INTRODUCTION: TRANSLATION AND TRANSFORMATION IN AUDIOVISUAL AND DIGITAL CULTURE

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1. Transformation phenomena in the new era

Cultural works and phenomena live a new digital life, remediated in interactive form. The media and entertainment industries have transformed successful narratives, characters and entire fictional worlds from the past into lucrative franchises for the serial production of FX movies, TV series on demand, videogames, reality shows and home robots. AI generated narratives, based on classical fairytale structures populate the web. Gen Z translators published the first classical novels in SMS writing style while professional old school translators are striving to update the wording of old characters with internet slang. All this intensive metabolism of the digital

semiosphere calls for semiotic attention since signs exist only insofar as they are recognized, that is, insofar as they are repeated (Barthes 1978: 15).

The same is valid for translation. As Torop (2003: 265) argues, "seriation is one of the ontological characteristics of translation. It means that the same source text may underlie multiple various translations and that the identification of an absolute or ideal translation is impossible". It is true that the notion of source text, of the text in general, has been redefined in our days where digitalization is the main characteristic in digital communication. Bankov (2022: xiii) rightly mentions that "most semiotic contributions to the study of digital culture come *from textual semiotics*. This area is dominated by the contributions of the Paris School, i.e., Greimas/Floch, but also represented by Eco's interpretive semiotics". However, it might not be enough in our days since "in software culture, we no longer have "documents," "works," "messages" or "recordings" in twentieth-century terms. Instead of fixed documents which could be analyzed by examining their structure and content (a typical move of the twentieth-century cultural analysis and theory, from Russian Formalism to Literary Darwinism), we now interact with dynamic "software performances" (Manovich 2013: 33).

Whatever the cultural text may be called, it is certain that it is now multimodal and an interesting subject for translation studies. Scholars also often underline the translation aspect of digitization. As Olteanu & Ciula (2022: 68) argue, "digitization – when dealing with conversion across media – and digitilization are forms of intermedial translation, hence of relevance to translation studies that found its theoretical grounding in semiotics". Furthermore, digital and online tend often to be used interchangeably in translation studies even though that not all mobile and digital technologies are necessarily online. Desjardins (2021: 386) explains that "digital refers more specifically to the technologies that have progressed from analogue circuits, which account for most of the technology with which we interact today, for instance tablets, smart phones, interactive smart walls that create immersive experience and spaces, and 3D printers". Undoubtedly, the digitization of cultural texts is a challenge for translation studies to the study of which semiotic theory can make a particular contribution.

2. Intersemiotic and Digital Culture

The contributions to this volume of *Digital Age in Semiotics and Communication* deal with various translation phenomena such as intermediality, film adaptation, film colorization, remediation and various technospheric phenomena such as cinefication, audiovisual and digital mass culture, digi-

tal transformation, cyberspace, and digital image. The first group of articles shows that those phenomena are characteristics of a rich interesemiotic space. As Torop (2020: 269) states, "in intersemiotic space, the original text and all of its translations comprise a mental whole, which is all-encompassing for collective cultural memory and selective for every individual reader. In the context of culture, intersemiotic space is also a space of transmedial translation". The new cultural texts (metatexts) resulting from intersemiosis is expected to carry additional connotations[1], a characteristic of particular semiotic interest.

The second group of articles reveals the advantages of the semiosphere of digital culture. As Bankov (2022: 26) highlights, "in digital culture, language is no longer the lord of semiotic phenomena; the latter is the communicative disposition of the culture holders. The language is there, together with an incredible variety of visual, audio, kinetic and other expressive forms". A significant innovation is that other expressive forms could also be interactive.[2] This interaction seems to be the essential different characteristic in relation to the study of other cultural texts, an element that justifies the use of the term *platfospehere* in the context of the semiosphere.[3]

Drawing on the premises of avant-garde cinema (experimentation, transformation, liminality), **Loukia Kostopoulou** seeks to examine in her article "Intermediality in contemporary avant-garde cinema: Blurring media boundaries in Jean-Luc Godard's films" how intermediality functions as a form of experimentation in contemporary avant-garde cinema and bring new insights as to the nature of the medium and the impact on the spectator. Examples are drawn from Jean-Luc Godard's films 'First Name: Carmen' (1983) and 'Film Socialisme' (2010). What is emblematic of Godard's late works is what Fletcher calls the aesthetic of resistance. Although his late films do not urge the audience to be politically engaged, as was the case with his earlier works of the 1960s and 1970s, the political nuances are evident. Aligning with Fletcher's view, Kostopoulou concludes that his late work is aesthetically political, insinuating that cinema and other arts could act as a form of resistance. In this way, and through the fragmentariness that prevails in his work, Godard engages the audience in a process of reflection and alertness.

