The Politics of Adaptation
The Politics of Adaptation
Media Convergence and Ideology

Edited by

Dan Hassler-Forest
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

and

Pascal Nicklas
University Medical Center Mainz, Germany
# Contents

List of Figures vii  
Acknowledgments viii  
Notes on Contributors ix  

Introduction 1  
Dan Hassler-Forest and Pascal Nicklas  

**Part I  Adapting the Past: Politics and History**  
1 History as Adaptation 7  
*Thomas Leitch*  
2 Voyeuristic Revisionism? (Re-)Viewing the Politics of Neo-Victorian Adaptations 21  
*Caterina Grasl*  
3 Cultural Nostalgia, Orientalist Ideology, and Heritage Film 35  
*Antonija Primorac*  

**Part II  Adapting Authorship: Politics and Convergence**  
4 Emerging from Converging Cultures: Circulation, Adaptation, and Value 53  
*Timothy Corrigan*  
5 Transmediality and the Politics of Adaptation: Concepts, Forms, and Strategies 66  
*Jens Eder*  
6 Bastards and Pirates, Remixes and Multitudes: The Politics of Mash-Up Transgression and the Polyprocesses of Cultural Jazz 82  
*Eckart Voigts*  

**Part III  Adapting Postcolonialism: Politics and Race**  
7 ‘Bergman in Uganda’: Ugandan Veejays, Swedish Pirates, and the Political Value of Live Adaptation 99  
*Lindiwe Dovey*
Contents

8 Yvonne Vera’s *Butterfly Burning* and the Politics of Adaptation in African Literature 114
   Aaron Bady
9 Michael Jackson and Afrofuturism: *HIStory’s* Adaptation of Past, Present, and Future 126
   Erik Steinskog

Part IV  Adapting Nationality: Politics and Globalization

10 The End of the Hollywood ‘Rip-Off’? Changes in the Bollywood Politics of Copyright 143
   Lucia Krämer
11 Adapting Tasmania: Terrorizing the Past 158
   Imelda Whelehan
12 Laibach’s Subversive Adaptations 172
   Darko Štrajn

Part V  Adapting Genre: Politics and Popular Culture

13 *Game of Thrones*: The Politics of World-Building and the Cultural Logic of Gentrification 187
   Dan Hassler-Forest
14 You Think You Know the Story: Novelty, Repetition, and Lovecraft in Whedon and Goddard’s *The Cabin in the Woods* 201
   Gerry Canavan
15 Stop/Watch: Repressing History, Adapting *Watchmen* 214
   Jacob Brogan

Part VI  Adapting the Body: Politics and Gender

16 Biopolitics of Adaptation 229
   Pascal Nicklas
17 ‘Restrained Glamour’: Joe Wright’s *Anna Karenina*, Postfeminism, and Transmedia Biopolitics 243
   Monika Pietrzak-Franger

Index 257
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Diagram of adaptation forms</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Choice, reception, and appropriation in transmedial texts</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Structural models of transmedial multitexts; from left to right: multiple exploitation, supplementation, integration, and participation</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Mash-up of ‘Casually Pepper Spray Everything Cop’ and John Trumbull’s <em>Declaration of Independence</em></td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Mash-up of ‘Casually Pepper Spray Everything Cop’ and Georges Seurat’s <em>A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte</em></td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Michael Jackson, <em>HIStory</em> official video</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Michael Jackson, ‘They Don’t Care About Us’ music video</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Michael Jackson, ‘Scream’ music video</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>Laibach in 1983</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>Daenerys frees the slaves in <em>Game of Thrones</em> season three, episode ‘Mhysa’</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>The ‘upstairs’ plot and its metatextual options in <em>Cabin in the Woods</em></td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>Jeep campaign</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

This book was made possible by the generous support of the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), the Research Focus Program ‘Media Convergence’ of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, the National Film Institute and National Film Museum Frankfurt am Main, and the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis.
Dan Hassler-Forest was born in New York and now resides in the Netherlands, where his lifelong addiction to film, television, and books currently finds a welcome outlet in his position as Assistant Professor of English Literature at the University of Amsterdam. In his work, he struggles to align his passion for pop culture with his dedication to radical Marxism, the results of which are published from time to time in journals and edited collections. His own books include the monograph *Capitalist Superheroes* (2012) and a collection of essays on comics and graphic literature. He is currently preparing a monograph on fantastic world-building and radical political theory.

