

# Book Reviews

## The Intermedial Turn and the Dynamics of the Semiosphere

**Titika Dimitroulia**

Nicola Dusi, *Contromisure. Trasposizioni e intermedialità*, Mimesis edizioni, Milano – Udine, 2015, 289 pp, 17€, ISBN-10: 8857528944, ISBN-13: 978-8857528946.

The first term in the title of Nicola Dusi's last work, *Contromisure* (Countermeasures), catches readers' interest, particularly in juxtaposition with the rest of the title, *Trasposizioni e intermedialità* (Transpositions and intermediality): it implies the prevention of conflict or the response to it – and thus, with the connotative meaning of the term, we directly enter Dusi's main field of interest and specialization: semiotics. The rest of the title defines the space in which this conflict takes place: the transposition of a text from a semiotic code and from one medium to another. The title is plainly explained in the theoretical chapter which opens the volume, and in the following chapters which deal with case studies that present those *countermeasures* in concrete examples of intersemiotic and intermedial transpositions, drawing upon both works of the Bourdieusian restricted cycle of literary production and others of the popular culture, ranging from comics and crime fiction to literary adaptations and popular films.

Dusi's volume is or –at least at a first glance– seems to be organized as a circle: it starts and closes with theory and in between are the case studies. When one examines more thoroughly how it is organized though, it turns out to be much more complex, as the theory, which refers to multiple and diverse models, is constantly illustrated by examples, and the case studies incorporate theoretical models presented in an applied form for the first time or delve into previously presented models and principles. This sort of organization is a constant characteristic of Dusi's academic discourse in his articles, books and conferences, yet here it takes different forms and leads the reader to the core of the thematic, figural and figurative organization of the discourse.

The volume continues and expands Dusi's consistent reflection on audiovisual media, digital media and polysemiotic texts in general, with emphasis on their multiple intertextual,

interdiscursive and intermedial transpositions, where texts are defined in the broader sense proposed at the outset by Kristeva, in her work on intertextuality, and used or expanded subsequently by many hermeneutical schools; the landscape as a text in human geography, the space as text in Michel de Certeau, or the spectator as text in Lotman. Organized in nine chapters of different lengths, probably because they are revised versions of texts covering the period 2002-2015, and mainly 2005-2008, and framed by the theoretical reflection of the first and last chapter, the questions and issues which emerge in the transposition of the texts are exposed, moving from one medium to another, like *Il deserto dei Tartari* directed by Zurlini; the transfer to screen of Blake Nelson's *Paranoid Park* by Gus Van Sant; the adaptation of six of the eight stories of Alan Ayckbourn's play *Intimate Exchanges* by Alain Resnais in his film *Smoking/No Smoking* and its dialogue with Borges and Queneau; the derivative texts of Andrew Lloyd Webber's and Tim Rice's rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and the film *Lola rennt* by Tom Tykwer; the multiple and diverse polysemiotic transpositions of Pinocchio and Don Quixote; and Robin Hood and Sherlock Holmes' permanent and occasional characteristics.

The diversity of the chapters and the complexity of the perspectives used in the analysis make it hard to effectively present them in a review piece. The reader who wants to follow in detail the author's theoretical and investigative endeavour should accompany his reading with some peeks into the films studied, most of which available on YouTube. Take for example, the analysis of the opening and final credits of Robin Hood by Ridley Scott or Sherlock Holmes by Guy Ritchie. They are both discussed in a quite original way, that focuses on the intermedial constitution of the character's identity and the latter's uniqueness in the different media. At the same time, they are treated in an eminently pleasant way, when, for instance, someone watches the digital stylization of Sherlock Holmes, or the fairy narrative of Robin Hood's story in the opening and end credits, presented in painting mode.

The core of Dusi's problematic regards the nature of text transposition from one medium to another. In his elaboration, he refers to diverse theoretical models, beginning with Bolter and Grusin's *remediation*, a process existing long before the appearance of digital media on which they focus. Remediation concerns the re-elaboration, translation and transposition of the rules and conventions of pre-existing media onto the new media. The modes of remediation either pertain to verisimilitude, the 'impression of reality' according to Roland Barthes, which dissimulates the medium (immediacy) and links the representation to its reference; or foreground the presence of the medium (hypermediacy) and the process of mediation at work. On the basis of his sustained work on intersemiotic translation, Dusi approaches remediation at the stylistic, expressive and figurative level, as well as at the level of media materiality, examining the multiple aspects of its orientation and impact, when, for example, an older medium incorporates features of newer ones in a process of 'retrograde remediation', as defined by Bolter and Grusin.

Dusi dissects different definitions and taxonomies of intermediality and links them with the Foucauldian social order of discourse and with cultural practices and attitudes. He focus-

es on the different types of intermediality, ranging from transposition – from a literary work, for example, into film – to mixed codes, as in comics and the opera, or simple reference, as in the cases where cinema uses painting techniques. He stresses the materiality of the medium, which defines the expressive modes and the systemic character of intermediality, versus the individuality of *transtextuality*.

His most important contribution to the study of intermediality – or ‘intermedial translation’, to use Zecca’s term, which includes all types of intersemiotic translation present in intermediality – is the examination of the figural in intermedial transpositions, and especially in cinema, defined as follows: ‘Speaking about the figural in cinema, and its use as one of intermediality’s keys, means that our analysis represents the constant and coherent tensions which cross the text and the different media, due to a network of dynamic systems of powers, organized in semi-symbolic systems, pathemic (affective-passional) and rhythmic. And thus indicate the implicit elements, sensible, perceptible, tension-related and affective, which work on the spectator’s body in many different ways regarding the narrative and figurative variables and their textual formation’ (2015: 25, our translation).

Dusi consistently stresses the intense dialogism operative between the different media, just as between the texts and the arts, both in the cases he examines in depth and the discussion of the theoretical terms, which attempt to capture what remains and what changes through intermedial transposition. Although his main focus is on cinema, he refers to all the rings of the intermedial chain, including videogames and the web. He clarifies the distinction between intermediality and transmediality, as defined by Lotman, which embraces all the intersemiotic and intermedial types of translation, in order to stress the variable, hybrid, transitory aspect of texts in the dynamic semiosphere, informed and reinforced by those intra- and intersemiotic translations.

Dusi defines intermedial as comprising all the transpositions which re-elaborate previous texts, and crossmedial or transmedial, as comprising all the transpositions which expand them in new variations. The important thing in these translations, as he highlights in his analysis, are the variables and the invariables of the artworks on all levels, as they are informed by the author and the medium itself and influenced by the ‘contexts of the discourse, the modes of production and the experience of the media and the reception practices’ (2015: 262, our translation). Thus, from a sociosemiotic perspective, Dusi continues and corroborates the study of adaptation, transfer and extension of the works in multiple semiotic systems and media, demonstrating the complexity of their interpretation, as well as the importance of the semiotic micro- and macro-analysis of cultural production.

**Titika Dimitroulia** is Associate Professor of Translation Theory and Practice, School of French Language and Literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Email: [tdimi@frl.auth.gr](mailto:tdimi@frl.auth.gr)