

**Adapting, Translating and Reworking 'Gomorra'**

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## Adapting, Translating and Reworking *Gomorra*

### *Introduction*

Adapting a literary text for a movie or for a TV series within the same culture brings into play a plethora of interpretive, semiotic and hermeneutic relationships. What follows is a case study of the Italian novel *Gomorra* (2006) by Roberto Saviano. The study will consider the diverse strategies of adaptation employed, examining the complex passage through different discourses, practices and processes from Saviano's novel to Matteo Garrone's film (*Gomorra*, 2008) and the TV series (*Gomorra*, 2014 - on air).<sup>i</sup>

The analysis will adopt a multidisciplinary methodology, in order to draw attention to translational 'continuities' from one medium to another as well as to the differences and 'discontinuities' in transmedia reinterpretations of previous source materials. It should be pointed out that in scrutinizing the translational shifts from *Gomorra* the novel to film and TV series adaptations the idea is not to establish any presumed 'faithfulness' to the original text. It is a question, rather, of developing a flexible approach in the study of different, though related, textual products and their independent ability to construct meanings. More specifically, according to the semiotics of translation (Eco, *Experiences in Translation* 9-12), it is a problem of equivalence among texts to some signifying levels of the novel and, conversely, how the creation of different meanings for new 'model readers' works. In a transmedia perspective (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 93-130), the *Gomorra* universe presents both problems of 'continuity', i.e. adaptation strategies, and tactics of extension or 'multiplicity'.

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3 In the first case, where equivalence prevails, some intertextual guidelines (or semiotic  
4 *isotopies*) are chosen as invariant in the process of interpretation and intersemiotic translation  
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6 from one text (literary, cinematic or televisual) to another (Eco, *The Role of the Reader* 27;  
7  
8 Dusi, *Il cinema come traduzione* 101-12). In the second case, transmedia extension and  
9  
10 rewriting strategies are marked by differences and *discontinuities*, given that a literary source  
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12 text can also work as a simple matrix of invariants. This practice is shared by web prosumers  
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14 who create remixes and mash ups, and by the *Gomorrah* series screenwriters, although their  
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16 ‘remix’ of Saviano’s novel is constrained by the pressure to insert it into a coherent  
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18 storyworld.  
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24 According to Juri Lotman’s Tartu school of cultural semiotics (Saldre, Torop 40), these  
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26 interpretations and narrative expansions belong to a broader idea of intercultural and  
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28 transmedia translations. Actually, target and source texts are changed in any translation and  
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30 adaptation process, and what the study of transmedia have to offer is the way they open up  
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32 and explain the difference of the ‘intertexts’, in Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms, from new possible  
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34 perspectives and points of view (Stam, *Literature through Film* 15-17; Leitch, “Twelve  
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36 Fallacies” 164).<sup>ii</sup>  
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40 Therefore, the problem is not at all to do with a prescriptive evaluation of the degree of  
41  
42 fidelity to an original (Hermasson 148). Our research is based on a comparative semiotic  
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44 methodology that considers adaptation as both a translational and an interpretive process that  
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46 changes both the source and the target text. This process amplifies the points of view and the  
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48 encyclopaedic context of interpretations of the source (Eco, *Experiences in Translation* 20-  
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50 21), while considering the new contexts of reception. When studying this process, film  
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52 semioticians look both for levels of intertextual coherence (Stam, “The Theory and Practice  
53  
54 of Adaptation” 24-26) and – as linguists do – for differences due to new communicative aims  
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56 (Nord 35). Translation studies considers translation a ‘dynamic compromise between  
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3 *adequation* norms (those drawn from source [con]text conditioners) and *acceptability* norms  
4 (those that depend on target [con]text conditioners)' (Cattrysse, "A Dialogue on Adaptation"  
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6 2). Hence, this perspective – with its stronger orientation towards target texts, readers and  
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8 cultures (according to Gideon Toury 56) –, acknowledges the importance of 'equivalence'  
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10 strategies in the transformation from one medium to the other. Any adaptation is indeed, like  
11  
12 a translation, a 'complex form of action', that is to say a trans-cultural communication  
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14 process, always target oriented, with a dynamic and functional approach.<sup>iii</sup> Moreover,  
15  
16 according to Umberto Eco, translation and adaptation are 'negotiation processes' (*Mouse or*  
17  
18 *Rat?* 180), or interpretive conjectures and 'bets'. Thus, every translation (but also, in our  
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20 terms, every adaptation) involves the interpretation of two texts, and 'is always a shift, not  
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22 between two languages, but between two cultures – or two encyclopaedias" (Eco,  
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24 *Experiences in Translation* 17; Eco and Nergaard 218-22).

