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TO ADAPT OR TO ADAPT TO? CONSEQUENCES OF APPROACHING FILM ADAPTATION INTRANSITIVELY

Attempting to explain how and why he practices orchid “mutation for fun and profit,” John Laroche, the eponymous character of Susan Orlean’s 1998 nonfiction book *The Orchid Thief*, tells Orlean, “Mutation is the answer to *everything*” (17). So it is only fitting that when screenwriter Charlie Kaufman came to adapt *The Orchid Thief* to the screen for Spike Jonze’s 2002 movie, he transmuted Orlean’s essentially plotless journalistic account of Laroche’s adventures, filled with digressions about obsessive orchid collectors, legal intrigues surrounding the Seminole tribe, and the natural history of Florida, into a film aptly titled *Adaptation*.

Adaptation., as even filmgoers who have not seen it know, is all about the process of adaptation. Charlie Kaufman (Nicolas Cage), the screenwriter hero, has been given an impossible assignment: to prepare a screen adaptation of *The Orchid Thief*, which he calls a book “about flowers,” a phrase echoed by the actual screenwriter Charlie Kaufman in an interview with Jonze and Rob Feld (Kaufman 123, 130). Because Orlean’s book lacks a strong narrative, and because Charlie’s high regard for the book, its author, and his own aesthetic principles discourages him from preparing a Hollywood adaptation that adds “sex or guns or car chases,” he is driven to despair over his inability to complete the assignment until he eventually accepts the help of his twin brother Donald, a cash-hungry compromiser with no single real-life counterpart whose adaptation provides a brilliantly maladroit ending to the film by adding exactly the elements Charlie refused to consider: a drug-fueled affair between Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep) and her eponymous hero John Laroche (Chris

Cooper), Orlean's criminal involvement in Laroche's scheme to clone orchids spirited from their natural habitat in order to sell the products to wealthy collectors, and a violent climactic confrontation that leaves both Laroche and Donald Kaufman dead.

The film uses its hero's inability to turn his impossible source into a well-made screenplay as the basis for a darkly comic postmodern adaptation marked by riotously playful self-reflexivity rather than fidelity to its source or dramatic coherence on its own terms. Both its principal events and its leading excursions are organized around the metaphor announced in its title. As Frank P. Tomasulo observes, "At one level, [the title] refers to the troublesome process of adapting a book to the screen; just as important, *Adaptation*. refers to the troublesome process of growing and maturing as a person – and as a species" (169).

Almost any book could have provided the impetus for the self-reflexive screenplay of *Adaptation*. Apart from the opportunities it offered to explore restless, unfulfilled characters seeking objects that could provide splendid visuals, however, Orlean's book offered a particularly inviting source, since adaptation is a topic nearly as important to the book as it is to the film – and even more important, proportionally speaking, to the 1995 magazine article Orlean published in *The New Yorker* that had stirred interest in Hollywood even before she expanded it into a book. Of the many adaptation situations Orlean considers, three are especially noteworthy: Laroche's curious habit of abruptly changing gears from one consuming passion to another; her own search for passion, a hitherto unfulfilled search that has led her to assume many poses and personas in the course of her journalistic career; and the adaptability of orchids, whose quest to survive by mutating is at the heart of both Laroche's passion for them and the legal question of whether he is in fact an orchid thief. The film borrows all three of these and enriches them by adding a fourth: "Kaufman adapts to the problem of adapting the book to a screenplay by thematizing adaptation itself, a concept that fits well with the book's discussion of adaptation in the biological world" (Bartlett 2007).

Taking off from this analogy between biological and cinematic adaptation, Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon have recently urged "a homology between biological and cultural adaptation" that views stories as adaptive organisms because "[s]tories, in a manner parallel to genes, replicate; the adaptations of both evolve with changing environments" (444). The focus of Bortolotti and Hutcheon's essay is to use this homology between biological and cultural adaptation to propose a broader range of criteria for success in adapting than fidelity to the original property, a criterion clearly irrelevant in biological adaptation. In this essay, I would like to use the same homology to explore a different range of questions about adaptation by emphasizing a distinction between the two adaptation situations Bortolotti and Hutcheon do not consider.

