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Making Off with Michel Houellebecq – Adaptational Strategies and *La Carte et le territoire*

MADS ANDERS BAGGESGARD and JAN LØHMANN STEPHENSEN

In 2014, two seemingly unrelated artworks appeared under the same title, *The Kidnapping of Michel Houellebecq*. Both took their immediate cue from the author's supposed abduction during a 2011 book tour, the purpose of which was to promote his recent novel *La Carte et le territoire* (2010) in Belgium and the Netherlands. As a result of Houellebecq's failure to show up for the tour, the author's Dutch publisher made a joke in an interview with the American newsagency *Bloomberg*, stating that "I wouldn't panic yet... We have no concrete evidence that he is a missing person. Of course we are worried."¹ Despite the apparent irony, media across the globe broadcast the news of the supposed disappearance of Michel Houellebecq. Both abduction-works thus appear to be commentaries both on the media strategy of Houellebecq as the often-proclaimed *enfant terrible* of French literature, and on the willingness of the media to play along with these strategies.

However, the two works are inspired not only by the public persona "Houellebecq" but also by Houellebecq's literary works, both thematically and through attempts to replicate the celebrated deadpan tone of his writing, albeit with different means.² Hence, in this article we wish to explore the relationship between Houellebecq's literary and artistic strategies and these peripheral works; asking the bidirectional question whether works like these are the result of a new relationship between art forms in a intermedial world, and/or whether they are the offspring of a particular performative form of writing developed through Houellebecq's œuvre with *La Carte et le territoire* as the key example.

An intermedial cluster

La Carte et le territoire is a novel about art, literature and death: how it comes about (how it is produced), and who – and what – is involved in that process. The

¹ Catherine Hickley, "French Novelist Houellebecq Goes Missing, Dutch Publisher Says", *Bloomberg*, 14 September 2011.

² Writing on Houellebecq and other French authors, Jérôme Meizoz has tried convincingly to capture the link between persona and style through his concept of posture. See *L'œil sociologique et la littérature* (Genève: Slatkine Erudition, 2004), p. 64 for an analysis of Houellebecq. See *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur* (Genève: Slatkine Érudition, 2007) and *La Fabrique des singularités. Postures littéraires II* (Genève: Slatkine Erudition, 2011) for further elaboration of the theory.

protagonist, Jed Martin, is a famed artist, and one of the main characters is a novelist named Michel Houellebecq – bearing strong resemblances to (the public image of) the author of the novel itself – and the second half of the book deals with solving the brutal, art-like murder of Houellebecq.

The handheld docu-comedy *L'Enlèvement de Michel Houellebecq*, written and directed by Guillaume Nicloux, in which Michel Houellebecq stars as himself, also makes good use of this persona which has been carefully crafted by the author over two decades as someone who is prone to excessive consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and prostitutes. Although not an adaptation into film in the traditional sense, Nicloux's film is nonetheless an obvious spin-off of this particular novel, given the latter's persistent thematic preoccupation with the intermedial relations between literature, photography, painting and (art) cinematography, as well as their socio-economic, structural conditions.

These themes are also dealt with in another unconventional spin-off, Genevieve Knapp and John Christy's strange novel, *The Kidnapping of Michel Houellebecq: the Novelization*. Here, the author-figure Houellebecq is subject to yet another abduction. This time, following a strange turn of events, he is taken to a suburban ghetto in Chicago, where he finds ample opportunity to display those very same personal attitudes and idiosyncrasies that we have come to associate with Houellebecq; and in addition, to develop a serious heroin addiction. At the end of the novelization, Houellebecq also falls victim to an equally brutal, yet less aestheticized murder (in comparison to *La Carte et le territoire*) at the hands of his kidnapper, Ricky.

The issue of intermedial relations and their socio-economic, structural conditions is a recurring theme in this unorthodox novelization, as well. Thus, in a brief preface, the authors insist that the explicit reference to the film (that is, as its novelization) is only maintained out of pecuniary interest: the film's potential success might spur interest in the novelization. This did not happen, so the novelization now exists as yet another weird *other* accompanying Houellebecq's literary œuvre alongside a number of different artefacts and artworks such as the parody *La tarte et le suppositoire* and Bernard Maris' essay *Houellebecq Économiste*, which reads Houellebecq's works as economic treatises. This list also includes a number of different real-life remakes by artists such as the Frenchman Thomas Lévy-Lasne, and even exhibitions at the Dutch KochxBos gallery and Kunstverein Hamburg, mimicking the artwork produced by the fictional character Jed Martin, which popped

up in the years following the publication of the novel.³

Kochx Bos Gallery & Artisan Associés Jed Martin present the Avant-première including a pre-study of Michel

HOUELLEBECQ

Jed Martin

Travail Humain

***** Le Monde
***** Art Forum

Expo 8 - 16 April 2016

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³ Lévy-Lasne has painted a series of portraits based on Jed Martin's fictional works. However, the most elaborate take on transforming the described artworks into real ones has been initiated by the art gallery KochxBos in Amsterdam, which has hosted two exhibitions of Jed Martin's works under the title *Travail Humain* (in 2016 and 2018; cf. figure 1). These exhibitions have taken the existence of Jed Martin as a given, attributing the exhibited artworks to him. Jed Martin even appears on the gallery's homepage on a list alongside the real-life artists exhibited by the gallery (<http://www.kochxbos.nl/artists.html>). The exhibition *Jed Martin – The Map Is More Interesting Than the Territory* at Kunstverein Hamburg was also curated "in honor of Jed Martin", and also presents Martin as an actual living artist: "Jed Martin, born in 1975, is one of the most important

Figure 1: Poster for the exhibition "Jed Martin: Travail Humain" at KochxBos gallery, Amsterdam (2016). © Artistes Associés Jed Martin Courtesy of KochxBos Gallery Amsterdam."

This article will use the two abduction works and *La Carte et le territoire* as its main examples, but will place the discussion within this broader frame of works surrounding Houellebecq's novel, including adaptations and Houellebecq's work in other media (for example, the exhibition *Rester vivant* presented at the prestigious Palais de Tokyo in 2016). This set of texts, we argue, is not an incoherent cluster, but an example of an economy of adaptation and transmediation,⁴ which has manifested itself increasingly over the last century as a central mechanism in the cultural economy.