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30 Cinematic adaptation, considered as 'intersemiotic translation' (Jakobson, "On Linguistic  
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32 Aspects of Translation" 232-239; Eco, *Experiences in Translation* 99-132; Dusi,  
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34 "Intersemiotic Translation" 184-87), magnifies the interpretive act, while bearing in mind the  
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36 communicative intentions of the (source and target) texts, by analysing both the relations of  
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38 intertextual coherence among different cultural products and the textual choices of  
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40 adaptations aiming to present themselves to the target viewers as somehow *recognizable* in  
41  
42 their connections with the source texts, in a process of functional equivalence. Moreover, we  
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44 talk of a plurality of source texts, which could be seen as Genettian 'hypotexts', since they  
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46 become a series of second 'hypertexts' that have to be considered in order to understand each  
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48 step of the process (Genette 9-18). And so the discourse of 'fidelity' which, to cite Robert  
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50 Stam ("The Changing Pedagogies" 1), 'compared novel to film in terms of the gaps between  
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52 the two texts', has been superseded in contemporary scholarship by a discourse of  
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54 'intertextuality as part of a more multidirectional approach that emphasizes the multiple  
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3 interlocutors of both source novel and adaptation'. This is precisely the case for the novel  
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5 *Gomorra*, which uses non-fiction sources and becomes a fictional TV series, passing  
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7 through a cinematic adaptation, while expanding its encyclopaedic system of interpretations,  
8  
9 thanks to a theatrical adaptation and numerous fandom products.  
10

11  
12 Stam claims ("The Changing Pedagogies" 3) that a close reading of source and target texts  
13  
14 maintains its importance in the comparative analysis of the poetic and the stylistic issues of  
15  
16 hypotexts facing hypertexts, always to be considered one step in an endless process of  
17  
18 'remediation' (Bolter and Grusin 273). In this article, a close and specific semiotic reading  
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20 demonstrates how some choices at the content level and the form (or expressive) level of the  
21  
22 source products provide some guidelines in the intersemiotic translation of target cultural  
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24 products; a process that is either more complex in terms of having several intertwining textual  
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26 levels, or more selective, in opting to reinterpret a single level of the text such as, for  
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28 example, its narrative structures.  
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33 Rethinking the three types of translation – interlinguistic, intralinguistic, and intersemiotic (or  
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35 transmutation) – proposed by Roman Jakobson ("On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" 232)  
36  
37 in terms of interpretive operations, Eco maintains that 'in translation the critical attitude of  
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39 the translator is [...] implicit, and tends to be concealed, while in adaptation it prevails and  
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41 constitutes the very essence of the process of transmutation' (*Experiences in Translation*  
42  
43 126). Eco claims that intersemiotic translation can only be an 'adaptation', because in shifting  
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45 to another purport (or continuum) there is a significant transformation of the content of the  
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47 source text. However, he accepts that many adaptations isolate one of the levels of the source  
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49 text to 'translate' it in another continuum (i.e. the narrative level, or the affective and  
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51 perceptive level), working as a 'poetic translation where, in order to preserve the rhyme or  
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53 the metrical scheme, for example, we are prepared to compromise on other aspects' (Eco,  
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55 *Experiences in Translation* 125). In our view, cinematic and TV adaptations can express  
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3 some 'continuity' with the source text, acting as a sort of 'poetic translation' and searching  
4 for some similar meaning effects within their different culture and new audience. When  
5 analysing the transposition of a novel to film and TV series, we face textual choices that give  
6 rise to a scale of procedures of 'similarity', that is to say strategies that choose only some  
7 levels of pertinence in the relation between source and target texts (Dusi, "Intersemiotic  
8 Translation" 191-92). This is the case if we accept that differences between texts can  
9 sometimes be overcome through flexible notions of equivalence and translatability, starting  
10 from some shared 'forms' at the level of content and expression.

11  
12 Looking at the set of hypotexts (in Stam's sense) in the *Gomorra* universe there are many  
13 differences and 'discontinuities' due to the choices of selection or expansion, reinterpretation,  
14 remix or mash up made by the TV screenwriters and the showrunner, both for greater  
15 acceptability to the new target audience and for economic and production issues. Indeed,  
16 *Gomorra* is also a case of a successful franchise. Furthermore, these differences increase  
17 exponentially in the case of fans' paratexts, none of which are bound to norms of  
18 equivalence, although they are mostly coherent in respect of a common storyworld.

19  
20 This article seeks to consider issues of translational equivalence between novel and film, and  
21 goes on to focus on issues relating to intermedial and transmedia connections of the products  
22 of new 'complex' TV seriality (Mittell 18-20), including many products of the paratextual  
23 universe of re-creations by fans. Consequently, the methodology proposed is 'hybrid',  
24 drawing on the perspectives of Stam, Eco and Lotman, the criticism of Lawrence Venuti (and  
25 Translation Studies), and the openings to digital convergence of Henry Jenkins and Jason  
26 Mittell.

27  
28 Jenkins (*Convergence Culture* 169-205) and Mittell (261-291) emphasise the importance of  
29 paratexts, both those professionally created for the franchise exploitation as trailers and those  
30 created by 'amateurs', namely fans and prosumers. In translational terms, paratexts present  
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3 innovations and differences combined with some reinterpretations of at least one level of  
4 their source (hyper)texts, which could be TV adaptations, as in the case of *Gomorrah*.  
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6 According to Jenkins and Mittell,<sup>iv</sup> these paratextual products are an extension of the fictional  
7 world of the source texts that reopen the narrative paths and their meanings to create new  
8 transmedia experiences (Dusi, “Seriality, Repetition and Innovation” 140-42). We understand  
9 these experiences phenomenologically, in line with Vivian Sobchack (53-84), as being  
10 consistently embodied and (re)located. According to the semiotics of cultures (Lotman,  
11 *Culture and Explosion* 12-18; Torop, “Intersemiosis and Intersemiotic Translation” 71-75),  
12 such experiences are part of the global interpretive and translational process.  
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### 26 *Methodological Problems*