Reviewers and adaptation theorists typically use the word *adapt* transitively, as a verb that requires both a subject and an object – X adapts Y – as in formula-

tions like “screenwriter David Hare and director Stephen Daldry adapted Michael Cunningham’s novel *The Hours* to the screen.” But the alternative sense of the word Bortolotti and Hutcheon propose is intransitive, requiring a subject but no object. In this construction, X does not adapt Y; X adapts to Y. People do not adapt anything but themselves, as when divorced parents or retired workers adapt to new situations, or when citizens are exhorted to adapt to the realities of diminished stores of fossil fuels. In this sense of the word, non-human things are equally capable of adaptation. Plants and animals adapt – or, in the case of dinosaurs, notably fail to adapt – to new homes, new patterns of food supply, new mixtures of sun and shade, or, in a considerably longer view, newly evolving geological conditions.

Do stories have the same tropism toward replication as dinosaurs? This question, which Bortolotti and Hutcheon answer in the affirmative, implies several other questions they do not address. The first is whether “stories” is the best word to use for the material that is homologous to adaptive organisms. Many films eligible for the Academy Award for Best Screenplay Based on Material Adapted from Another Medium borrow not stories but heroes like Batman and James Bond or even the songs that inspired the film *Yellow Submarine* (1968) or the television series *Harper Valley P.T.A.* (1981). And many other films based on stories from another medium transform those stories beyond recognition. This essay, however, will follow Bortolotti and Hutcheon in using “stories” to designate the material that is adapting, or being adapted, both because the great majority of intermedial adaptations are narrative and for a more compelling reason that will become clear later.

Beneath this question are several others. Do stories have a positive tropism to adapt to new circumstances, new cultures, and new media? Are they genetically programmed to survive by expressing psycho-biological imperatives innate to a “human nature” that transcends historical and cultural differences because “people are strongly inclined to behave in ways that enhance their fitness” to survive (Barash and Barash 4)? How compelling is a homology between, say, viruses, which despite their primitive intelligence show an extraordinary ability to survive by mutating, and the stories most adapters and adaptation theorists think of as so much raw material – or, if they take a higher moral tone, as immutable but insensate classics whose survival must be insured through adaptation by other hands than their own? In short, what is the relation between the transitive and intransitive senses of adaptation?

Adaptation. provides a witty sketch for an answer to the last and most urgent of these questions. Orlean’s fascination with adaptation is limited to the intransitive sense of the term, as when she reflects that orchids “are ancient, intricate living things that have adapted to every environment on earth” (53). In Jonze’s film, Charlie Kaufman’s obsession with adaptation is overwhelmingly transitive: Will he be able to adapt Orlean’s book to the screen? Almost without Charlie’s noticing it, however, the film echoes Orlean’s interest in intransitive adaptation in its allusions to Charles Darwin’s biological theory of evolution through adaptation and natural selection, in Charlie’s involuntary reflections on the geological history of the earth, and in

Charlie's own reluctant adaptation to the requirements of his professional dilemma by allowing his double and opposite, Donald, to write his way out of it. Perhaps the most telling of these echoes is the very first, when Charlie's voiceover accompanies the opening credits, which run at the bottom of an otherwise empty black screen: "Do I have an original thought in my head?... Life is short. I need to make the most of it... I need to turn my life around. What do I need to do? I need to fall in love. I need to have a girlfriend. I need to read more, improve myself." Charlie believes that the best way to develop original ideas is to adapt, to change himself, even though he can only imagine this change as deliberate, willed, transitive.

Adaptation. treats the process of cinematic adaptation as an exercise in failed transitivity. Charlie Kaufman, a capable screenwriter assigned to adapt a property he loves, should be able to make the changes needed to bring Orlean's book to the screen by exercising his will, intelligence, and good taste. But the unsuitability of the book as movie material, Charlie's paralyzing awe of his source and its author, his envy of his brash and unscrupulous brother, and his generally depressive temperament, exacerbated by a midlife crisis, make it impossible for him to establish the control over the project he feels he should be asserting. The film is thus a comic critique of the transitive model of adaptation. Charlie, who constantly feels guilty that he has not taken charge of the project, never doubts that he ought to be in charge. His writer's block is resolved only when his brother Donald's free-wheeling approach to adaptation, which he has regarded with horrified loathing, hijacks both the adaptation and the movie itself, showing that in order to win the adaptation sweepstakes, aspiring adapters must utterly subordinate whatever desire their sources have to replicate themselves to the will of the adapters who recreate them by violating their most fundamental principles.