We argue, also, that the particular set of artworks with which we engage in this article is not a random one, but the result of a particular challenge made by Houellebecq in a novel that continuously engages with the questions of intermediality and transmediality, especially in the form of the relationship between textual and visual forms of expression highlighted by the collaboration between the protagonist, painter and visual artist Jed Martin, and the in-novel character Michel Houellebecq.

We will therefore discuss, on the one hand, recent theories of the intermediality of adaptation and novelization and the reading of contemporary literature on these terms; while on the other hand we will discuss the ways in which these theories can enhance an understanding of Houellebecq's transmedial strategy and the concept of notoriety as it unfolds within and around his works.

The adaptation industry

Traditionally, the theories and analysis of adaptation have focused primarily on how the content of one medium (literature) has been transposed into another medium (film), with a strong tendency both to privilege the "original" over the "copy" (the so-called *fidelity problem*)⁵ and to ascribe *a priori* superior rank to the medium of the book over film.⁶ The latter tendency has to do with an inherited set of normative inter-media hierarchies that have been radically challenged in recent years. Likewise,

contemporary French artists." ("Jed Martin – The Map Is More Interesting Than the Territory", *Art Viewer*, 15 June 2017.)

⁴ Geoffrey Long, *Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company* (PhD thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007).

⁵ J.D. Connor, "The Persistence of Fidelity: Adaptation Theory Today", *M/C Journal*, 10: 2 (2007).

⁶ See for instance Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach", *New Literary History*, 3: 2 (1972), 279–299 (p. 288): "With the novel the reader must use his imagination to synthesize the information given him, and so his perception is simultaneously richer and more private; with the film he is confined merely to physical perception, and so whatever he remembers of the world he had pictured is brutally cancelled out."

the former tendency is based on a specific conception of the *sign*, which suggests that a story (*the signified*) can simply be retold in another way, using a different (media) vocabulary (*signifier*). Or to put it in Jean Baudrillard's terminology, which Houellebecq deliberately and jokingly paraphrases both in his title and throughout the novel: "Le territoire ne précède plus la carte, ni ne lui survit. C'est désormais la carte qui précède le territoire – précession des simulacres – c'est elle qui engendre le territoire."⁷ In the novel this theme is quite explicitly explored through Jed Martin's early works, which are photographic reproductions of Michelin Maps showing a fetishistic interest in their visual, physical and material qualities, rather than being interested in their ability to index a specific geographical site. These artworks thus point to the same conclusion as Baudrillard, as revealed by the title of Martin's first exhibition: "La carte est plus intéressante que le territoire."⁸

In critical dialogue with the fidelity-centred tradition within the academic field of adaptation studies, Australian literary scholar Simone Murray in her book *The Adaptation Industry* (2012) has suggested that we should rather develop a proper *sociology of adaptation*, which "takes us well beyond textual specifics and enables us to ask how the mechanisms by which adaptations are produced influence the kinds of adaptations released".⁹ In a chapter devoted to "the expanding role of the author in an era of cross-media adaptation"¹⁰ Murray shows the ways in which the adaptation industry celebrates the neo-Romantic notion of authorship whilst simultaneously, and paradoxically, relying on poststructuralist notions of distributed authorship in their actual practices. "Romantic myths of semi-divine and socially autonomous authorial genius," Murray notes, "are here being invoked by the *adaptation industry itself* to disguise its own operations."¹¹ Hence, while academic theory, extending Roland Barthes' seminal statement that the "birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author",¹² has taken it upon itself to routinely mourn (or celebrate) the passing of the authoritative author figure and focus on processes of perpetual intertextual citation,¹³ outside academia "critically esteemed and commercially successful literary fiction authors [have] never wielded more

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1981), p. 10.

⁸ Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 84.

⁹ Simone Murray, *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptations* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 4.

¹⁰ Murray, *Adaptation Industry*, pp. 25-49.

¹¹ Murray, *Adaptation Industry*, p. 27.

¹² Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", *Aspen Magazine*, 5-6 (1967), UbuWeb, <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/threeEssays.html#barthes>. The statement seems to be ironically invoked by Houellebecq himself when the murder mystery is unfolded in the second half of *La Carte et le territoire* and in the dialectics of author murder and abduction in our two other works.

¹³ Cf. Robert Stam, "Introduction: the Theory and Practice of Adaptation", in Robert Stam & Alessandra Raengo (eds.), *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Adaptation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 1-52; Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

cultural clout”.¹⁴ Here, the author is at the centre of a host of activities in which he or she transfers *promotional capital* to other cultural products. Mostly to books by the same author, of course. But increasingly so-called *celebrity author branding* also “attaches itself additionally to incarnations of this same book-derived content in other media formats”¹⁵ – for instance in movie adaptations, where their presence on premiere nights confers massive amounts of cultural capital on the adaptation business.¹⁶

Notably, Murray argues, this results in growing pressure on fiction authors to take into consideration at the early stages of content creation the multiplatform potentials of the book they are embarking upon.¹⁷ Hence, literature no longer has the status of an isolated medium, not even to its own producers. Literature is often either being written with the prospect of adaptation in mind; or being structured in ways that are deeply infiltrated by an interiorized “cinematographic regime”.¹⁸ These industry mechanisms are also spelled out in Christy and Knapp’s novelization, in which the abducted author explains to his kidnapper that:

“[T]he money is not in the books. It is meager in comparison to the film deals that Hollywood will offer us. [...] The film industry buys book rights from known authors for millions of dollars – that is regardless of whether the film is made. Can you believe that! And if the film is made, it means more publicity. That translates to more book sales. The money never stops.”¹⁹

The case in hand thus illustrates that an author is no longer just an author, an adaptation no longer just a film based on a book, and—as we will discuss later—a novelization no longer a book based on a movie. Rather, all these media products are entangled in a meshwork of inter- and transmedia relations, all of which, of course, are still intimately entangled with media industry conditions, economic interests and notions of authorial authority.

¹⁴ Murray, *Adaptation Industry*, p. 34.

¹⁵ Murray, *Adaptation Industry*, p. 35.

¹⁶ The celebrity standing of Houellebecq has been discussed extensively in France – most often derogatorily in connection with his presumed lack of *style*. See for example Jean-François Patricola, *Michel Houellebecq ou la provocation permanente* (Paris: Écriture, 2005) and Éric Naulleau, *Au secours, Houellebecq revient!* (Paris: Chiflet & Cie, 2005). Samuel Estier sums up these discussions and concludes calmly: “L’arrivée de Houellebecq dans le champ littéraire est parallèle à un grand nombre de bouleversements qui affectent le milieu.” Samuel Estier, *À propos du “Style de Houellebecq. Retour sur une controverse (1998-2010)”* (Lausanne: Archipel Essais 21, 2015), p. 104.