Pascal Nicklas is a research group leader in the Department of Microscopic Anatomy and Neurobiology of Mainz University Medical Center working in the field of empirical aesthetics and neuro-aesthetics. He teaches in the Comparative Literature Department of Johannes-Gutenberg University Mainz. His research focuses currently on the aesthetics of adaptation. His publications include a volume on *Adaptation and Cultural Appropriation* (2012) edited with Oliver Lindner and a special issue of *Adaptation* (6:2, 2013) edited with Eckart Voigts.

Aaron Bady is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Texas, teaching African literature. He is the author of the blog titled zunguzungu.

Jacob Brogan teaches in the Department of English at Georgetown University. He received his PhD from Cornell University, where his dissertation explored the poetics of fragmentary form. His current research project explores the relationship between denim and our fantasies about labor. His work has been published by *The Washington Post, The Comics Journal, The Chicago Tribune*, and other publications. He writes about cancer and other topics at www.jacobbrogan.com.

Gerry Canavan is an assistant professor in the English Department at Marquette University, specializing in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature. With Kim Stanley Robinson, he is the co-editor of *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction* (2014), and with Eric Carl Link he is the co-editor of the *Cambridge Companion to American Science Fiction* (2015). He is currently at work on two projects: a critical monograph on
the subject of ‘science fiction and totality’ and a book on the life and work of legendary African-American science fiction author Octavia E. Butler.


**Lindiwe Dovey** is Senior Lecturer in African Film at SOAS, University of London, and co-founder of both the Film Africa festival in London and the Cambridge African Film Festival. She is a South African scholar, film festival director, film curator, and filmmaker. Her book *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen* (2009) won a Choice Outstanding Award, and her new book *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals* will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in March 2015. She has been the recipient of a Philip Leverhulme Prize (2012–2015).

**Jens Eder** is Professor of Media and Communication Studies at the University of Mannheim, Germany. His main research interests include audiovisual narratives and their influences on culture and society, characters, emotions, images of human nature, medium and transmedia theory, and recent developments of audiovisual media. His has authored many books including: *Dramaturgie des populaeren Films* (1999), *Audiovisuelle Emotionen* (2007, ed. with Anne Bartsch and Kathrin Fahlenbrach), *Die Figur im Film* (2008), *Characters in Fictional Worlds* (2010, ed. with Fotis Jannidis and Ralf Schneider), and *Medialitaet und Menschenbild* (2012, ed. with Maike Reinerth and Joseph Imorde). His other published work addresses subjects such as transmedia imagination, digital characters, propaganda, advertising, happiness, depression, DNA, and other film-based topics. A book on affect and audiovisual media and an anthology on *Image Operations* in war and political conflict are forthcoming.

**Caterina Grasl** is an assistant professor in the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. She has written a book on early precursors of the neo-Victorian novel, *Oedipal Murders and
Nostalgic Resurrections (2014). Her research interests include, but are not limited to, all things neo-Victorian; historical and detective fiction; early women writers; and cognitive approaches to literature and culture. She is a member of the Cognitive Cultural Criticism Network at the University of Vienna.

Lucia Krämer is Assistant Professor of British Literary and Cultural Studies at Leibniz University Hanover, Germany. She obtained her PhD in 2002 at the University of Regensburg with a study of the biofictional representation of Oscar Wilde in novels, dramas, and films (2003) and continues working on Wilde and late Victorian literature. She has also co-edited an interdisciplinary collection of essays about the ambivalent status of authenticity between materiality and constructedness (2011). Her current main research areas, with three collections of essays in the making, are the theory and practice of adaptation, as well as postcolonial media cultures. She is also currently preparing a monograph about the reception of Bollywood in Britain.

Thomas Leitch teaches English and directs the Film Studies Program at the University of Delaware. His most recent books are A Companion to Alfred Hitchcock (2011), co-edited with Leland Poague, and Wikipedia U: Knowledge, Authority, and Liberal Education in the Digital Age (2014).

Monika Pietrzak-Franger is a lecturer in the English Department at Hamburg University, Germany. Her books include, as author, The Male Body and Masculinity: Representations of Men in British Visual Culture of the 1990s (2007) and, as co-editor, Adaptations: Performing across Media and Genres (2009), Reflecting on Darwin (2013) and Women, Beauty, Fashion (2013). She is currently preparing a monograph Spectres of Syphilis: Medicine, Knowledge and the Spectacle of Victorian (In)Visibility, which focuses on the visualization of diseases in late Victorian culture, for which she has received funding from the Volkswagen Foundation. In 2012, she was a visiting fellow in the Department of Anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis. She has published on gender, medicine, visual culture, and adaptation, and she is a co-editor of the journal Adaptation.