Instead, the film satirically celebrates the triumph of intransitive adaptation figured first in Donald, who is eager to surrender himself to any and all external imperatives in order to finish the screenplay, and ultimately in Charlie himself, who succeeds in the end by following the crassly commercial precepts of Donald and screenwriting teacher Robert McKee (Brian Cox). Charlie's failure to adapt Orlean's book yields to his success in adapting himself – not by imposing his will, but by surrendering to the exigency of circumstance: "Charlie is able to overcome his writer's block only when he introduces himself and his own personal and artistic concerns into Orlean's text. Even the larger theme of human and vegetative adaptation is introduced only when Charlie starts to muse [in the opening scene] about where *he* came from, starting with the 'primal ooze'" (Tomasulo 165).

The course of adaptation studies to date has been set by the consensual acceptance of a transitive model of adaptation. But I wonder how the field might change – might itself adapt to new circumstances, even though academic fields are of course insensate and therefore notoriously incapable of changing themselves – if it took the intransitive model more seriously, either as a supplement or alternative to the transitive model or as a corrective competitor to it.

In the spirit of Jonze's film, which is designed to raise provocative questions rather than settling them, I would suggest five areas of adaptation study that would demand reconsideration from anyone taking the intransitive model seriously.

The most obvious consequence of considering this model is a changing notion of *agency and intention*. When Dorothea Krook, wrestling with the discrepancy between the ways a legion of commentators following Edmund Wilson have read "The Turn of the Screw" and Henry James's stated aims for the story, distinguishes "between the *author's* intention and the *work's* intention" (353), her words seem at the very least semantically confused, for although works of fiction can surely imply motives and intentions, they cannot intend anything themselves. Yet a poststructuralist claim much broader – we do not write language; language writes us – has become a truism. Are language and culture capable of agency in a way "The Turn of the Screw" is not? If they are, do stories more closely resemble language and culture or James's novella in their capacity to intend? Would it be more accurate to say that stories adapt us than to say that we adapt stories? If stories do not intend to adapt but rather embody such intentions, whose intentions do they embody?

The biological model of adaptation is of dubious value in resolving these questions for two reasons. The first is the problematic status of agency within this model, most dramatically illustrated by recent debates between proponents of intelligent design, which posits an agency and intentionality behind all biological adaptation, and subscribers to Darwin's theory of evolution. As early as 1864, Thomas Henry Huxley recognized that "Teleology... received its deathblow at Mr. Darwin's hands" because "for the notion that every organism has been created as it is and launched straight at a purpose, Mr. Darwin substitutes... a method of trial and error" (Darwin 621, 622). Yet Darwin himself often seems to endow a rhetorically personified nature with agency and intentionality, as in his analogy between human and natural selection:

As man can produce and certainly has produced a great result by his methodical and unconscious means of selection, what may not nature effect? Man can act only on external and visible characters: nature cares nothing for appearances, except insofar as they may be useful to any being. She can act on every internal organ, on every shade of constitutional difference, on the whole machinery of life. Man selects only for his own good; Nature only for that of the being which she tends (Darwin 146).

Even if there were general agreement on the extent to which natural selection was the result of some purposive agency, the homology would be further complicated by a vital difference between nature and culture. Observing that "[i]t is people who change stories and do so with particular intentions," Bortolotti and Hutcherson contend that in "the natural environment... mutations are random with respect to the direction of adaptation required for the environment," whereas "culture, on the contrary, at least potentially, directs changes" (453). But while it is certainly true that individual authors and adapters intend goals and design strategic changes to meet them, it is much less clear that culture as such has such goals and intentions.