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31 According to Luc Van Doorslaer and Laurence Raw (199-202), ‘it is clear that AS and TS  
32 possess a considerable degree of common ground’; moreover, adaptation studies and  
33 translation studies are disciplines both ‘distinct yet mutually interactive, provided we are  
34 willing to set aside our ring-fencing tendencies [...] and embrace plurality and difference’.  
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40 The hermeneutical approach shared by film studies and translation studies implies a  
41 ‘hermeneutic, interpretive and interrogative’ relation (Venuti 41). Venuti claims that  
42 translation and adaptation should be considered as based on ‘an interpretation that fixes form  
43 and meaning in the source text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations in the  
44 translating language and culture’ (Venuti 28). This also applies to the adaptation of a literary  
45 text for cinema and for a TV series within the same culture, as is the case with *Gomorrah*.  
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54 However, rethinking the process of translation in the era of transmedia seems to be necessary,  
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56 if an agreement can be reached on what is meant by translation and transmedia. For example,  
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58 in a discussion about the translational strategies of film adaptations, Stam claimed that a film  
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3 version of a novel 'should be seen as performing various operations on both the formal and  
4 thematic features of the literary text, so as to recast it in characteristically filmic terms' ("The  
5 Theory and Practice of Adaptation" 45). For Stam, working at a 'formal' level - namely, on  
6 expression - and a 'thematic' level - namely, on content - means operating by 'selection,  
7 amplification, concretization', or also by 'popularization, reaccentuation, transculturalization'  
8 ("The Theory and Practice of Adaptation" 45). Some of these problems and operations will  
9 be highlighted in our analysis of the translational universe of *Gomorrah*, particularly in view  
10 of some warnings by Leitch claiming that 'either you think of each new adaptation as  
11 returning retrospectively to the archive for its inspiration and authority, or you think of the  
12 archive as a repository of texts and moments and relationships that assume currency and  
13 textual status only in the moment of performance' ("A Dialogue on Adaptation" 3).

14  
15 In a comparison between translation and adaptation theory, Venuti reminds us that in the  
16 transposition for cinema, what is involved is both a 'communicative' work and a broader  
17 'hermeneutic' work of exploration of source materials. For Venuti, a translation is an  
18 'intercultural communication' process only if we agree that 'it communicates one  
19 interpretation among other possibilities' (Venuti 29), and this basic communication is what  
20 'inevitably varies the forms and meaning of that text' (Venuti 29).

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22 In our view, based on the combination of cultural semiotics and translation semiotics referred  
23 to above (Jakobson "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" 232-39; Eco, *Experiences in*  
24 *Translation* 99-128; Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* 143-50), this would consist of dealing  
25 with a complex passage from Saviano's novel to the film and the TV series by looking, on the  
26 one hand, at intersemiotic translation 'continuities', from one medium to the next, and, on the  
27 other, at 'discontinuities' and transmedia openings.<sup>v</sup> In the first instance, we take into  
28 consideration intertextual guidelines, or 'isotopies', which appear in the interpretation and  
29 adaptation from one medium to the other, as we shall attempt to illustrate by discussing urban  
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3 space and its implications for the storytelling and its characters. This approach draws on the  
4 understanding that the adaptation mechanism requires selection and reduction, at times  
5 producing the effect of a magnifying lens or, to cite Stam, ‘amplification’ (“The Theory and  
6 Practice of Adaptation” 45), expanding individual areas of the source text, functioning as a  
7 matrix of invariants.  
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11 In a textual and socio-semiotic perspective, to analyse an adaptation means to look for some  
12 identifiable ‘invariant structures’ that link a novel to a film and to a TV series, that is to say  
13 items that can be traced and repeated.<sup>vi</sup> They can be analysed at the level of narrative  
14 structures, for example, or of thematic isotopies at the semantic level. Socio-semiotics thus  
15 considers texts as layered objects, shaped by mutually dependent, invariant or variant, levels.  
16  
17 Whatever textual layer we choose will determine the way we adapt a text into another text.  
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21 While focusing on ‘continuity lines’ is a useful approach to the study of intersemiotic and  
22 intermedial relations, ‘discontinuities’ provide more scope when considering transmedia  
23 strategies of extension, opening and rewriting, for example by users and prosumers in the  
24 web, where a much wider intersemiotic network linked to the creation of a storyworld is  
25 predominant. We will define intermediality as a web of relations, or, even better, as the  
26 ‘crossing of borders between media’ (Rajewsky 44), which - in our perspective - includes  
27 both issues of intersemiotic translation (between different semiotic systems) and issues of  
28 ‘intrasemiotic’ translation (between similar semiotic systems as in film remakes and trailers).  
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32 According to Lars Elleström, intermediality works as ‘a bridge between medial differences  
33 which is founded on medial similarities’ (Elleström 12): in this sense, for our purposes, it  
34 becomes almost synonymous with ‘intersemiotic translation’ (Dusi, “Don Quixote,  
35 Intermediality and Remix” 122-4). ‘Crossmediality’ and ‘transmediality’ could be defined as  
36 the inter-related media experiences that occur across a variety of media. According to Jenkins  
37 (“Transmedia” 1), ‘transmedia storytelling’ describes the ‘further development of a  
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3 storyworld through each new medium' and the 'flow of content across media [...] and the  
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5 networking of fan responses'. Conversely, according to Drew Davidson, 'cross-media'  
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7 communications emphasize interactivity (as for example in video games) because they  
8  
9 'require a pro-active role by the audience to interact with the experience and get more  
10  
11 directly engaged and involved' (Davidson 24).  
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14 Viewed from the perspective of the Lotman school, all these cultural products and re-  
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16 interpretations should be placed within a broad idea of intercultural and transmedia  
17  
18 translation (Torop, "Intersemiosis and Intersemiotic Translation" 71-75; Saldre and Torop,  
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20 25-27). We should note that in a cultural semiotics perspective 'narrative texts that exist  
21  
22 simultaneously in several media appear in cultural experience as both a topological invariant  
23  
24 or a storyworld and as typological, medium-specific variations' (Saldre Ojamaa 13), and  
25  
26 consequently 'transmedial space is [...] simultaneously invariant and variative, reflecting the  
27  
28 general mechanism of storing knowledge in cultural memory' (Saldre Ojamaa 13).  
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33 Continuity issues of intersemiotic and intermedial relations, and discontinuity problems of  
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35 transmedia and crossmedia strategies, explain why - as we shall see in the course of this  
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37 analysis - Garrone's film, based on the novel, gleans only a handful of stories linked to  
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39 individual characters, some of whom are only sketched in the novel. It also explains why we  
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41 can consider as 'translational' - although in a much broader sense - the choice made for the  
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43 first season of the TV series *Gomorra* to pick and expand only a few chapters of the novel,  
44  
45 those dedicated to the 'Camorra System', the rise and fall of the Di Lauro clan and the  
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47 *Camorra* women, and new information supplied to Saviano by a former mafia boss  
48  
49 (Benvenuti, 124). The TV series also outlines all the fictional characters during the script-  
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51 writing stage, although they are created with a condensation and *mash up* strategy starting  
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53 from the literary source and extratextual sources such as newspaper articles or documents  
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3 from the investigation on organized crime, as indicated by Saviano in his role as co-  
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6 scriptwriter.  
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### 10 *Translational Equivalences from Novel to Film*

