, one against the other. In this sense, experimentation in filmic rewriting would only be an exacerbated modality, and exemplary in this respect, of an aesthetic and not poetic constitution of literature (Ropars 2007: http://www.rouge.com.au/11/filmic_rewriting.html).

For Ropars, the term 'rewriting', which is a substitute for 'translation', suggests a theoretical shift on understanding of the transition from literature to film. A transition means a repetition: a film must become a work of art with the same title, but in the same time must remain the 'text' sharing the same title. This opposition modifies the identity of the original, putting the very principle of writing in a new light.

Assuming the *difference* as the principle of the film, it is impossible to measure the exact degree of equivalence or alteration. Ropras observes, but she does not mention it explicitly, the phenomenon of intermediality: "Not only will there be no synchresis between different art forms, but each of them is revealed, through contact with the other, to be deprived of all unitary essence, even that of combination" (Ropars 2007). Put it simply: this is the purpose of filmic "deflection" in the rewriting of literary works, by doubling the work.

The shift from literature to film is fruitfully and clearly revealed when the notion of point of view is discussed. Usually, in literature, what we see is a way of seeing: a point of view. In film, what we see is a "secondary" point of view (Wilson 1975: 1026).

The assertion that the point of view presented in a film belongs to the director – "the imaginative vision of the film maker" – would explain nothing related to the understanding of the film (Wilson 1975: 1026). An evident truth is also that an "implied author" or "personified camera" are insufficient notions to generate an aesthetically central concept of "narrative voice" pertaining to the implied film author. A complex research on the discursive function of the point of view and the whole range of narrative strategies in film and literary texts is to be found in Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse*, where the importance of filmic adaptations is emphasized:

> Films endow narrative with interesting new possibilities of point of view *manipulation* [C.C.], since they have not one but two, cotemporal information

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channels, visual and auditory (and in the auditory, not only voices but music and noises) (Chatman 1978: 158).

George Bluestone arguably affirms that novel and film develop complex relations, and, at some point of intersections, the book and the script are almost indistinguishable, with unmarked, almost invisible, borders. Bluestone's skepticism is, though, very visible: "An art whose limits depend on a moving image, mass audience, and industrial production is bound to differ from an art whose limits depend of language, a limited audience and individual creation" (Bluestone 1957: 64).

Norman Silverstein affirms that a "film's text" requires the aesthetic participation of a "literate spectator", and such a spectator (which also is a reader of modern literature) knows that film and literature are cognate forms of expression and experience, that are not antagonistic (Silverstein 1973: 145). The film is a language in the sense that coherent expression of images enables the communication of messages. Following André Bazin, then Christian Metz, Stuart Clurman uses the distinction between *continuity* (analog) and *discontinuity* (digital) to analyse the relationships between film and literature in the terms of *text* and *context*, insisting that representation is a precondition in analysis of the film texts and contexts (Silverstein 1973: 147).

A very peculiar approach of relationship between film and literature is the case when one writes a history of literature through film, as Robert Stam did: *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005) – a volume which is a "historicized account of key moments in the history of the novel, both in literary terms and as refracted through the prism of adaptation" (Stam 2005: 1).

Sure, one should not separate the history of adaptation theory from the history of arts; and also, one should see history of literature in the light of large-scale historical events.

Beyond the paradigmatic issues identified by Stam, in this volume we may find also the main issues related to adaptation: the fidelity of discourse, the artistic intertextuality and its multicultural nature, the problematic nature of illusion, the impact of the magic alternatives to conventional realism, the specificity of the film and the crossover elements (from literature to film, from film to other media).

Adaptation, for Stam, is *automatically* different and original due to the change of medium, as the shift from a "single-track medium" such as the novel to a "multitrack medium" like film (using written and spoken words, and also music, sound effects and cinematic images) generates the issue of literal fidelity (undesirable, for Stam).

If fidelity is such an inadequate term, we must look for another one, as the adaptation theory has a whole and diverse range of terms (as mentioned by Stam): translation, actualization, reading, critique, dialogization, cannibalization, transmutation, transfiguration, incarnation, transcoding, performance, rewriting, signifying, detournement. Every term is related to a different part or dimension of adaptation. Adaptation as a reading of a text could suggest that a literary text can generate any number of adaptations, as a text can have any number of readings. Of more interest is not the evaluation of how much fidelity can be accounted for an

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adaptation, but the complex relationships ("twists and turns") of intertextual exchanges.