A passage Bortolotti and Hutcheon excerpt selectively, quoting the phrases I have italicized below, to bolster their case for the intentionality and wisdom of cultural innovation actually makes a different and far more tentative point:

If cultural innovations *are not truly random, but are designed to solve specific problems*, they may increase the rate of the corresponding adaptation in evolution over that expected for a truly random process. We might speculate, however, that whatever the good faith and insight of the proponents of innovation of any kind, the chance that the innovations will prove truly adaptive in the long run is not 100%, so that many innovations, however *purposeful* [sic: Bortolotti and Hutcheon quote this as “purposive”] *and intelligent* they may seem to their proponents and first adopters, may not turn out to be highly adaptive, at least not on a long term basis (Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman 66; cf. Bortolotti and Hutcheon 453).

The most we can say with confidence is that cultural innovations are intentional in the sense that except for what Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman call “a copying error” in cultural transmission (66), someone generally intends them. But that is a long way from saying that culture itself intends evolutionary changes, and more than biological change is directed by the agency or intentionality of any particular organism. Specific avatars of culture, from Oxford University to 20th Century–Fox to the Book-of-the-Month Club, have their own goals and intentions – most often formulated, as in these three cases, after debate, compromise, and incomplete resolution among the still more atomistic goals and intentions of their directors – which in turn must compete with the intentions of innumerable other cultural agencies. Despite the best efforts of sociologists, anthropologists, and market researchers, producing film adaptations is still a gamble whose success is always intended but never assured. Whether the agency and intentionality of culture in general is more like that of nature in general or of particular authors and adapters remains arguable. So the intransitive model of adaptation complicates the assumptions about agency and intentionality that have heretofore shaped adaptation studies without substituting any superior or more comprehensive verities.

A second consequence that arises from entertaining the intransitive model is a changing notion of the *process* of adaptation. Under a transitive model, adapters *make* adaptations, thereby rising to the status of author (“maker”), whether or not they are granted that status by commentators who regard them as secondary creators or parasites on the creativity of the presumably original devisers of stories whose ranks do not include William Shakespeare. Under an intransitive model, it might be argued that adaptive organisms are both subject and object of the process. It seems more reasonable, however, to conclude that they do not make anything, not even themselves; what they do instead is *change*.

Robert Stam has catalogued some of the ways adaptation studies has attempted to “account for the mutation of forms across media: adaptation as reading, rewriting, critique, translation, transmutation, metamorphosis, recreation, transvocalization, resuscitation, transfiguration, actualization, transmodalization, signifying, performance, dialogization, cannibalization, reinvisioning, incarnation, or reaccentua-

tion.” Even though Stam notes that “[t]he words with the prefix ‘trans’ emphasize the *changes* brought about in the adaptation, while those beginning with the prefix ‘re’ emphasize the *recombinant* function of adaptation,” and asserts that “just as any text can generate an infinity of readings, so any novel can generate any number of adaptational readings which are inevitably partial, personal, conjectural, interested” (25), his intertextual account of adaptation, intermittently inflected by such suggestive notions as generation and recombination, does not take full account of the incessant mutability of all texts. For even those texts that seem most stable and canonical – *The Iliad*, *Hamlet*, *Madame Bovary* – change not only in every new adaptation but in every new reading. Like medication, they are not effective until they are dissolved in water or blood.

In order to take account of this radically mutable nature of textually adaptive organisms, theorists would need to shift from conceiving adaptation as a kind of making involving a maker who works with certain raw material to produce a product to a kind of change involving an organism that evolves in order to achieve a longer life, reach a new audience, or demonstrate its viability in a new medium or a new set of cultural circumstances. But this shift already implies a third consequence: a changing conception of the *motives* for adaptation.

Traditional theories of adaptation agree that the primary motive for adapting texts to new media is financial. Adapters take on the task of reworking old stories, as in *Adaptation.*, in order to make money. Hutcheon adds to this motive the desire of early filmmakers “to gain respectability or increase cultural capital” (91) of their emerging medium by tackling Shakespeare and cites “personal reasons” (92) adapters have like wanting to criticize or pay tribute to the works that inspire them. But what motives do stories have to adapt? Does it make any more sense to impute motives to discursive entities than to biological organisms? Clearly the concept of motivation is not restricted to human subjects, for animals deliberately seek food and plants grow toward light and water. But if stories have motives for adapting, where do these motives come from apart from the adapter’s transitive motives – the individual story, its genre, the circumstances in which it is embedded, or some narratological homologue to human nature?