Antonija Primorac is Assistant Professor in English Studies in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split, Croatia, where she teaches courses on nineteenth-century English literature, neo-Victorianism, and contemporary British culture. Prior to that, she held appointments at University College London and the University of Zagreb, Croatia. She was
a Fulbright researcher at New York University, and a Chevening scholar at the University of Oxford. Antonija is co-editor (with Monika Pietrzak-Franger) of the 2014 special issue of *Neo-Victorian Studies*. Her research interests include adaptation studies, neo-Victorianism, Victorian literature and culture, postcolonial studies, feminist theory, world literature, and literature in translation.

**Erik Steinskog** is Associate Professor in Musicology in the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen. His current research interests include African-American music, Afrofuturism, music and technology (particularly the cultural effects of technologies of storage and reproduction), voice studies, and aesthetics. His recent publications include ‘Diva Forever: The Operatic Voice between Reproduction and Reception’ (2011); ‘Hunting High and Low: Duke Ellington’s Peer Gynt Suite’ (in Solomon (ed.), *Music and Identity in Norway and Beyond*, 2011); ‘Queering Cohen: Cover Versions as Subversions of Identity’ (in Plasketes (ed.), *Play It Again*, 2010).

**Darko Štrajn** is a professor at the Graduate School for Studies in Humanities (ISH) and a researcher at the Educational Research Institute in Ljubljana, Slovenia. While one line of his research has been the study of Fichte’s philosophy of subjectivity, the other has comprised activities ranging from political activism and journalism to managing research in the social sciences. Together with five other Yugoslav students (late Serb PM Zoran Djindjic among them) he was convicted for ‘verbal transgression’ in 1974 for taking part in students’ activity against the government’s suppression of the new left ‘Praxis group’ of philosophers. His recent publications focus on problems of aesthetics, social changes, democracy, education, philosophy, and media studies.

**Eckart Voigts** is Professor of English Literature at TU Braunschweig, Germany. He has written, edited and co-edited numerous books and articles, such as *Introduction to Media Studies* (2004), *Janespotting and Beyond: British Heritage Retrovisions since the Mid-1990s* (2005), *Adaptations: Performing Across Media and Genres* (WVT 2009) and *Reflecting on Darwin* (2014). He is on the Board of the Association of Adaptation Studies and the journals *Adaptation* and *Adaptation in Film and Performance*. With Pascal Nicklas he co-edited the special issue of *Adaptation* (vol. 6:2, 2013) on transmedia storytelling and participatory culture.
**Imelda Whelehan** is a professor and pro vice-chancellor at the University of Tasmania and a visiting professor at De Montfort University’s Centre for Adaptations. She has written widely on adaptation studies, feminism, and popular culture. Her books include *The Feminist Bestseller* (2006) and *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema* (with Deborah Cartmell) (2010) and she is co-editor of the journal *Adaptation*. 
Introduction

Dan Hassler-Forest and Pascal Nicklas

Adaptation is all about change: from one work of art to the next. Therefore, adaptation is also about power. On one level, there has been the power of the ‘original’ text over its adapted version, which has in many cases automatically been considered a polluted or otherwise inferior copy of the primary text – the Hegelian slave to its more authentic master. But the ways in which adaptations are used in our contemporary context of ubiquitous computing and global capitalism enforce a power dynamic that is even more explicitly political: a continuous negotiation of existing social, cultural, and economic hierarchies that can be reaffirmed but also challenged by the new ways in which adaptations are circulated and appropriated.

By foregrounding the phrase ‘the politics of adaptation,’ this book means to suggest the political and ideological contexts and power relations within which artistic adaptations take place. With this approach, the contributors to this volume seek to explore new research challenges relating to history, political philosophy, and the changes in production and distribution that have been the result of globalization and media convergence. It also opens our eyes further to the importance of adaptation as a tool of appropriation and power negotiation in racial and post-colonial debates, as well as in terms of biopolitics and gender.

Since the act of adaptation by its very definition involves a process of transformation and rewriting, any adapted text must by necessity also involve the repurposing of ideas that implicitly or explicitly articulate a sense of political engagement. Case studies of adaptations can therefore be useful tools for examining larger ideological shifts, especially when examining the interaction between a specific text and its cultural reception. Focusing on the politics of adaptation therefore moves us beyond the traditional debates on fidelity and medium-specificity, seeking to
explore and mobilize the most recent developments and methodological shifts that are currently transforming the field of adaptation studies.