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14 Roberto Saviano's novel *Gomorra* (2006) entails intersemiotic translation and adaptation  
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16 problems, starting from its complex enunciative construction, which effectively establishes a  
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18 new genre (at least in the Italian context): not a 'docu-fiction', but a 'non-fiction novel', or,  
19  
20 for some scholars, a 'hybrid novel' to be studied in the context of contemporary  
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22 transformations of the novel (Palumbo Mosca 156-165). In Saviano's writing, the  
23  
24 autobiographical mode blends with reportage. The real names and monickers of *camorristi*  
25  
26 are drawn from recent Italian history and their criminal activities in a narrative that cites  
27  
28 judicial documents and trial verdicts and quotes newspaper articles and preliminary police  
29  
30 investigations. It is a form of narrative in which invention and truth-like - or rather 'truthful' -  
31  
32 storytelling (Greimas 103) live side by side, producing 'factual' and contextual  
33  
34 correspondences, described as 'New Italian Epic' (Wu Ming1 2-4). It is worth emphasizing  
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36 the word 'epic', characterizing a conscious historical realism, whether the story has many  
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38 points of views - often unexpected and incompatible with a traditional approach - to be  
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40 considered as present at the same time, or whether reality should always be subjectively  
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42 translated in our cognitive, perceptive and cultural mindsets. In this regard, realism is  
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44 something that is discursively (re)constructed, thanks to layerings of perception, narrative and  
45  
46 enunciative mediation (Eugeni, *Semiotica dei media* 47-51; D'Aloia and Eugeni 22-23).