Surprisingly, the last of these hypotheses may be the most likely. One of the most striking features of certain kinds of stories is their competitive nature. In any adversarial courtroom proceeding, the prosecution and the defense present two stories intended to compete for the belief of the judge or jury. Attorneys see their job in court as presenting the more successful story, the one that covers the most evidence most compellingly in a way that shows their side in the most favorable light possible. The same thing is true with candidates competing for public office by presenting stories about themselves that make them seem most trustworthy while defining their opponents through stories that cast suspicion on their character or ability. Whatever their specific policy proposals, candidates know that they cannot succeed without crafting a life story that emphasizes their rise from humble roots, their dra-

matic conversion from discredited ways of thinking or behaving, or their endurance of tribulations that forged their characters and made them more deserving of public favor. Historians too write not simply to explain what happened during the Punic Wars or the Industrial Revolution but to compete successfully with earlier explanations by telling a better story, one that is more dramatic, logical, germane to their readers' current interests, and perhaps truthful.

Although the competitive motive is not nearly so obvious in the case of fictional stories, they too are constantly competing with each other for publication contracts, larger printings, more sustained publicity, the most prominent places on the shelves of bookstores, an extended stay on the most influential bestseller lists, and ultimately the canonical status that will extend their lives indefinitely. Even scholarly publishing has in recent years acknowledged more openly its competitive nature, as monographs compete for review attention in prestigious quarterlies (their prestige itself established through competition with other quarterlies) and purchase by schools and libraries. It might be argued that these motives are more properly ascribed to authors than their stories. Given the nature of even the simplest stories to mutate as they spread and multiply, however, it is more likely that motives are implicit in stories as well as storytelling. Stories are told to amuse, to frighten, to impress, to pass the time, and to establish the storyteller's right to hold the floor against possible challengers. But these motives are not simply added to stories; they play a vital role in shaping them as stories rather than lists of hard facts or striking images or mellifluous words. Like cockroaches and fighter planes, stories are designed to compete more successfully than other alternatives in the discursive arena. That is why the most influential histories are shaped as stories, why virtually all the top-grossing films year after year tell stories, why readers continue to spend their time and money on fictional stories, and why audiences around the world delight at the prospect of hearing a story.

This is not to say that all stories succeed, any more than all biological mutations succeed. Darwin's insight was that nature did not design only those mutations that would be most successful – biological mutations are random – but allowed only the most successful mutations to survive. Though they are hardly the products of random generation, stories likewise succeed because they compete successfully with other stories and less compelling modes of discourse. For this reason a shift from a transitive to an intransitive model of adaptation involves a changing notion of *teleology*. From its beginnings, adaptation study has been resolutely archeological in its orientation, looking ever back in time to what it calls the source of every adaptation. The source is used not only to explain the adaptation, as its efficient cause, but as a privileged criterion of value by which to evaluate it. Indeed, a primary reason that however successful a particular adaptation may be, its status as an adaptation renders it aesthetically suspect is that adaptation as such is devalued because it is parasitic on a source whose primacy is established in by both its anteriority and its presumed originality.

Robert Stam's intertextual analysis of adaptation, derived largely from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, goes a long way toward decentering the privilege of alleged sources over adaptations. In Stam's view, no sources are truly original: "adaptations in a sense make manifest what is true of all works of art – that they are all on some level 'derivative'" (45). Every text, however sanctified by antiquity and canonicity, is an intertext marked by traces of numberless earlier texts without which it could have been neither composed nor understood. The choice of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, both texts that owe a great deal to earlier texts, as original sources that inspire later works but whose own inspiration is generally ignored, is political, aesthetic, and ideological, not ontological.