¹⁷ Murray, *Adaptation Industry*, p. 36.

¹⁸ Jan Baetens, “Novelization, a Contaminated Genre?”, *Critical Inquiry*, 32 (2005), 43–60 (p. 56).

¹⁹ John Christy & Genevieve Knapp, *The Kidnapping of Michel Houellebecq: the Novelization* (Amphetamine Press, 2014), p. 81.

An intermedial novel

These processes are clearly visible in the collection of works and artefacts which surrounds *La Carte et le territoire*. In various ways the two abduction works make off with the Houellebecq-persona and create an intermedial context to the novel on the basis of this persona. However, this intermedial context is not only peripheral to the novel, but lies in continuation of the reflections on intermediality presented within it. As described above, *La Carte et le territoire* is not only a novel about art, but a novel about the importance of fame and the author/artist persona for the success of artworks and for the intermedial processes surrounding the creation and (e)valuation of art.²⁰

This is perhaps seen most clearly in the description of the interaction between the novel's protagonist, Jed Martin, and the fictional Michel Houellebecq. Martin, a struggling artist who suddenly becomes the talk of the French art world due to a series of artworks whose most striking characteristic is that they are cleverly promoted in collaboration with the Michelin company, commissions Houellebecq to write an essay to accompany the exhibition of a series of paintings entitled "série des métiers". In turn, Martin, as the finale of the series, paints Houellebecq the author as a representative of his profession: "Dans le tableau, Houellebecq est debout face à un bureau recouvert de feuilles écrites ou demi-écrites. Derrière lui, à une distance qu'on peut évaluer à cinq mètres, le mur blanc est entièrement tapissé de feuilles manuscrites collées les unes contre les autres, sans le moindre interstice."²¹

²⁰ Following French sociologists Boltanski & Esquerre, we could say that *La Carte et le territoire* is a novel about the processes that increase the value of objects, especially art, within an *economy of enrichment* (Luc Boltanski & Arnaud Esquerre, "The Economic Life of Things: Commodities, Collectibles, Assets", *New Left Review*, 98 [2016], 31-54). According to this analysis, enrichment processes are quite disparate productive activities, "many of which are not even identified as 'work', but rather presented as an expression of 'desire' or 'passion', even by those who engage in them" (p. 54).

²¹ Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 184.

Figure 2: "Elementary professions 'Michel Houellebecq, writer', Painting by Jed Martin: Travail Humain II exhibition" at KochxBos Gallery Amsterdam (2018). In private collection of Max Pam. © Artistes Associés Jed Martin, Courtesy of KochxBos Gallery Amsterdam."

The painted Houellebecq is thus presented as a man of words, but the novel immediately negates this vision, emphasizing the author's reliance on visual impressions: "Si Houellebecq aimait au cours de sa phase de travail punaiser les

murs de sa chambre avec différents documents, il s'agissait le plus souvent de photos",²² and continues to merge the visual and the textual in an explanation of the choice of the painter as being driven by "Une pure fascination plastique devant l'image de ces blocs de textes ramifiés, reliés, s'engendrant les uns les autres comme un gigantesque polype."²³ Text is thus transformed into visual, even sculptural form, highlighting the interdependence and transformability of the two media, a fact that is also supported by the existence in the novel, as a pair of odd twins, of the fictional Houellebecq's essay on paintings, which is only paraphrased, and Martin's painting of the author, which is only described. The process reaches its climax when Houellebecq himself enters the realm of art as a prop in the last part of the novel, as the victim of a murder so brutal that Jed Martin, when he is confronted with photographs of the murder scene not knowing that this is the motif, interprets it as "Un Pollock; mais un Pollock qui aurait travaillé presque en monochrome"²⁴ – a style which, ironically, is the exact opposite of Jed Martin's own weapon of choice: object-oriented hyperrealism.²⁵

Working across media is not alien to Michel Houellebecq, either. In fact, a number of his earliest publications took the form of collaboration with visual artists such as two limited-edition poetry collections, *La Peau* (1995) and *La Ville* (1996), illustrated and published by the French visual artist Sarah Wiame; and alongside the curator Nicolas Bourriaud and others, he was one of the founders of the journal *Revue perpendiculaire*, which was devoted to exploring forms of expression running perpendicular to traditional media, genres and formats.²⁶ Houellebecq is also an avid photographer; and his short story *Lanzarote* was published by Flammarion in 2000 as a box-set containing two volumes, one with the story and another with Houellebecq's photos – most of which depicted landscapes and volcanic formations from the island that gives the story its title. The photographs explore the territory between the figural and the abstract which is also thematized in *La Carte et le territoire*.

This does not mean that working between media is without its problems. When Houellebecq's photos were the subject of a large exhibition at the prestigious

²² Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 184.

²³ Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 185.

²⁴ Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 350.

²⁵ American art critic Clement Greenberg famously noted that the abstract two-dimensionality of Pollock's action paintings was partially a response to the realist superiority of other new media technologies (especially photography). See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting", *Art & Literature*, 4 (1965), 193-201.

²⁶ Houellebecq was expelled from the journal due to his controversial statements on cloning in connection with the publication of *Les Particules élémentaires*. See Nicolas Bourriaud, Christophe Duchatelet, Jean-Yves Jouannais, Christophe Kihm, Jacques-François Marchandise and Laurent Quintreau, "Houellebecq et l'ère du flou", *Le Monde*, 10 October 1998, p. 16, and Futoshi Hoshino, "Nicolas Bourriaud: Between Practise and Theory" (interview), *ArtiT*, 19 March 2018.

Palais de Tokyo in the summer of 2016, the president of the museum, Jean de Loisy, in one of the seven interviews collected in a special issue of the in-house magazine *Palais* published in connection with the exhibition, praised Houellebecq as a modern Victor Hugo, spanning almost all artistic disciplines, and Houellebecq answered sardonically: “C’est une source d’emmerdements, car les gens vous prennent moins au sérieux. Les gens n’aiment pas les touche-à-tout.”²⁷ His answer highlights the continued importance of the traditional author figure. Working across the disciplines is not easy because it makes it difficult to position yourself within an institutional circuit, as either author or artist honouring the very different economic and symbolic logics governing the two fields.