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48 For Saviano's novel we would speak of a 'documentary mode' (Odin 135-137), which is  
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50 much favoured in today's literary, film and television aesthetics. Paul Ricoeur (12-14) states  
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52 that in the 'historical narrative' we encounter 'conditions of truth' that are ontologically  
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3 different from fiction narrative. However, *Gomorrah* is a perfectly hybrid form, because ‘the  
4 historical document seems to extend itself in its literary double, fostering the narrative  
5 development’ (Chimenti 1). In this possible ‘non-fictional’ narrative world (Doležel 28), the  
6 ‘fictional/non fictional’ depends on the communication pact with the reader. In socio-  
7 semiotic terms, a pact of ‘documentarizing’ reading is a pact that can be verified or falsified  
8 by intersubjective comparisons. In French Film Studies, for example, the ‘documentarizing’  
9 communication pact (Odin 135-137) between film and spectator works within a discursive  
10 framework driving the viewing and medial experience in a more or less substantial  
11 relationship with the direct world of our phenomenological experience. Therefore Saviano’s  
12 non-fiction may be defined as a narrative form using both a ‘documentarizing pact’ and a  
13 ‘documentary mode’, in which the space of the real lives being narrated is also enhanced by  
14 grafts, borrowings, investigations, articles, and reediting from other media and languages,  
15 producing reality effects also by virtue of these translational and discursive mediations.  
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33 In the film by Matteo Garrone (*Gomorrah*, 2008), the enunciative complexity of  
34 Saviano’s novel is dealt with by translational ‘decontextualization’ and ‘re-contextualization’  
35 (Venuti 30), changing materials and the substance of the expression in the intersemiotic  
36 translation.<sup>vii</sup> The film reveals very precise choices, in terms of aesthetic autonomy with  
37 respect to the novel, from which it selects only a few stories, or fragments of stories, that  
38 therefore become emblematic, in contrast with the mosaic built by Saviano. Garrone’s film  
39 lives on parallel stories, which only partly overlap, thanks to the shared spatiality and  
40 temporality of their characters. The textual strategy of the film aims to suggest an underlying  
41 feeling present throughout the novel – and here interpretation is a bet on the poetic and  
42 aesthetic sense of Saviano’s text –: in addition to drawing on the discursive surface,  
43 Garrone’s film works on emotional effects, such as discomfort and rage, on conveying the  
44 *camorristi*’s all-powerfulness, as opposed to the powerlessness and frustration of their  
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3 victims, often depicted in a tragic or, at times, both surreal and grotesque light. In the novel,  
4 this is conveyed - phenomenologically - through remarks and descriptions made by the first-  
5 person narrator, always steeped in corporeity and reporting his own exasperated perceptions  
6 and feelings, as if the narrator's body had become the guarantor of the truth of what is being  
7 told.  
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14 In Garrone's film, direct experience becomes polyphonic, evoking the choral structure of  
15 Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946). That is to say, it produces a perceptively and narratively  
16 layered experience with added reality effects, thanks to the way in which the story was  
17 visualised and filmed, including in terms of its pacing, plasticity of spaces, and lighting. At  
18 the beginning of the film, the interiors of the sun tanning centre are in saturated colours, in  
19 contrast with the sequences that follow in which we encounter the exterior shots of Scampia's  
20 *Vele*,<sup>viii</sup> huge desaturated and starkly grey tenement blocks. In the barren and maze-like  
21 interiors of the *Vele*, we meet two young boys playing their heroic fantasies and feeling all-  
22 powerful when they repeat the lines of *Scarface* by Brian De Palma (1983).  
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35 Looking at the shots, the space and luminosity of the film, there is a wide use of objective  
36 framing, either at close-up or at a distance, with bodies and places silhouetted against doors,  
37 windows, corridors, slots, contrasted with high-angle shots showing how the urban space is a  
38 sequence of solids and voids, defined by the bodies of sentries, in the squalor of cold  
39 concrete. At times, the framing brings to mind the image of a cage and entrapment.  
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47 In terms of light, from the very beginning the film reveals light and colour contrasts, and  
48 entire sequences seem to be eaten up by darkness, where black and dark shadows prevail, for  
49 example in the cave where young Totò undergoes his initiation. These scenes are contrasted  
50 with sequences marked by white light flares, for example the one depicting Robertino's  
51 departure at the airport, together with Franco, the toxic waste manager. Here the hand-held  
52 camera broadcasts its presence ceaselessly panning across faces, coming closer to and  
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3 moving away from the bodies. These are expressive and stylistic choices that assign a  
4 testimonial value to filming modes, while colours create negative connotations (submission  
5 and fear in the former instance; hypocrisy in the latter). Camera shake, live recording of  
6 sound and images with non-conventional and accidental framing, all contribute to the sense  
7 of a truthful documentary construction.  
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### 17 *Intermedial and Transmedia Issues in the TV Series Gomorrah*

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21 The TV series follows the direction taken by Garrone's film in an intermedial way, and takes  
22 up many of its expressive choices. The shots often follow characters and places closely, and  
23 scenes where light is almost blinding are replaced by darker and nocturnal ones. In  
24 intertextual terms, these are also a reassessment of the *noir* genre, the *gangster movie* (or  
25 even *western* when spaces expand enormously), which almost always engenders an alienating  
26 effect. The TV series version of *Gomorrah* follows Saviano's novel only in terms of narrative  
27 extension and not adaptation (Jenkins, "Transmedia" 1-5) which, in a looser definition, still  
28 pertains to the order of cultural translation.  
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40 The urban spaces in the *Gomorrah* series, against the ever-present backdrop of the *Vele*  
41 tenements in Scampia, are explicitly set against the rich and tawdry houses of *Camorra*  
42 bosses, full of kitsch paintings, chinaware and Padre Pio statues, back-lit cabinets filled with  
43 glassware and fake Louis XIV tables and chairs, in an outpouring of gilded lacquering,  
44 marble and velvet. These interiors are built by set designers who drew inspiration from De  
45 Palma's *Scarface* (1983) and watched TV news reports picturing Mafia bosses being arrested  
46 in their mansions, but also scouted the Neapolitan hinterland for the most suitable locations.  
47 They then used first-hand documentary (ethnographic) material together with television and  
48 cinema 'remediations' (Bolter and Grusin 54-57).<sup>ix</sup>  
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3 Another way to reinterpret and make conjectures about Saviano's novel, differing from the  
4 cinematic adaptation, is that the TV series succeeds in expanding not only the dynamics of  
5 the *Camorra*'s power related in the novel but also the viewers' sense of estrangement and  
6 disorientation, by disrupting any sharing of values (the so-called 'allegiance', Smith 6) with  
7 the emotions and actions of the anti-heroes on screen (Garcia 57), as well as any possible  
8 catharsis by viewers. Moreover, in the TV series there is a 'controlled experience of  
9 estrangement' (Eugeni, "Innovazione" 117), demonstrated firstly in the building of  
10 characters, towards whom viewers have to adjust their empathic involvement, secondly in an  
11 interpretation of Italian history which is not superficial and open to intermediality, and,  
12 thirdly and most significantly, in the spaces and locations of the Italian province that are  
13 'explored especially in their dark, criminal and usually disquieting features' (Eugeni,  
14 "Innovazione" 118).