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[1] See Kourdis (2021).

[2] It is worth noting that, according Rastier and Duteil-Mougel (2009: 215), even intersemiosis is defined as an interaction between sign systems.

[3] See Bankov (2022: 17–18).

Aluminé Rosso studies a particular semiotic phenomenon, cinefication, in her paper titled "The cinefication of museums: from exhibitions to films. The case of Tate Modern". The author examines museum as a mass medium which adopts new exhibition practices such as banners, marquees, and all sorts of resources aimed at promoting the temporary exhibitions. Rosso focuses to the phenomenon of the *cinefication* of the museum in which exhibitions are titled, conceived, promoted, and distributed as films, and the artists, adorned by the figure of the genius, are presented as parts of the art history star system. Rosso presents an analysis of the programming and promotion of the temporary exhibition *Picasso 1932: Love, fame, and tragedy* at Tate Modern which goes one step further producing trailers and posts them on its website and social media. Rosso concludes that we are going through a new period based on the visitor's experience which should yield positive results, if decisions are not made based on prejudices about "the general public, " "tourism, " and, of course, artists. This is an original study which remains to prove whether the cultural sector will continue to be attracted, in essence, by marketing practices which give a commercial character to the cultural product.

Eirini Papadaki in her article "Remediating fantasy narratives for participatory fandom: Tolkien's stories and their translations in films, video games, music, tourism tours and other culture industries' products" deals with the phenomenon of fantasy transmediality. Papadaki examines the translation and adaptation of Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" to different media and cultural industries, such as Peter Jackson's films, role-playing games, and the music industry with reference to well-known songs and bands. Through comparative analysis of certain segments of the "Lord of the Rings" industry market and comments made by fans on digital platforms, the paper underlines the basic story elements of the Tolkien universe, as adapted to each above-mentioned variant and examines the role of fans in the digital semiosphere. The particular and continuing influence of this trilogy on the entertainment industry makes Papadakis' article particularly interesting. This comes especially at a time when the pressure exerted by fans of the Tolkien trilogy is pushing the entertainment industry to release derivatives which have to compete with other fictional productions of popular American streaming services offering a wide variety of award-winning TV productions such as Netflix and CBS.

Augmented reality is another research challenge for semiotics. **Kyle Davidson** in his article "Me, myself, and my avatar – a semiotic study into digital transformations via avatars" examiners the Chinese musical idol show, *Dimension Nova* (produced by entertainment company IQIYI). This

Chinese idol show follows the same pattern as other musical idol shows, however, the contestants for *Dimension Nova* are virtual beings, an option that puts the burden of the show not on the participants but on virtual reality. The transformation of the avatar from a representation of the user to an individualised entity, interactive and reactive, as we progress from Web 2.0 era to the new Web 3.0 society of omnipresent computing is the focus of this article and is introduced by what the author terms the "hypervirtual" environment of the future. Davidson's article may well be a trigger for a discussion about man's relationship with augmented reality in the field of entertainment and his real fear that in the future his participation in everyday life will be limited through substitutes.

Although the mode of expression of mourning has been the subject of anthropology throughout time, the use of digital media for this particular subject is of particular semiotic interest. **Hongjin Song** is the author of the article "A Wailing Wall in the Cyberspace: Loneliness, Censorship, and Collective Memory", an article in Memory of Dr. Li Wenliang, an iconic figure who was accused of being an informer on the Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan, punished by the Chinese authorities before dying infected by the coronavirus after a while. The author examines semiotically the transmediality of cyberspace of our modern times focusing on the phenomenon of online mourning and more precisely the wailing wall in the cyberspace as a unique spectacle in online culture, especially in a society like the Chinese which is not used to outbursts of this type triggered by the researcher's latest Weibo post. Song's article shows the power of social media in expressing human suffering and how it can be used to reproduce ideological positions and even covert conspiracy theories.

Gerardo Fabián Rodríguez and **Lidia Raquel Miranda** in their article "Body and senses in the production of cultural meaning: from Middle Ages to TV series, films and videogames" attempts to examine certain components of mass culture which have transformed narratives, characters and fictional worlds, distinctive of the Middle Ages, into communicative and semiotic practices reinterpreting historical and literary texts as a way of reflecting on people, social life and its problems in the present world. It starts from considering that semantic plurality and diachronic bases of the idea of body and senses enable an interdisciplinary and comparative study, in order to understand their historicity, their ideological effect and the innumerable aesthetic possibilities which they promote in different areas of culture. The reflections take into account the bodily and sensory aspects of the Middle Ages selected by series, films and video games with an impact, as significant elements, on current cultural orientations and

attitudes. This connection between the past and the present is a particular challenge for the authors, which they handle successfully through their original study.