These differences are discussed throughout *La Carte et le territoire*, but have also surfaced at different points in Houellebecq’s career, perhaps most notably in connection with his widely discussed change of publishing house from Flammarion to Fayard in 2004. Following the success of *Les Particules élémentaires*, Houellebecq was both able to secure a historically large advance on his upcoming novel *La Possibilité d’une île*, and to contract the publishing house, part of the media group Lagardère, one of the largest in the world at the time, to produce an adaptation of the novel with Houellebecq as director.²⁸ The film was released in 2008 under the same title as the novel, and was an absolute commercial and critical failure, described by *Le Monde* as a “défilé d’images sans vie, montées sans rythme, sans rien”.²⁹ Despite the reuse of the title, the film is not an adaptation in the most traditional sense (cf. below), since it virtually ignores the narrative of the novel, reducing it to an almost abstract reflection on the science-fiction theme of the novel. An excerpt from the film was also screened at the Palais de Tokyo, and in another of the accompanying interviews Houellebecq commends his main actor Jean-Pierre Malo for creating a sense of *rature*, and goes on to discuss this as the primary accomplishment of the film, scratching out expectations, and perhaps even the original novel itself.³⁰ The adaptation, and Houellebecq’s later use of it as part of the exhibition, adds to his image as an author who operates at the interface between the various arts and commerce, catering to the demands of the market while using the opportunities that his fame and position provide to circumvent expectations; for instance by permanently oscillating between posing as the authoritative author figure and its opposite.

The trans- and intermedial space used by the two abduction works is therefore opened up both by Houellebecq’s own artistic practice and through his appearance

²⁷ “Entretien entre Michel Houellebecq et Jean de Loisy”, *Palais*, 23 (2016), 12–15 (p. 15).

²⁸ Marie-Dominique Lelievre, “Extension du domaine de l’édition”, *Libération*, 9 June 2004.

²⁹ Jean-Luc Douin, “La Possibilité d’une île”: l’impossibilité d’un film – Michel Houellebecq échoue à adapter son roman”, *Le Monde*, 9 September 2008.

³⁰ “Entretien entre Michel Houellebecq et Benoît Delépine”, *Palais*, 23 (2016), 60–61, p. 61.

and performance in different media. This complicates the question of how to understand the relationship between our three main artworks, blurring not only the relationship between original and copies (or *hypotext* and *hypertext* in Gerard Genette's terminology),³¹ but also the relationship between media and the place they hold within a larger media landscape.

Beyond transmedia storytelling

Engaging with these problems critically entails looking at inter- and transmedial clusters of cultural products and expressions and their internal and external relationships, rather than simply analysing and studying individual works and authors.

In a recent short piece entitled "Adaptation, Extension, Transmedia", the author of *Convergence Culture* (2006), Henry Jenkins, notes that:

In the age of transmedia franchises, there is much more movement of stories, characters, fictional worlds, core themes, and stylistic elements across media. The borders between textual and promotional practices are breaking down, and this blurring of categories should have some impact on how we think about adaptation.³²

Such a reconceptualization would certainly also seem necessary in order to understand that the relationship between Houellebecq's novel, Nicloux's movie and Christy & Knapps' reluctant novelization involves specific cases of transmedia adaptation. However, it might also mean that we should agree to rid ourselves of yet another foundational assumption of adaptation theory, which is also perpetuated by Jenkins: the idea that transmedia adaptation is by definition primarily, if not exclusively, an instance of *telling stories* across media,³³ that is, the (inter)medial transfer of the *narrative* dimensions of a given "source text".

This is, for instance, what seems to be at stake when Houellebecq specifically praises the deletion of the narrative dimensions in the adaptation of *La Possibilité d'une île*. Similarly, apart from one specific "plot-event"—namely the disappearance of "the author, Houellebecq", either through murder, kidnapping or both—none of the other works discussed here can be said to adapt either the narrative of the novel or the narrative of the film.

³¹ Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 5.

³² Henry Jenkins, "Adaptation, Extension, Transmedia", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 45: 2 (2017).

³³ Cf. chapter 3, "Searching for the Origami Unicorn: *The Matrix* and Transmedia Storytelling", in Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), pp. 95-134.

In fact, the two abduction-works primarily seem to adapt central *themes* characteristic of Houellebecq's work. An interesting example is Houellebecq's well-known antipathy towards modernist architecture, which becomes a recurring element linking the different works on different levels. In the novelization the kidnapped Houellebecq, assisted by his kidnapper Ricky, co-authors a rambling essay/novel called *Minimalization through Urban Space* about "a brilliant, aging drug dealer, who 'got out of the game' to practise urban-planning",³⁴ in which he takes wild swings at modernist architecture *tout court*. And in the movie, the character Houellebecq's persistent quarrels with modernist architecture, especially Le Corbusier, plays a quite significant role; for instance, when the author, in one of the film's opening scenes, engages in yet another monologue on its maladies. The essay in the novelization echoes both Houellebecq's essay *Approches du désarroi* written in 1995 – recently reprinted in connection with the exhibition at Palais de Tokyo – and the criticism of Corbusian architecture raised in *La Carte et le territoire*, notably through descriptions of Jed's life in and around the Parisian neighbourhood Les Olympiades, built around 1970 with explicit reference to Le Corbusier's *Charte d'Athènes*. After the publication of the novel, Houellebecq actually moved into the neighbourhood, returning from Ireland, joking that: "Je suis rentré pour voir sombrer le socialisme."³⁵ The modernist architecture of Les Olympiades is thus also the visual backdrop for the first part of *L'Enlèvement de Michel Houellebecq* as the place from which the author is abducted, acting as a contrast to the rural environment dominating the rest of film.

Figure 3: Frame grab from *L'Enlèvement de Michel Houellebecq*: Houellebecq in his apartment in Les Olympiades.

³⁴ Christy & Knapp, p. 79.

³⁵ Thomas Pitrel, "Mystère – Les absences de Michel Houellebecq", *Vanity Fair*, 6 January 2015.

The critique of modernist architecture is thus a theme common to all of the works that go beyond the narrative. Simply labelling it a theme, however, also seems unsatisfying when its thematic nature manifests itself in concrete locations and dialogues with particular theories and between existing and fictional texts. This suggests a more dynamic relationship between artworks and between artworks and real-life authors and filmmakers than that suggested by the term “adaptation”.