Adaptation consists of amplifying the source text through multiple intertexts, as the image contains the history of painting and visual art, the sound inherits the whole history of music, dialogue and sound experimentation (Stam 2005: 7).

According to Stam, the cinema divides – from its beginnings – into 'realism' (Lumière) and 'magical' (Meliès); also, we must not forget that the dominant forms of film were 'modern' in their technique, not in their aesthetic approach. The film is realistic, the novel is modern (Stam 2005: 13–14).

As emphasized before, *Literature through Film* is the "history of the novelistic tradition via its filmic re-envisionings, stressing the complex energetic and synergistic shifts involved in trans-media migration" (Stam, 2005: 20). For that reason, in analysing the complex relationship between film and novel, Stam deploys multiple grids – coming from literary theory, media theory and cultural studies. 'Fidelity' and 'realism' should be replaced by terms such as 'intertextuality' and 'embeddedness', transceding the problem of sources and influences, as adaptation is "a way of one medium seeing another through a process of mutual illumination" (Stam 2005: 365).

(This is the main reason I suggest the use of the term *intermediality*: it is the mutual aspect that defines the work of art, even when it is not simultaneous – adaptation implies that one work preceeds another).

2. Visuality – the real starting point

The discussion on the relationship between literary text and film is possible due to a phenomenon identified in the literary text, which can be best described by the term *visuality*. Sandra Poppe affirms that literary visuality [*literarische Visualität*] connects the fields of semantics with aesthetics, as meaningful description and representation of visual perceptions are deeply connected with the aesthetic and poetic conceptions of the authors, conferring the unicity of the work of art, and this visuality is a constitutive element of the text:

> Literarische Visualität verbindet die Bereiche der Semantik und Ästhetik miteinander, da die Beschreibungen und Representätionen visueller Wahrnehmung sowohl Bedeutung vermitteln als auch mit dem ästhetischen und poetischen Konzept des Autors in Verbindung stehen. Gerade im Textverfahren der Beschreibung manifestiert sich die stilistische und damit ästhetisches Eigenheit des Werkes. Die anhand von visuellen Assoziationen entstehenden Verknüpfung einzelner Passagen und deren Bedeutungen führen als weitere Eigenschaft der Visualität zu einer Sinnstrukturierung tes Textes. Damit kann die Visualität als konstitutives Textmerkmal verstanden werden, das in verschiedener Form und Ausprägung vorliegen kann. Es handelt sich also nicht um eine Randerscheinung einzelner, ausgewählter Texte, sondern um ein Phänomen, das die Poetizität literarischer mitbestimmt (Poppe 2006: 66–67).

For Stefan Horlacher, visuality is description, simile, Ekphrasis, metaphor; for Mieke Bal, visuality means "visual turn" and "visual poetics". Christopher Collins defines "verbal visuality" as "mental imagery prompted by written texts" (involving *Rezeptionsästhetik* and cognitive psychology).

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The presentation of visual perception is a significant method of shaping the fictional world. For this reason, the priority is to identify a phenomenon called *visuality* – understood as an intermedial interface between arts. Sandra Poppe clarifies and then develops a terminology in order to contribute to a comparative analysis of "transformation" of literary text into films (Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Kafka's *Der Prozeß*, and Conrad's *Heart of darkness* i.e.), pointing out that in literature and films, visuality fulfills the same functions: clarity, semantics and structure formation. Visuality is a common feature of both arts, being an intermedial phenomenon, serving as a bridge between the media, stimulating the intermedial interplay. It has several functions: to communicate the meaning, to structure the work of art, is an aesthetic core of each individual work of art, be it literary or filmic (Poppe 2006: 320, 321).

In literature, we may find that visuality helps us to differentiate three forms of description: pure description, dominant description and punctual description. The "act of seeing" is integrated in the storyline, and leads the description and gives meaning to visual perception in a literary representation. The function of visuality is based on the strong correspondence in literature and film; the visual representation, in both fields, has mimetic, semantic, and structural functions. In the process of the literary or filmic description is a mimetic image of the fictional world ("ein anschauliches 'Bild' der fiktionalen Welt", Poppe 2006: 315), which represents – simultaneously – a secondary effect and a starting point of visuality.

Ekphrasis is a special form of the description (*Objektbeschreibung*), belonging in the same time to the representation itself (verbal representation of the real) and to the work of art (fictional visual work). *Ekphrasis* has two main meanings: 1) "word-painting" (in terms of Murray Krieger), representation and "image forming", in order to make a meaningful description, but in the realms of a text; 2) it is a verbal representation of a graphic/visual representation (A.W. Heffernan). The first definition refers to a representation made only by words, or to make a description, the second refers to a description made with the help of images or pictures in another work of art (further explanations can be found in Clüver 1997: 19–33).