But a truly teleological view of adaptation would go still further than putting adaptations on all fours with their presumed sources. Instead of looking back, biological adaptation looks ever forward. Mutations survive not because they are just as good as their progenitors but because they are better at the kinds of skills their changing environments demand. The question of how closely a mutation imitates the qualities of its predecessors is, as Bortolotti and Hutcheon point out, irrelevant. What matters instead is how well adapted it is to an ever-changing present and how well it is likely to survive in an uncertain future. Instead of asking, therefore, which film or television adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* best captures the tone or spirit of Austen's novel, commentators might be better advised to ask which have been most successful in finding audiences of their own and why. The goal of this analysis, which is already routinely undertaken not in college classrooms but in the market research firms that advise film studios, would not be the comparative evaluation of adaptations with each other but the analysis of the individual strategies they adopt in competing for space in the crowded marketplace. Market researchers are indifferent to which version of *Pride and Prejudice* is best; they care only which version does best, so that they can predict which versions of *Persuasion* and *Jane Eyre* and *Beloved* are likely to do so well that they are worth producing.

It is in this connection that the difference between truly random biological mutations and not-entirely-random textual adaptations is most important. Film adaptations, however random moviegoers may think they are, are planned with an eye toward finding an audience. When Darwin predicts in the closing paragraphs of *On the Origin of Species* that "as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress toward perfection" (397), he is speaking of two different kinds of perfection: the perfection of a species which best enables it to survive, and the perfection of a system which supports many different species. Film adaptation, which has hitherto been interested exclusively in the first of these kinds of perfection, would do well to consider the second.

It is true, of course, that unlike biological mutations, all film adaptations imply a definite teleology, a future in which their backers become rich, their performers famous, their chief technicians honored with industry awards, and their

influence so broadly diffused that they are capable of generating endless spinoffs, from Happy Meal toys to Director's Cut DVD's to novelizations to licensed lines of apparel. Even as the scholarship on adaptations continues to look back, the makers of adaptations are constantly looking forward, however cloudy their crystal balls may be.

A teleological approach to adaptation, however, would not be content to raise the question of where a particular adaptation is going or how well it is likely to do. The final question for any teleology is a question about a mutation's ultimate goal. Given a biological competition for limited resources that is likely to end only with the destruction of a planetary system, when has a mutating organism reached its definitive form? If biology took its cue from textual adaptation, the answer would lie in the past. Lampreys and amoebas would be heralded as original and canonical and the species that evolved from them unfaithful copies. In the discourse biologists practice, however, the answer to the question is clearly Never, for mutation continues randomly whether or not circumstances require it. Even if an organism adapted perfectly to suit its circumstances, changing circumstances would reward further mutations as the once-perfect adaptation became less and less well-suited to its system.

If it is equally true that textual adaptations never achieve a definitive form because of the guarantee that social, political, historical, and sociological circumstances will also continue to change, then an intransitive model of adaptation will require one last shift: a changing notion of *substance and identity*. A signal advantage of transitive models of adaptation is that their archeological perspective provides a high degree of stability. Whatever changes MGM, Franco Zeffirelli, and Baz Luhrmann ring on *Romeo and Juliet*, the copies never supersede the original. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is always *Romeo and Juliet*, whose text continues to be readily available in paperback from the same bookstores that stock the upstart competitors whose success as often as not boosts its own. In an intransitive model of adaptation, however, there is no definitive *Hamlet*, for the incessant nature of adaptation guarantees the ultimate obsolescence of any version.

This does not mean that all Romeos are created equal. Everyone knows that one version of *Romeo and Juliet* is better than all the others. But not everyone agrees which version that is. An intransitive model of adaptation would deprive Shakespeare's *Romeo* of its institutional privilege over its competitors – or, more precisely, would deprive the cultural institutions that pronounce it definitive (the academy, the classroom, the library archive) of their privilege over competing cultural institutions (the box office, the blogosphere, the photo archive) that also have power to confer this title. As in biology, the balance of power among these different systems would be constantly changing, so that the best answer in the classroom at 10 a.m. would not necessarily be the best answer in the dormitory at 10 p.m., and

might well be discredited or forgotten in another century. It is true, of course, that institutions like the library and the university, which are designed specifically to last, will have a more enduring influence over questions of evaluation than institutions like YouTube and Facebook, which are designed specifically to accommodate and encourage change. It remains to be seen which of these strategies, conservatorship or acceleration, will be more successful in the long run.