Jenkins suggests that in cases such as this we should differentiate between, at one end of the continuum, *adaptations*, which involve “a version or retelling of the original”; and at the other end, *extensions*, which he refers to as a radical version that “goes beyond the original (for example, expanding the timeline or developing the backstory of a secondary character or exploring another dimension of the fictional world)”.³⁶ He adds that “[e]xtensions often authenticate themselves as belonging in the same fictional world through adapting aspects of their originating texts.”³⁷

If we were to use this theoretical framework, one could argue that the crucial point really would be the status of the persona “Houellebecq”. On the one hand, Houellebecq appears to be a person existing in the world most of us inhabit. One of the authors of this article has met him a couple of times, when he seemed to be a rather calm and even pleasant man. Other people claim to be his friend or even to be related to him.³⁸ On the other hand, Houellebecq is clearly a fictional character, inhabiting the universe of his own books, but also appearing in other works such as the ones discussed here, and, between the two, appearing in different media in roles that mimic both the fictional and the real-life versions of Houellebecq. The point being that the relationship between fiction and reality can be best understood not by searching for links back to the real life of the author—understanding him “au fond”, as stated on the back cover of Denis Demonpion’s infamous investigation of the author’s past, *Houellebecq non-autorisé* (2005)³⁹—but by looking at the role played not only by the name but also by the character Houellebecq in the extended œuvre.⁴⁰

³⁶ Jenkins, “Adaptation”.

³⁷ Jenkins, “Adaptation”.

³⁸ A fact often used to promote books and attach them to the Houellebecqian universe: for example, by Dominique Noguez’s *Houellebecq, en fait* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2003); Fernando Arrabal ! *Houellebecq* ; (Madrid: Editorial Hijos de Muley Rubio, 2005), and Juremir Machado da Silva, *Um Escritor No Fim do Mundo – Viagem Com Michel Houellebecq À Patagônia* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2011), which all emphasize the author’s friendship with Houellebecq on their covers, presumably to anchor the narrative in the reality behind the slippery proper noun Houellebecq. Not to mention the infamous book by Houellebecq’s mother, Lucie Ceccaldi, *L’Innocente* (Paris: Scali, 2008), in which she repeatedly writes off her son as a “p’tit con” (404) because of his less flattering, though fictional, descriptions of his mother in, particularly, *Les Particules élémentaires*.

³⁹ Denis Demonpion, *Houellebecq non-autorisé – enquête sur un phénomène* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

⁴⁰ This includes what Roland Barthes terms “la nébuleuse biographique (Journaux, Biographies, Interviews personnalisées, Mémoires etc.)” (276) in his resurrection of the author in his 1979-80 lectures on *La Préparation du roman* (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2003), but also the way that the character is used and shaped by others in adaptations, commentaries, etc. Simone Murray has thus argued that festival talks, interviews, and author appearances in general should perhaps be included

The understanding of the relationships created by variations on the theme of modernist architecture or the road travelled between media by the character Houellebecq can thus better be understood by employing another concept which Jenkins brings into the equation: *world-making*. With reference to Mark Wolf's work on the (authorial work of) building "imaginary worlds",⁴¹ Jenkins urges us to think of these fictional worlds as:

A mental or intertextual construct – an encyclopedic understanding of all of the elements that constitute the setting of a particular story (the characters, the institutions within which they operate, their core tools and technologies, core bodies of knowledge, social norms, shared mythologies, and so forth) and from which new stories could be generated.⁴²

Whether a new so-called "installation" truly belongs to such an already existing fictional world or not ultimately hinges on how it makes use of "familiar lines or speech patterns, visual iconography, specific plot events, etc.," and how that specifically is "reinterpreted and restaged in a new media setting."⁴³

A case in point would be *L'Enlèvement de Michel Houellebecq*. The film can be seen as an extension of the work by virtue of the fact that Houellebecq himself participates in the creative process. In addition, it expands the *world* created in and around the works of Houellebecq. Although not an extension of the fictional universe in a strict sense, it is an extension of the already transgressional work done in the novels through the destabilization of fictional codes by his integration of real-life elements, such as his recurrent use of protagonists named Michel and settings that correspond to the places where Houellebecq lives and the subsequent use of these instabilities in the author's public performance.

Despite its other qualities, the main attraction of the film is clearly the persona Houellebecq. Not as an abstract form, but as a corporeal presence, whose degraded cigarette-, alcohol- and prostitute-consuming body incarnates many of the themes known from his books. Likewise, the deadpan tone of the books is reflected in the rather smug way in which all the lines are delivered. Despite this less positive depiction, the character is adored by all other characters, not least because of his apparent honesty (established through his bodily presence), and he ends up as the

as "the far outer edge" of contemporary adaptation studies through an expanded notion of Genette's "paratext" (Simone Murray, "Three Key Questions for Adaptations Studies in the Digital Age", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 45: 2 [2017]).

⁴¹ Mark J.P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁴² Jenkins, "Adaptation".

⁴³ Jenkins, "Adaptation".

natural centre of the narrative universe: not only as an object to be ransomed, but as a symbol of humanity, no less.⁴⁴

The weight of this position, a reversed Stockholm syndrome, is dissolved towards the end of the film as the characters leave the state of exception caused by the abduction and return to their normal lives. In this way, the film makes off with Houellebecq, and releases him again into the world created by and around the author. A world consisting of a quite fixed repertoire of issues, themes and characters copulating enthusiastically and weaving threads throughout a complex yet coherent whole. And lurking behind it all: the deadpan, tongue-in-cheek presence of Michel Houellebecq, French author and *enfant terrible*, who constantly traverses the border between fiction and fact, map and territory.

Novelizing the author

Worlds like these do not exist in empty space, however. Their existence is also governed by the cultural and financial economies of which they are part. Whereas Guillaume Nicloux's movie – given Houellebecq's own double or triple presence as actor, as role, and perhaps even as implicit co-author/inspirational source of this very Houellebecq-like comedy – clearly has formal links to Houellebecq's authorial world-making, the links in relation to Christy & Knapp's novelization are less tangible. Especially given the fact that it is neither an official and legally sanctioned novelization, nor for that matter is it related in any obvious way to any particular pre-existing hypotext (a film), other than by the generic marker "novelization" on its cover.