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17 At this stage, it is necessary to move gradually away from the translational hierarchies  
18 between source and target texts, in order to widen the view by adopting an intermedial and  
19 transmedia perspective. In the case of *Gomorra*, however, the hierarchical perspective on  
20 'second' texts is strongly canonized by the omnipresent authorial hallmark of Roberto  
21 Saviano, who is credited as being one of the scriptwriters of Garrone's film and as the author  
22 of the 'concept' from the very first season of the TV series.

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25 Let us start with transtextual 'continuities' given by some translational isotopies appearing as  
26 cultural markers. Leaving aside the use of dialect,<sup>x</sup> we will investigate spatiality. This term  
27 refers not only to narrative spatiality, but to recognizable urban landscape and locations. The  
28 first hypothesis linking the film to the TV series is that the documentary mode produces  
29 'reality effects', given by the choice of shooting the scenes in exteriors in the clearly  
30 recognizable real places of the poorest neighbourhoods of Naples, in Scampia's late-modern  
31 slums, Secondigliano and their surrounding areas. These places are used in the film and in the

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3 TV series almost like testimonials of the translational operation. Filming in recognizable  
4 locations thus becomes a way to adapt the enunciative complexity of the novel, playing  
5 between autobiographical fiction and non-fiction in an ongoing reassertion of realism. In this  
6 respect, it bridges the cinematic and televisual adaptations with some translational ‘rules of  
7 similarity’ (Chesterman 159).

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10 The expressive, documentary and also connotative strength of the places feed into a second  
11 hypothesis. In both Garrone’s film and the TV series, the work on the expressive substance of  
12 the visible, together with the work on figurality linked to rhythms, forces and plastic tensions  
13 (bearing in mind, for an example, the light and colour features), is very effective in producing  
14 the impression of any good transposition on the viewer: not so much an equivalence, which  
15 will always be partial, local, and culturally and historically defined (Venuti 32), but, rather,  
16 the desire or need to re-read Saviano’s book with new focus on its sensorial and perceptive  
17 organization.

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20 In line with Lotman’s ‘re-semantisation’ effect, by going back to the novel and re-reading it  
21 in the light of the TV series and of the film, the viewer would better appreciate not only the  
22 multi-faceted product of Saviano’s writing with its strong visual charge, but also the  
23 complex, often negativizing, universe of sound, touch and bodily expression. The focus, in  
24 this case, is on its expressive and sensory system - which might be left in the background by  
25 an interpretation in terms of a ‘non-fiction novel’. Such a sensorial universe is strongly  
26 delivered by the intersemiotic and intermedial translations.

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29 In our hypothesis, urban spatiality becomes a semiotic tool, or, even better, a ‘translational  
30 shifter’ between different media.<sup>xi</sup> This means seeing it applied to the different level of  
31 signification in the representations and adaptation between novel, film and TV series, with  
32 textual levels shifting from one medium to the other – changed, yet recognizable. Urban  
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3 space becomes one of the characters thanks to toponyms and descriptions in the novel, and  
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5 the framings ‘dedicated’ to the urban landscape in the film and the TV series.<sup>xii</sup>  
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8 As previously stated, the documentary communicative pact between an audiovisual product  
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10 and a viewer works as a cognitive frame or as a way of giving instructions to the viewer’s  
11  
12 medial experience. When we watch a documentary we accept that it is something concerning  
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14 our life, and that, unlike a fictional story, the events in the story can be verified or falsified by  
15  
16 intersubjective checks (Odin 135-137). A documentary pact may be strengthened by  
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18 providing circumstantial evidence, testimonies and historical documents.<sup>xiii</sup> The case of  
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20 *Gomorrah* increases the complexity of the problem of the interdiscursive and extra-textual  
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22 reference to the ‘real’ world by setting the series in the actual suburbs of Naples, with its  
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24 architectural features, squares and streets, which are clearly recognizable by the Italian  
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26 viewer. This choice gives the TV series its ‘referential truth’ and indisputable presence as an  
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28 historical and extra-textual testimony.  
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33 In Television Studies, according to Margrethe Bruun Vaage (237), this is a ‘reality check’  
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35 which comes into play when a fictional medial product gives a touch of reality, using archive  
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37 documents and inducing a sort of fact checking operation by the viewer. The ‘reality check’,  
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39 therefore, serves as a textual mechanism to orient the viewer’s reaction.<sup>xiv</sup> We would  
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41 emphasize, however, when talking about ‘reality’, that more than a ‘reality check’ is  
42  
43 involved, given that textual and discursive media constructions produce ‘effects of realism’  
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45 (Metz 125-138). It is nevertheless true to say that the ‘reality check’ produces in the viewer a  
46  
47 ‘critical reflection about the boundaries of fiction’ (Bernardelli 56). Moreover, for the  
48  
49 paratextual TV products, such as TV trailers, the grey tenement buildings of the *Vele* of  
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51 Scampia immediately become more than a simple location: they are a trademark of the  
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53 narrative world of the series.  
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3 Earlier in the discussion, we mentioned the strategies of ‘selection’ and  
4 ‘amplification’, indicated by Stam for adaptation, together with those of ‘popularization’ and  
5 ‘reaccentuation’. The *Gomorra* TV series creates the characters using a strategy of  
6 condensation which produces a new focus with respect to the sources. For example, the  
7 *Gomorra* TV series expands the literary base, exploring in depth the complex psychologies  
8 of the negative characters being presented. In Garrone’s film an authorial choice prevails,  
9 where the narrator’s voice of the novel is downplayed in order to focus on the expressive and  
10 iconic representation of the value-laden, social, ethical and political conflicts of the story.  
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21 The transmedia universe linked to the novel, the film, and especially the TV series,  
22 reveals many differences and discontinuities, which can be understood in socio-semiotic and  
23 economic-productive terms (Scaglioni and Barra 5-10). If one considers adaptation in terms  
24 of its wider meaning, as indicated by Linda Hutcheon (15-32), an authorial film like  
25 Garrone’s, and the innovative fiction of the series *Gomorra*, have different needs and cater  
26 to different audiences, and work with different communication goals. Here, there are  
27 discursive tensions and constraints emerging from practices of a diverse nature. Firstly, there  
28 are - franchise-related - exploitation strategies by cinema and television producers for a  
29 successful product like a bestselling novel. There is also the importance of promotional  
30 strategies for the medial product, which for the TV series begin even before production, and  
31 involve the writer Saviano. He willingly accepted using his name as a sort of quality ‘label’,<sup>xv</sup>  
32 and only subsequently acting as an ‘endorser’ for the film and TV series. In our view,  
33 Saviano is successful in his civic engagement mission against the *Camorra*. Furthermore, the  
34 investment in ‘quality’ fiction programmes by an innovative pay-TV like Sky Italy aiming to  
35 sell its product abroad and meeting the socio-cultural need of its subscribers to distinguish  
36 themselves, should also be considered in this light.  
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However, in transmedia terms, the franchise got out of hand and spread through the web no longer thanks to global strategies of transmedia storytelling organized by promotion (in a ‘top down’ mode), but also through contents developed by fans. These are local tactics that can generate web series with a million viewers. A notable example of this is the series titled *Gli effetti di Gomorra la serie sulla gente* (‘The effects on people of the series *Gomorra*’) created by the Neapolitan group The Jackal. This is a powerful remix of the dialogues in the series episodes, delivered in the form of a dialogue between two comedians, with parts repeated in a loop and with nonsense refrains, imitating the characters and grouping together various roles. Roles and discourses overlap in a fast-moving soliloquy, often with alternating off-kilter answers. The result is a parody that reverses the original meaning of the dialogues crystallised in the memory of the viewers of the TV series, thereby disrupting their rhetorical construction of violence. The parody also enables the viewer to enter and exit the roles from the ‘real world’ and the ‘fictional world’, as shown by forays into reality brought about by the presence of Roberto Saviano or Salvatore Esposito (the actor playing Genny Savastano) in the episodes of the web series.