For many years, adaptation studies has already proclaimed itself to have reached ‘an important crossroads’ (Leitch, 2006). Originating among literary scholars with an interest in cross-media adaptations, the field has been heavily invested in examining similarities and differences between source texts and their numerous textual relations: novels that have been adapted into films, television series based on literary properties, video games based on cinematic franchises, and so forth. But as processes of globalization and media convergence have rapidly transformed our media landscape over the past two decades, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain or even properly identify the previously assumed boundaries between media, and the cultural hierarchies that once seemed to define their relative values. Digital convergence (Jenkins, 2006), ubiquitous computing (Negroponte, 1996), and the development of participatory culture (Nicklas and Voigts, 2013) have been important factors in the recent reconfiguration of adaptation studies, with a tension developing between the traditions of detailed textual analysis on the one hand, and the broader framework of cultural studies on the other (Carroll, 2009; Murray 2013).

In order to start suturing this gap between text-based case studies of individual adaptations and questions of social use and cultural context, the question of politics offers the field a productive way forward. As all adaptation processes inherently imply hierarchies of taste and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), both the theory and the practice of adaptation are ultimately determined by social relationships that are inherently political. An ideologically informed perspective on adaptation practices therefore must take into account not only the political economies that successfully produce and distribute adaptations in countless forms, but also the unpredictable ways in which such texts are received, negotiated, and appropriated around the globe. Building upon these central questions, this book develops new ways of understanding adaptation through a focus on political and ideological concepts, offering a perspective that combines specific case studies with an approach that is truly global in its scope.

The necessity for this intervention is all the more vital given the sweeping cultural, social, and technological changes that have transformed the mutual relationships between contemporary narrative media. Large-scale processes like globalization, media convergence and audience participation make it important to shift adaptation studies’ dominant framework from the analysis of cine-literary case studies to
the socio-cultural mechanisms and political economies that determine their value. It has therefore become necessary to examine more closely the various kinds of political and ideological assumptions underlying not only the contents of specific adaptations, but also – and perhaps especially – the cultural, economic, and social practices that surround their production, distribution, and consumption. This approach therefore also requires methods that combine more traditional humanities research with fields such as sociology, philosophy, fan studies, and new developments in the neurosciences.

This book therefore brings together a group of scholars from a variety of disciplines, whose work offers a wide-ranging set of approaches to the field. Their work has been organized into a series of thematic clusters focused on politics and adaptation, each of which explores in depth a case study related to this conceptual focus from a political point of view. These experts were brought together on the one hand to broaden and expand the field by incorporating interdisciplinary developments in academic methods outside the traditional humanities, and on the other to open up adaptation studies to scholars for whom adaptation studies’ literary focus has been a limitation.

Together, these authors have explored the politics of adaptation from a variety of disciplines and perspectives, while their work remains united by the conceptual questions that affect the entire field. This approach differs from earlier collections with similar cultural interests, which have mostly remained within the classical paradigm of literature and film studies (Nicklas and Lindner, 2012; Bruhn, Gjelsvik and Hanssen, 2013). The individual chapters in this book have been grouped into six clusters that can be accessed separately, but which build upon each other structurally and thematically.

These clusters articulate the six overlapping and mutually reinforcing frameworks identified by the book’s contributors as key issues within the debate we wish to address:

1. History
2. Media convergence
3. Postcolonialism and racial identity
4. Globalization and nationality
5. Popular genres
6. Biopolitics and gender

While all six topics provide engagements with a varied range of case studies and interdisciplinary methodologies, they remain united by
their focus on a critical approach to the political implications of adaptation processes. By moving from adaptation studies’ traditional emphasis on genres, texts, and authors to these critical concepts, this collection offers new approaches that aim to broaden the existing framework considerably.

These six areas of thematic interest together elucidate the most vital recent developments in adaptation studies, expanding the scope of the field by moving away from comparative case studies based entirely on close textual analysis, and firmly establishing an agenda rooted in the contextual study of complex social, cultural, and political processes. The effect of these interdisciplinary approaches is on the one hand a methodological pluralism generally characteristic of the humanities in recent years. On the other hand, the volume’s development of a politically informed approach to adaptation studies is neither uniform nor ideologically programmatic: rather than furthering any specific political agenda, the essays instead offer critical examinations of the power dynamics that are crucial to understanding adaptation theories and practices in the context of globalization.

Works cited

Part I

Adapting the Past: Politics and History