Christy & Knapp's book does mirror the kidnapping plot of Nicloux's movie, but with a few significant twists—or alternative "points of no return", as narratology would have it—making the storyline diverge quite radically from the film. First, the staged abduction, which is planned in order to inspire Houellebecq to write even better literature,⁴⁵ is brutally disturbed by the Mexican-American dope dealer Ricky, who has crossed the Atlantic seeking to kill the author. Second, when the fleeing Houellebecq, on a plane to the US, is accidentally seated near Ricky, who forces the author to follow him to the ghettos of Chicago, which the world never gets to know about, since the hired kidnapper, unaware of what has happened to Houellebecq en route to the US, fakes the author's death to keep him out of harm's way. So, while the world thinks of Houellebecq as dead, the author and Ricky, stuck in the drug dealer's

⁴⁴ Cf. Mads Anders Baggesgaard, "The Complexities of Honesty", in Gavin Bowd (ed.), *Le Monde de Houellebecq* (Glasgow: Centre for Emblem Studies, 2006), pp. 159-170.

⁴⁵ Christy & Knapp certainly must have adopted this from Nicloux's movie, where it is also suggested as a possible motive behind the kidnapping. Another indicator that Christy & Knapp have been aware of the movie is the scene in which one of the kidnappers flexes his muscles and shows off to Houellebecq, which is replicated in the novelization (p. 46).

mole-infested basement apartment, gradually develop a twisted kind of friendship, which initially is forged through the sharing of cigarettes, alcohol, joints and syringes for injecting heroin, but in time also through the asymmetrical process of co-authoring *Minimalization through Urban Space*. The friendship is finally brought to an abrupt end when Ricky, for no apparent reason, slays Houellebecq with a pull-up bar (hereby somehow realigning the novelization with the second half of *La Carte et le territoire* after its narrative detour as the adaptation's other).

As might be obvious just from this short recap, the weird plot (and rambling prose) make Christy & Knapp's book a strange piece of literature. However, this does not necessarily make it a strange novelization. Because what all instances of novelization as a literary genre seem to have in common is the fact that they sit quite awkwardly in the media landscape. Belgian literary scholar Jan Baetens has even suggested that novelization might not be literature at all, but rather a kind of *anti-literature*.⁴⁶

So, what is a novelization? In short, a novelization is "an adaptation of film into literature",⁴⁷ often a novel written specifically to accompany a film at the time of its release, although for reasons of production time it is quite often based on the screenplay rather than on the movie itself.⁴⁸ Although critically under-appreciated and academically under-studied,⁴⁹ novelization is a surprisingly common phenomenon which has accompanied the movie business for nearly a century as a kind of merchandise tie-in, especially in relation to mainstream Hollywood movie production.⁵⁰ Originally, before video, DVD and streaming, the intention was both to prolong the movie experience and to serve economic agendas. With the proliferation of new recording and distribution media, the economic agendas have become increasingly important. Novelization has become "a calculated means of maximizing profit"⁵¹ through product diversification, or as Woody Allen has one of the characters in his short story "This Nib for Hire" phrase it, a novelization is "an exploitation paperback – strictly for lowbrows".⁵²

⁴⁶ Baetens, "Novelization", pp. 43-60.

⁴⁷ Thomas Van Parys. "The Commercial Novelization: Research, History, Differentiation", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 37: 4 (2009), 305–317 (p. 305). Cf. also the same author's "The Study of Novelisation: A Typology and Secondary Bibliography", *Belphégor*, 10: 2 (2011).

⁴⁸ Johannes Mahlke, "The Hollywood Novelization: Film as Literature or Literature as Film Promotion?", *Poetics Today*, 33: 2 (2012), 137–168 (p. 141).

⁴⁹ Recently some interest has been paid to the phenomenon, especially by Baetens (cf. *La novellisation – Du film au roman* (Bruxelles: Les impressions nouvelles, 2008)). See also Kate Newell, *Expanding Adaptation Networks: From Illustration to Novelization* (London: Palgrave, 2017).

⁵⁰ Cf. Randall D. Larson, *Films into Books: An Analytical Bibliography of Film Novelizations, Movie, and TV Tie-Ins* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1995) for a bibliography of all US novelizations from the 1920s to mid-1990s.

⁵¹ Mahlke, p. 139.

⁵² Woody Allen, "This Nib for Hire", in *Mere Anarchy* (New York: Random House, 2007), p.

This last comment points to the fact that novelizations are notoriously considered bad literature—and often for good reason. But according to Johannes Mahlkecht, this is really no surprise. It is actually deliberate Hollywood studio politics, since the producers are not interested in quality work that would compete with the core product, the movie. For this reason, the studios impose unfeasible “external constraints”⁵³ on the hired writers of novelizations, making artistic success virtually impossible. Hence, novelization, which in theory could have been “a hierarchical equal companion piece to the film, a text”, is in reality predestined to become merely a “subordinate adjunct, a paratext”.⁵⁴

However, in his book *La novellisation* Jan Baetens points to the French context as the exception to this rule.⁵⁵ As reflected in the writerly interest in film at the outset of *la nouvelle vague* and its origins around the *Cahiers du cinéma*, French literature boasts a rich history of authors interpreting cinematic works and artists working with the same themes across the two media, from Alain Robbe Grillet and Marguerite Duras to contemporary writers like Tanguy Viel, Pierre Alféri and Bruno Dumont, who published his *La Vie de Jésus* as a *texte du scénario* two years before his film with the same title.

But if Houellebecq’s genre-crossing behaviour could be linked to this tradition to some extent, Christy & Knapp’s book is clearly representative of—while simultaneously critically engaged with—the American tradition of novelization as media-convergent products of financial opportunism. In contrast to movie adaptations, which quite often do not eagerly flag the fact that they are based on a short story or a novel (which the majority of movies are in some way or the other), *all* novelizations (apart from a few, perhaps) parasitically attach themselves to movies as part of the symbolic and economic traffic that surrounds their release.⁵⁶ This is, of course, what Christy & Knapp poke fun at in their short preface “A Note on the Title”. Despite the fact that their novel, in addition to bearing the same title as Nicloux’s film (*The Kidnapping of Michel Houellebecq*) is subtitled “the novelization”, they insist that it is *not* a novelization of that film at all. They have not seen the movie, not even after becoming aware of its existence, “and do not intend to do so unless made to in court”.⁵⁷ At least, this is what they claim (although there are quite a few hints that they most certainly have seen it). Instead, they just want to “capitalize on

⁵³ Cf. Jan Baetens, “Expanding the Field of Constraint: Novelization as an Example of Multiply Constrained Writing”, *Poetics Today*, 31: 1 (2010), 51-79.

⁵⁴ Mahlkecht, p. 160.

⁵⁵ On the French tradition of novelization, see also Van Parys, “The Study of Novelisation”.