However bitter a pill it may be to traditional scholars of adaptation, deprivileging definitive evaluations is only the most obvious change an intransitive model of adaptation would pose for the question of what gives a given adaptation its identity – what makes Shakespeare’s or Luhrmann’s *Romeo Romeo*. A more far-reaching problem involves not individual adaptations but what might be called species of adaptations. If species are constantly mutating in Darwin’s universe, and some of those mutations are leading to fundamental long-range evolution, then what makes a species a species? Debating the merits of what his predecessors had called “the Natural System” (351), Darwin concluded that “descent with modification,” not divine providence, was responsible for the orderly arrangement of species, and that “all true classification is genealogical” (355). His plan did not require him to ask further exactly when or how mutations within a given species reached a tipping point that created a new species. Indeed he expressly warns that

Hereafter we shall be compelled to acknowledge that the only distinction between species and well-marked varieties is, that the latter are known, or believed, to be connected at the present day by intermediate gradations, whereas species were formerly thus connected. . . . It is quite possible that forms now generally acknowledged to be merely varieties may hereafter be thought worthy of specific names. . . . In short, we shall have to treat species in the same manner as those naturalists treat genera, who admit that genera are merely artificial combinations made for convenience. (394–395)

The biological homologue ultimately threatens to dissolve not only genres, the obvious analogy here, but individual texts themselves into “artificial combinations made for convenience.”

In this regard, theorists of textual adaptations, which are designed expressly, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, to provide “repetition without replication” (7), can provide a uniquely modern insight. However consciously premeditated any text is, however definitive any single version of a story is, however orderly the system of textual genres and textual history looks at any given moment, students of adaptation know that that order is only ad hoc and institutional, an image that depends for its fixed clarity on being illuminated by a strobe light. Just as Darwin asserted that the will of individual organisms was always subordinate to principles of natural selection that operated within a group, textual adaptation teaches that individual avatars of textuality, texts and oeuvres and movements and genres, are always subordinate to the incessant process of textual production, mutation, and evolution itself. The world

and the text, both of which look so solid and substantial to any given observer, are always works in progress, a Heraclitean stream whose direction incorporates, subordinates, and dissolves innumerable acts of individual and collective will.

This is the most profound lesson of adaptation studies: that the noun *adaptation* is subordinate to the verb *adapt*. Applying this insight to biology has led to an unprecedented emphasis on how and why organisms and their world change, how they can be expected to change in the future, and how it might be in our power to direct these changes. Applying it to the field of textual studies would lead to a shift from a focus on textual *productions* to a focus on textual *production*. But it might first be applied more modestly to the field of adaptation studies itself. A discipline dominated for half a century by a transitive model stressing the individual agency and motivations of the makers of adaptations, looking backward to putative sources for cues to the nature and value of adaptations, and assuming that institutionally canonized texts have a stable, substantial identity that adaptations can only confirm could benefit by adopting the lessons this new, intransitive, verb-centered model can provide.

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ADAPTOWAĆ CZY ADAPTOWAĆ SIĘ? KONSEKWENCJE NIEPRZECHODNIEGO DEFINIOWANIA ADAPTACJI FILMOWYCH

Streszczenie

Czy scenarzyści i reżyserzy adaptują historie na potrzeby kina, czy też historie te trwają poprzez przystosowanie do zmieniających się okoliczności (nowy język, nowe medium, nowy gatunek, nowa publiczność, nowe oczekiwania)? Esej ten rozważa związek pomiędzy ścisłym („sztywnym”) definiowaniem adaptacji jako tym, który zachodzi w historiach, oraz tranzytywnym – przy udziale ludzkiej ingerencji w opowieści, i bada pięć konsekwencji autotelicznego definiowania adaptacji. Taka zmiana w badaniach nad adaptacją, w których tradycyjnie definiowano adaptację w sposób luźny („przechodni”), wymagałaby przededefiniowania, ustalenia nowych pojęć procesu adaptacji jako bazującego raczej na zmianach niż na tworzeniu, wymagałaby określenia motywów i orientacji adaptacji jako raczej konstrukcji teleologicznej niż archeologicznej oraz określenia istoty i specyfiki adaptacji literatury i adaptacji w ogóle.

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