Description includes and uses visual figures as metaphor, metonymy, symbol, image comparison, leitmotif. Literary visuality implies not only figures, frame or object descriptions, but also descriptions of perceptions or of how perceptions are generated. Colours, forms, dimensions, materiality, physical proportions also belong to description. Representation works through various techniques: 1) detailed description, 2) *visual* close representative details, 3) optical impressions, 4) spatial arrangements and scenes, 5) adjectives, metaphors and metonymies, and 6) image comparisons (Horlacher 1998).

As Rifaterre claims, the *description* is "a verbal detour" used to make the reader to understand something else than the represented object. The main characteristic of the mimesis is the purpose of interpretation, not necessarily of representation.

Visuality can be seen as constitutive element both for literary and filmic aesthetics and semantics, as text and film are both using visual metaphors. Of most importance, for Poppe, is to admit that the media-spanning characteristic of visual semantics and of the meaning structure is another trait of the "intermediality of the

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visuality" (*Intermedialität der Visualität*). Visuality can cross the boundaries of various media back and forth: of painting and literature, of painting and film, of literature and photography, of film and literature. (Poppe takes into consideration, for example, the case of Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon*, which in the Kubrick's adaptation insists upon paintings and dress – that greatly influenced Thackeray: actually, this is Kubrick's reading of Thackeray).

3. A Further Step: Intermediality

In a more specific way, we assume that the relationships between film and literature can be best described by the term *intermediality* [Ger. *Intermedialität*], which is a term derived from the term coined by Dick Higgins in 1966: *intermedia*, naming the hybrid artistical forms as concrete poetry (shape poetry) and performance arts. *Intermedialität* is a term with a strong influence in German language studies on film. There were also used alternative terms, with not so much success: *Multimedialität*, *Poly-* and *Pluri-intermedialität*, *Transmedialität*, *Medienwechsel* (shift of media), *Medientransfer*, *Mediale Transformation*, *Mixed media*, *Ekphrasis*, *Verbuchung* (novelization). For the influent authors like Joachim Paech, Werner Wolf, Ulrich Broich, Manfred Pfister, Irina Rajewski, the contact between different media is most accurately defined by *Intermedialität*. This term covers the aesthetic concepts that are integrated in the transfer from one medium in a new medium.

The filmic code is heterogenous and not arbitrary (as the verbal code). The filmic signs can be shared with other arts. Irmela Schneider distinguishes the "filmic code" from "cinematographic code", and Christian Metz between "fait filmique" and "fait cinematographique". Filmic code refers to all actions/plots that the everyday viewer can recognize. Actions and situations are "cultural codes" (Brian MacFarlane). In film, there are also "language codes"/"visual codes"/"non-linguistic sound codes"/"cultural codes".

In 1997, Joachim Paech tried to answer to a question that sounded like „Eine neue Literatur?" ("A new literature?"), derived from the multiplicity of the adaptations for scene or film, of scripts having as starting point (*Ausgangpunkt*) the literary text. If and in which way the film script is analogue with the dramatic literature for theater, and if this starting point generated a new form of literature? Can we read a film? Do these film-scripts have any literary value? Having in mind that script-writings (published as books) made a consistent tradition and the fact that also we witnessed a whole history of writing books based on films, these questions look very legitimate. Asking such questions implied that Paech observed a phenomenon of reciprocal influence in and between literature and film. Answering to these questions (especially to "can we read a film?") required a new terminology; what we can successfully evaluate as *intermedial* are not only the original filmic themes, but also literary themes from books:

> Gegenwärtig ist die *multimediale* [C.C.] Auswertung von ursprünglich genuin filmischen Stoffen auch zwischen Buchdeckeln wieder üblich geworden und erfolgreich (z.B. ‚Star Wars' von George Lucas oder die Literarisierungen von Fassbinder-Filmen durch Gerhard Zwerenz) (Paech 1997: 121).

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Paech's answer implied and made explicit the possibility of a literary reading of the film (1997: 180–204): the adaptation of a novel is equivalent to a story that is filmically narrated, not a literary text in filmic form.