⁵⁶ Heidi Peeters, “Multimodality and its Modes in Novelization”, *Image & Narrative*, 15: 1 (2010), 118-129.

⁵⁷ Christy & Knapp, p. 7.

Houellebecq's capitalization of himself",⁵⁸ hoping that the workings of Google's and Amazon's search rankings will bring some traffic their way.⁵⁹

This thread is also picked up in the narrative of the novelization itself. In the introduction, the novelization presents the fictitious Google product Google Reviews, developed to generate automatic reviews of books on the basis of a comparison of "any given book's vocabulary, length, motifs, themes, structure, etc."⁶⁰ with the repository of known texts in Google books. From this, a dynamic taxonomy is gradually established through machine learning. Subsequently, every new addition to this repository is "assigned significance scores based on the degree that they shifted the taxonomy."⁶¹ A technology, which is soon adopted by Amazon to generate automatic reviews and recommendations for customers on their site under the name LitCrit..

Towards the end of the novelization, this technology comes into play again after Houellebecq, who is already believed to be dead, is killed by his abductor and co-author Ricky. Before this incident, they have placed their self-published novel on Amazon, and have received a very negative LitCrit review. "This book is so profoundly bad," the review algorithm concludes, "that it may only be culturally significant as a pure reference to bad literature. [... It] is 'raw dogshit'."⁶² This comment is in many ways equally pertinent to Christy & Knapp's novelization, and perhaps even, as suggested above, to the entire genre of novelization in general.

Given the fact that LitCrit is a fully automated, "clear, accessible, authoritative system, without human input,"⁶³ this review is, of course, supposedly unaffected by those irrational and affective factors that would normally taint the literary review system; especially the authorial capital, which the signature "Houellebecq", dead or alive, under normal, pre-LitCrit circumstances would have lent to it (and perhaps assured it some undeserved merit). This is, of course, what Christy & Knapp ironically and tongue-in-cheek hope will do the trick for *their* novelization, leeching on the name Houellebecq and the movie title. In fact, even LitCrit has an opinion about this issue of the notoriety of the author-figure, confidently proclaiming that "famous authors become big idiots",⁶⁴ after which the review technology speculates that:

⁵⁸ Christy & Knapp, p. 7.

⁵⁹ It actually did work, as it was a Google search on the movie that drew our attention to their novelization.

⁶⁰ Christy & Knapp, p. 9.

⁶¹ Christy & Knapp, p. 9.

⁶² Christy & Knapp, p. 93.

⁶³ Christy & Knapp, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Christy & Knapp, p. 92.

You would think that faking his death and stripping him of his worldly luxuries [...] would make him write something with emotional relevance and merit [...] Instead, dear readers, it appears that an author, yanked from his soapbox of fame, will suffer from a Nietzsche-like degeneration of consciousness.⁶⁵

And on the last pages of the novelization, this review is edited by a human editor who is struck by the lack of quality: "If this Houellebecq guy was some sort of famous author, what is this shitty self-published book doing on Amazon, he thought?",⁶⁶ and accordingly finalizes the disappearance of Houellebecq, changing "all instances of 'Michel Houellebecq' to 'Ricky Lopez'".⁶⁷

The ending is interesting because the process described closely resembles the real publication of the novelization. John Christy and Genevieve Knapp are virtually impossible to track down as authors, and the book is published by Amphetamine Press, which may or may not be identical to the publishers advertising on Duotrope for "works of flash fiction" with the qualification that "The stories should be your own work and fall into one of the following categories [sic!]: Science Fiction, Horror, Fantasy or Extreme."⁶⁸ Duotrope is an online "subscription-based service for writers and artists that offers an extensive, searchable database of current fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and visual art markets",⁶⁹ and the advertisement for Amphetamine Press is archived and no longer active, just as the link to the publisher's website turns up dead.

Hence, in many respects Christy and Knapp's book is a dead and fatherless publication like the one described in the novel(ization), defying traditional generic forms of classification (including playing along with the notoriety game). Since it is not officially part of the tie-in business related to Nicloux's movie, it is not a traditional novelization. Rather, it qualifies either as "an unauthorized novelization"⁷⁰ or as "fan fiction".⁷¹ Except, of course, for the fact that Christy and Knapp quite explicitly defy any kind of fandom. Besides their blatant tongue-in-cheek opportunism, they plead ignorance – at least concerning the narrative plot of Nicloux's movie – thus refusing to position their book as a subordinate adjunct. But even if they have not seen the movie (which is still unlikely), they have clearly read most of Houellebecq's works and a fair deal of secondary material about the author. The novelization thus reveals a desire not only to be part of the world described by

⁶⁵ Christy & Knapp, p. 92.

⁶⁶ Christy & Knapp, p. 100.

⁶⁷ Christy & Knapp, p. 100.

⁶⁸ <https://duotrope.com/listing/3518>

⁶⁹ <https://duotrope.com/about/>

⁷⁰ Murray, pp. 185-191.

⁷¹ Cf. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Houellebecq – meticulously inscribing their own narrative into it – but also to kill off the author and take control over the world, despite acknowledging that doing so will lead to nothing but decay. In this system the figure Houellebecq remains the *nom du père*, structuring and limiting the space of enunciation, however uncoupled from the actual person.

Into the map

These reflections invite us to reconsider the correlation between original and copy, map and territory. In an article published in 2010, risk-geographer Valérie November, knowledge management expert Eduardo Camacho-Hübner and sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Latour argue that recent technology has fundamentally altered the relationship between map and territory. The advent of digital navigation tools “allows a mimetic use of maps to be distinguished from a navigational one”.⁷² On your GPS or smartphone, “maps now strike you not as what represent a world ‘out there’ but as the dashboards of a calculation interface that allows you to pinpoint successive signposts while you move through the world. But through which world?”⁷³ The change thus lies not in the conceptions of maps, not in a reversal or levelling of the relationship between the two levels, but of the way in which we exist in the world.