The explosion of performative actions by web prosumers also extends to T-shirts with the characters of The Jackal, role-playing games, remix trailers and fans’ blogs dedicated to the film and the series, and many animated gifs on social networks.<sup>xvi</sup> This kind of web transmediality engenders a profusion of individual variations and variants, further fed by mechanisms of reruns and reworks in between virality and ‘spreadability’ (Jenkins, Ford, Green 4-9).

The profusion also involves the production team and the actors performing in the series, as well as Saviano himself, whose presence in the web takes a variety of interrelated forms, from his Facebook page to the YouTube channel where he posts the dialogues with the protagonists of the TV series and the documentaries shot in the areas controlled by the

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3 *Camorra*. Saviano uses his Twitter account to provide ongoing commentary to the  
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5 broadcasting of the individual episodes of the first season. In his tweets he links the television  
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7 fiction to the specific real-life event that had inspired him and contributed to his output  
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9 during the writing stage, thereby continuing his work of stitching together ‘fiction and reality’  
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11 (Erbaggio 9). This process sets in motion the ‘documentarizing’ mode of reading and  
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13 intertextual skills, as well as contact with the cult author, in a transmedia expansion of the  
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15 viewers’ experience.  
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## 21 *Conclusions*

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26 Peeter Torop and Maarja Saldre interpret the transmigration of contents between  
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28 different media, namely the ‘transmedia storytelling’ (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 93-130),  
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30 through the differences between the ‘space of text, the space of media, the space of culture’  
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32 (Saldre and Torop 40). In their analysis,  
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38 the space of culture is simultaneously the space of different sign systems (intersemiotic),  
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40 discursive practices (interdiscursive), and media (intermedial). These three dimensions of  
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42 the space of culture allow more versatility in describing the processes of communication  
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44 (Saldre and Torop 40).  
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49 Interpreting the case of *Gomorra* through this wide concept of transmediality, what runs  
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51 through the novel, the film and the TV series is most of all the taking up and reconstruction  
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53 of a shared network of game rules that, following Jenkins (“Adaptation” 3-4), we will call a  
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55 ‘storyworld’.  
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3 In the case of *Gomorra*, the narrative texts, like the novel, the film, and the TV series, now  
4 live simultaneously in different media in our cultural experience, and – as we said earlier –  
5 the ‘transmedia space’ is invariant in terms of ‘storyworld’, and variant in relation to ‘medial  
6 specificity’ (Saldre and Torop 39-40). Urban spatiality, in this article, is considered a  
7 translational ‘shifter’, precisely because, in our hypothesis, the creation of a shared,  
8 contextual and cultural backdrop being historicized in the present derives from the  
9 intertwining of fictional and documentary storytelling, in a recognizable narrative world.