Intermedialität refers not only to the relationships between different forms of art: it is a kind of hybridization of the arts, but within the realms of differentiating between the arts and media. *Intermedialität* is seen as being aware of the act of simulating that any media can perform when is digitalized. It builds a symbolic representation, to that various media participate altogether (Paech & Schröter 2008: 10). For sure, the classic field for intermedial transformations is literature; the shift of media appears when the adaptation in film challenges the original literary work.

For Werner Wolf, *Intermedialität* could be a recent development of the American researches from '60 that generated the term "*interart studies*". *Intermedialität* challenged the English term *Intertextualiy*; I continuously emphasize that the German term is more precise because not all media are texts, and, besides, covers a larger area that also includes new media, not only the traditional. And, *Intermedialität* is relevant as concept, also as a field of research and as a learning paradigm for studying culture, not only literature: music, film, journalism, history of art, communication studies (Wolf 2014: 12).

Intermediality means switch and interaction *in* and *of* media, giving another perspective of the object reflected in other medium. On the other hand, when facing phenomena that are not specific to one medium and observed or replicated in another medium, we speak about *transmediality* (*Transmedialität*), a term used by Irina Rajewsky. It can be a historical phenomenon (crossing through centuries) in several media and arts (in literature, music, paintings). Furthermore, Rajewsky complicates the concept, considering transhistorical phenomena as aesthetic illusion, framing, descriptivity or narrativity. Also, *remediation*, as Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have examined, is a term frequently used, but with a restricted validity: only to "New Media", as the American authors are investigating a limited space: digital medium (see Bolter, Grusin 2000).

Paech observed that, when investigating the relationships between film and literature, theorists preferred to refer to adaptation ("*Literaturverfilmung*"), not to intermediality between literature and film. Paech adopted the term intermediality – a term which has more impact and significance when referred to a variation in the relationship between arts and among one another, and also between the media. Intermediality refers not only to two objects, but also to a whole process that includes the above mentioned relationships (between different arts and media). This definition implies that the objects, the phenomena or the media are comparable, they constitute possible entities in a comparative analysis.

Media are not objects, but requirements/conditions or possibilities for processes of forming, of shaping and making visible for their observation. For that reason, when we are studying a form, we may observe that a form has two sides: one can be called *figure* [*Figur*] and the other *figuration* [*Figuration*], in the terms of Joachim Paech. They sometimes are responding to each other, they are "displaced" also; consequently, "*intermediality of displacement*" should be one of the best types of processes of creating other forms (in other medium):

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> 'Intermedialitat als verfahren' ist daher als eine bestimmte Figur(ation) medialer Formprozesse zu beschreiben, nämlich als Wiederholung oder Wiedereinscreibung eines Mediums als Form in die Form eines (anderen) Mediums, wo das Verfahren der Intermedialität 'figuriert', also anschaulich wird und 'reflexiv' auf sich selbst als verfahren verweist (Paech 2014: 55).

The answer to the question „Why intermediality?" (or *Re-mediation* – a term borrowed by Paech from Jay Bolter: the repetition of one medium in another medium) may be found in the digital world. The textual structure of one book (Paech analyses *Nadia* by André Breton) is mixed with symbolic signs (written) and iconic signs (images), and that gives to the novel an intertextual system creating possibilities for displacement into the realms of the narration. This is a dominant characteristic of a text on/in a computer, where forms are written and images are generated. But, mainly, it is literature in another form.

As it can be seen, the phenomenon of adaptation is one of the main phenomena defining the relationships between literature and film: adaptation, visuality, intermediality. The complex process of filmic rewriting of the literary texts is revealed only appealing these three phenomena. Adaptation cannot be conceived in the absence of intermediality. *Intermediality* makes possible the *filmic rewriting* and it is undoubtedly based on *visuality*.

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Abstract

My paper investigates and explores the complex relationships between literature and film, focusing on the specific developments on creating a requisite terminology. The filmic rewritings are discussed from the vantage point of view of diachronically and synchronically analysis of the terms involved in researching the specific discourse of film and the creative reception of literature.

In defining film rewriting I am indebted to Joachim Paech, Werner Wolf and Sandra Poppe's researches on adaptation, in adopting their concept of *Intermedialität* (or *intermediality*, the term coined by Jay Bolter). The term intermediality should be prefferred over transmediality, intertextuality, *bricolage*, *Verfilmung*, adaptation or *Ekphrasis*, as it covers better and more adequately the complexity of relationships between film and literature. Essentially, the most specific and important relation between literature and film is *intermediality*, based on the *visuality* of literary text.

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