Fee-Alexandra Haase in her article "Beyond Mona Lisa's Smile: A Theoretical Approach to the Persuasion of Likeness in the Digital Image" discusses the digital image as a form of representation of *likeness* in the digital environment. The author argues that *likeness* is an implicit and often taken for granted quality of the communicative performance of digital media, while the term *image* is a typological classification, semiotic relations of the transfer of meaning can be described with the terms *icon* and *simulacrum*. Haase examines their presence in the digital environment tracing their tradition of their function regarding the establishing of likeness to philosophical ideas. She exemplifies with the case of the digital images as derivations from the portrait *Mona Lisa* that the appearance as an image of all what is displayed on the screen constitutes the specific likeness of digitality.

It is no coincidence that many semioticians consider that semiotics can also be defined also as *connotative semiotics*. **Thomas Bardakis** in his paper "A semiotic analysis on the representations of maids in Greek movies of 50s and 60s" examines the synergy of different semiotic systems such as language, proxemics, kinetics, and dress code, in the establishment of representations/connotations in Greek mass culture texts and, precisely, in films of the so-called *Old Greek cinema*. Bardakis supports that social representations constructed in films where maids appear could lead to a Barthesian *mythology* about this working class based on specific ideological perspectives diffused by the bourgeois of the era. Bardakis highlights a pattern in the representation of maids in those films about their names, their education, and their economic situation. Bardakis, also, argues that maids and servants used to construct connotations of wealth, dominance, and prosperity for people of upper-middle or high social class. According to Bardakis, this pattern has changed in the modern Greek television series in which maids participate more in everyday situations of the family and behave differently. Bardakis' study is part of the continuing interest that Greeks show in these texts of mass culture, which 50 years later continue to attract Greeks of various ages.

In her paper "Narratological approach of the film adaptation of Thérèse Desqueyroux by François Mauriac" **Despina Gialatzi** is examining the process of translation from literature into movies through isotopies. In particular, the research concentrates on the intertextual phenomenon between the original classic version in literature and the two film versions (1962 and 2012). Unveiling the psychographic image of main character, the applica-

tion of Greimas's narratological method offers a fertile field of research, and the examination of the transformation into a double cinematographic portrait. Thérèse is a woman prisoner in her name: Desqueyroux. The narrative structure of the work turns on the fragile psyche of the heroine. Is she really a fragile female figure or, a cruel poisoner in a search of mental freedom?

The last contribution comes from **Dimitris Neofotistos** who in his article "The colorization of Greek classic films as intersemiotic translation" probes with a matter that occupies translation semioticians, that is if the addition of a semiotic system to a cultural text constitutes the derivative text an intersemiotic translation. Neofotistos attempts to designate the role of color as a mode of new signification through the application of colorization to two classic Greek black and white films ("And let the wife fear her husband" written and directed by Georgios Tzavellas in 1965, and "A mess" written and directed by Dinos Katsouridis in 1963). Both movies are classified in the classic Greek cinema period (1940–1970) and very popular with the Greek public. Although it has been highly criticized as a non-aesthetic intervention and as an alteration of the creator's point of view, Neofotistos considers colorization as a process of translation since the colorized film remains the same in his syntagmatic nature and has been changed in a paradigmatic axe (addition of the color) due to a new medium of interpretation which has emerged hidden social connotations which were missing from the back and white cultural text. Neofotistos' approach is original and can be studied from a translational point of view through the comparison of the prototext and the metatext.

3. In lieu of a conclusion

The translational dimension of culture has been highlighted by many important scholars of semiotics. The importance of translation as an information transfer cultural mechanism was addressed by Lotman (1990) in his study of the *semiosphere*, and the *transmutation* or *transposition* or *intersemiotic translation* of information was addressed by Jakobson (1959) and Eco (1976, 2001). In the last decades with the development of audiovisual translation and interart studies we have witnessed the application of semiotic theory to these fields of research as well. However, as more and more aspects of our culture are digitized, the application of semiotics to digital culture is a challenge that should perhaps be daunting given the speed with which this change takes place. The articles hosted in the present volume, through their originality, are only a foretaste of the direction in which contemporary culture has taken.

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