This reversal of agency mirrors the change in strategy applied by an aging Jed Martin towards the end of *La Carte et le territoire*. Instead of slightly ironic meta-representations of maps, human artefacts and sociological structures, the artist decides to turn to the thing itself, nature. Not through images of landscapes, but caught at its own pace through very lengthy processes of photographing vegetal growth and decay, trying to replicate “le point de vue végétal sur le monde”.⁷⁴ The point here is not in the representation of nature, but in the reversal of viewpoints, looking at how the world views us. The representations involve the complex, serial exposure of up to 56 layers of video, showing the power of the vegetal over long periods of time, for instance in relation to the decay of industrial products – or, as it has been termed within critical media theory: the “geology” or “natural history” of media.⁷⁵ The reality shown is thus highly mediated, emphasizing not only the exteriority of vision, but also the mediatized and technological nature of any kind of vision. Hence, Houellebecq underscores a point which is also touched upon by

⁷² Valérie November, Eduardo Camacho-Hübner & Bruno Latour, “Entering a risky territory: space in the age of digital navigation”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28 (2010), 581-599 (p. 582).

⁷³ November et al., p. 595.

⁷⁴ Houellebecq, *La Carte*, p. 423.

⁷⁵ Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Jennifer Gabrys, *Digital Rubbish: A Natural History of Electronics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

November, Camacho-Hübner and Latour: the interesting question is less the non-existing real world, but the way in which this world is constructed by technology and aesthetics. As they put it: "What is commonly called the 'outside material' world, the one more or less accurately 'represented' by the maps, is entirely a by-product of the imagination, an aesthetic view of technical practices that have been put in the background."⁷⁶ This metaphor extends to our analysis of the relationship between different versions and extensions of literary works in the sense that the primary problem is not that there is no longer an original. The interesting question lies in the technologies and aesthetics that connect different realms (and texts).

One of the interesting traits of all the works presented here is that despite taking part in this transmedial cluster, they are all explicitly mono-medial. In his correspondence with the director of the publishing house Flammarion, Teresa Cremisi, Houellebecq thus states that he specifically did not want to produce detailed descriptions of the artworks: "Le problème est que les photos de Jed sont supposées être réussies, et que le lecteur imaginera toujours mieux que ce qu'on pourrait lui proposer."⁷⁷ Even though Houellebecq's novel is about art, the universe is exclusively textual, drawing on the imagination of the reader to connect the media. This is also true of other intermedial novels. In fact, Thomas van Parys has referred to mainstream Hollywood novelization as an emphatically *anti-ekphrastic* genre,⁷⁸ whilst Baetens has pointed to this as one of the reasons why novelization is *anti-literature*.⁷⁹

In one sense this might seem counterintuitive. If ever there was a genre which has been filtered through the aforementioned *cinematographic regime*, it must surely be novelization. So why would it turn out less "visual" than literature at large? According to Heidi Peeters, this has to do with the ways in which novelization is embedded in the cultural polysystem⁸⁰ of media: it simply goes out of its own way not to interfere with the reader's visual memories of the movie. Hence, the use of very generic descriptions, a vague kind of ekphrasis we might say, is a non-visual, monomedial aesthetic strategy intentionally applied by the novelization business. The hope is that this "low-fi" visuality, assisted by the cover of the novelization (more specifically: the peritextual part of its paratext),⁸¹ which eagerly alludes to this book as an appendix to the specific audio-visual preexisting hypotext (the film),⁸² will

⁷⁶ November et al., p. 595.

⁷⁷ Michel Houellebecq and Teresa Cremisi, "Correspondance", Agathe Novak-Lechevalier, *L'Herne — Houellebecq* (Paris: Éditions de L'Herne, 2017), p. 135.

⁷⁸ Van Parys, "The Commercial Novelization".

⁷⁹ Baetens, "Novelization", p. 55.

⁸⁰ Cf. Itamar Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Studies", *Poetics Today*, 11: 1 (1990), 1–6.

⁸¹ Cf. Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸² Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 5.

“infiltrate [...] the reader’s mind” and hence function as “multimodal gates” or “portholes into the filmic universe” and thereby establish a so-called “remembered multimodality”,⁸³ that is: a multimodal experience that is completed by the reader’s use of his visual memories from seeing the movie or perhaps even just its trailers.

As Baetens has pointed out, it is precisely this kind of media coexistence that makes novelization especially interesting in a world where media are increasingly interdependent:

Les divers médias se maintiennent, tout en se transformant sans cesse, bien entendu, mais au lieu de se présenter seuls, ou isolables, ils apparaissent et fonctionnent toujours en réseaux intermédiatiques.⁸⁴

In this media landscape a novelization is never merely (or primarily) just a “verbal adaptation” of some film: it is also part of its time, and this fact will have an influence on the kind of book or novelization it is. And naturally, the same goes for the novel in general: even this medium, traditionally thought of as the autonomous medium *par excellence*, is always already entangled with other media – regardless of whether this is in a concrete hypotextual (adaptation) or hypertextual (novelization) sense or not.

In the cases of Michel Houellebecq and his accomplices, this means that even though – or rather precisely because – the novel resists ekphrasis, the form of the novel is intrinsically intermedial. In *La Carte et le territoire* the breakdown of the barriers between reality and fiction through the use of real-life elements does not encourage a reading that engages the biography of the author, but favours a reading involving reflections on the relationship between the art forms presented in the novel as an invitation to place the novel in its larger medial and economic contexts: an invitation extended not only to scholars but also to other artists, encouraging them to take their point of departure in both the author figure and themes, and expanding on the world initiated by the author.

The main achievement of *The Kidnapping of Michel Houellebecq: the Novelization* is to point out the concrete placement of this process within the economic and media-specific circuit that at present is assuming new forms. The economic and technical possibilities offered by online services and media profoundly change the relationship between media and the way in which specific media (text, for instance) function. As Baetens points out: “La nouvelle technologie produit également une fusion de plusieurs domaines ‘textuels’.”⁸⁵ In particular, this entails a change in the way in which media are packaged and presented for consumption.

⁸³ Peeters, pp. 125-127.

⁸⁴ Baetens, *La novellisation*, p. 217.

⁸⁵ Baetens, *La novellisation*, p. 218.

Online platforms blur the way in which peritext has served to clarify the institutional context of works and make these forms available for reinterpretation, including generic markers. Christy and Knapp's book is labelled a novelization only to mark out the processes of adaptation between and within media that are intrinsic to the new logics of the market.

Reading these peripheral works is thus not only a prerequisite for a better understanding of the works of Houellebecq. Reading them through Houellebecq allows us to discern how changing media are affecting the production, distribution and consumption of literature and the potential for new relationships between authors and artists and between authors and readers these changes produce.

Understanding these processes requires reading in an expanded field, that not only accepts that the distinction between map and territory has collapsed, but explores the way in which both text and peritext (perimedia) serves as technologies to produce works as territories in a world of media coexistence.

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