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12 In conclusion, we are dealing with several interpretative and translational mechanisms  
13 in a continuum between adaptation and what Jenkins (“Transmedia” 1-3) would call  
14 transmedia narrative ‘extension’. Garrone’s film carries out a partial intermedial and  
15 intersemiotic translation of Saviano’s novel, while the series *Gomorra* uses the novel with a  
16 transmedia approach, as if it were a rich database from which it draws and reinterprets  
17 excerpts and fragments. In this respect it is useful to recall Leitch’s view of adaptation as a  
18 sort of performance that gives ‘textual status’ to an archive considered as ‘a repository of  
19 texts and moments and relationships’ (“A Dialogue on Adaptation” 3).

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22 The novel thus becomes a ‘matrix of invariants’ comprising a specific storyworld that  
23 includes, among other things, the narrative, thematic, figurative, discursive and stylistic rules  
24 of the game. These represent the groundwork on which the film and especially the TV series  
25 develop their innovations, with both variants and variations.

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28 This article has sought to find a balance between issues concerning adaptation and  
29 translation and issues of TV studies and film studies. Readers, film viewers and TV viewers  
30 obviously have diverse experiences in their reception of adaptations, which are multimodal,  
31 intersemiotic and intermedial processes. In a socio-semiotic perspective, such experiences  
32 may be considered related to some recognizable textual ‘isotopies’ or guidelines that every  
33 new adaptation provides, organizing meanings in continuity, or discontinuity, with the  
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3 source's fictional world (Dusi, "Don Quixote, Intermediality and Remix" 126-7). The  
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5 complexity of this fictional world increased with the digital process, involving the assembling  
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7 of texts and paratexts in a digital universe that contemporary TV studies also call 'medial  
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9 ecosystem' (Innocenti and Pescatore 1-18), which shares certain similarities with the  
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11 'polysystem' developed by translation studies (Cattrysse, *Pour une théorie de l'adaptation*  
12  
13 *filmique* 2-3).<sup>xvii</sup> In the medial ecosystem of *Gomorrah* we can find fictional and non-fictional  
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15 products, texts and paratexts with logics of cohabitation and negotiation but also with open  
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17 conflicts between translations, adaptations, reworks and expansions produced in different  
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19 periods and different cultures.  
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24 Furthermore, in a continuum between adaptation and extension, we have suggested  
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26 focusing on intertextual and intermedial 'continuity' and on the transmedia 'discontinuity' of  
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28 the products of fandom. Our multidisciplinary – and hybrid – methodology seeks to preserve  
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30 a textual approach tied to the problems of translational equivalence, studying adaptation both  
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32 as a translational and interpretive process, and as part of a wider media set.  
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## 40 Notes

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43 i The TV series *Gomorrah* is produced by Italian SKY Television and is now also available on Netflix.  
44 ii On adaptation and intertextuality, see Leitch, "Adaptation and Intertextuality" 96-97.  
45 iii See Reiss and Vermeer 124-125.  
46 iv But see also Gray 23-46; Murray 2.  
47 v On adaptation as intersemiotic translation, see Dusi, "Intersemiotic Translation" 184-89. On  
48 intermedial continuities and transmedia expansions, see Dusi, *Contromisure* 255-58; "Don Quixote,  
49 Intermediality and Remix" 124-5.  
50 vi According to Brian McFarlane, narrative is 'transferable because [it is] not tied to one or the other  
51 semiotic system', whereas 'the effects of enunciation [...] are closely tied to the semiotic system in which they  
52 are manifested' (Mc Farlane 19-20).  
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54 vii In Italy, a theatre play adapted from the novel and directed by Mario Gelardi was also produced in  
55 2008.  
56 viii 'Le Vele' is a block of buildings designed by Frank di Salvo in the 1970s.  
57 ix See the interview of the set designer Paki Meduri conducted by Michele Masneri on December 2014.  
58 x For an in-depth discussion on problems of interlinguistic and intercultural translation linked to dubbing  
59 and subtitling of Garrone's film, see Cavaliere 173-180.  
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<sup>xi</sup> See Jakobson, "Shifters" 41-58; on the "shifters" in translation and adaptation see Torop, *Total'nyj* 219-253.

<sup>xii</sup> In brief, as pointed out by Noto (301), urban space in the *Gomorra* series has diverse, if correlated functions, namely, narrative, intertextual (for example, recalling the crime movie), but also transmedia functions, guiding viewers through the narrative universe of the series.

<sup>xiii</sup> As, indeed, is the case in the TV series *Narcos* (2015 – on air).

<sup>xiv</sup> 'When fiction inserts elements of non-fiction [...] the spectator's fictional attitude is disturbed by reality checks. The spectator begins considering the real-life implications of this engagement, and is less willing to take on a morally flawed point of view' (Bruun Vaage 237).

<sup>xv</sup> According to Giuliana Benvenuti (167-179), even the writer Roberto Saviano becomes a recognizable and persistent brand of *Gomorra*'s transmedia storytelling.

<sup>xvi</sup> There is also a recent mobile phone App (*iGomorra*) created by fans, where samples of the dialogues of the boss Don Salvatore Conte are extrapolated, alongside their transcription, see Scaglioni 3.

<sup>xvii</sup> In 2014, updating and expanding his proposals, Patrick Cattrysse returned to 'polysystems theories', which he and others pioneered in the early 1990s (see the discussion between Cattrysse and Leitch, "A Dialogue on Adaptation" 1-3). 'Polysystems' of translation studies are very close to the concept of cultural 'semiospheres' developed by Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* 123-214.

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