

**The Phenomenon of Intermediality: The Exchange of Herge’s Panel through Spielberg’s
Movie Frame in *The Adventure of Tintin***

Shipra Tholia

*Assistant Professor, Department of German Studies, Faculty of Arts, Banaras Hindu University,
Varanasi(Uttar Pradesh) India 221005*

Abstract

In today’s world, the media discourse and especially the discourse on intermediality has received immense importance. Intermediality is a phenomenon, which allows crossing of boundaries between media. Content of one medium is not limited to that particular medium but in contrary it allows itself to express in different media. For instance Herge’s Tintin is not only limited to the medium comic but its content can be transferred into another medium such as film. This paper tries to understand this phenomenon of intermediality with the help of the comic *The Adventures of Tintin: Secrets of the Unicorn* 1943by George Remi and its interpretation by Steven Spielberg in his film *The Adventures of Tintin: Secrets of the Unicorn* 2011.

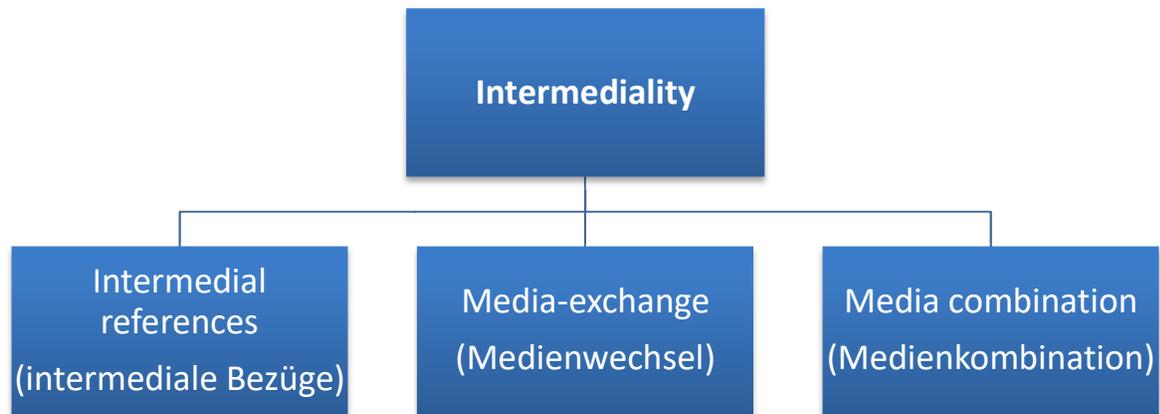
Key Words: Intermediality, medium, Tintin, linear medium, digital medium, Spielberg

Although the discourse on intermediality has found more respect and space in the current time but in reality, the phenomenon of intermediality is not new. No medium can be seen in isolation. Every medium has borrowed something or other from another medium. For instance, the medium film may be seen as a combination of many other media such as painting, architecture, text, and music, etc., whereas the medium comics can be seen as an amalgamation of painting and text. It is roughly addressed as a mixture of picture and text.

Interesting would be to understand how a medium like comic, which is a combination of painting and text, lets itself transferred into another multimedia i.e. film. This phenomenon of ‘transfer’ is called intermediality. According to Irina O. Rajewasky, intermediality differentiates itself from the two confusing concepts such as transmediality and intramedialty. (Rajewasky 19)

- | |
|--|
| • Transmediality: media un-specific Phenomena |
| • Intramediality: involves only one medium |
| • Intermediality: involves two or more media |

She further classifies Intermediality into three concepts:



Intermedial References: According to Irina O. Rajewasky, the phenomenon of intermedial reference is used in the process of creating meaning while giving reference of one medium into another (Rajewasky 19). One simple example can be understood as a reference of a book in a film or as a reference of a song in a comic/book.

Media Combination: A combination of two distinct recognizable media into one is called media combination (Rajewasky 19). Indeed these phenomena can also be seen as the backbone of all the existing medium. No medium can boast of having no traces from other media. The concept of ‘purity’ is not only old-fashioned but also irrelevant in today’s world.

Media-exchange: Irina O. Rajewasky calls it “Medienwechsel” which means the change of one medium into another medium. In her words, the transformation of a medium-specific product or product substracts into another medium. In this process, the last medium is physically present (Rajewasky 19).For example

Literary adaptation as well as the adaptation of comics into cinema etc.

This exchange or transformation of a medium is also seen as a blurring of boundary or crossing the boundaries within media.

Here arises the question, what gets transferred basically? Is it the culture, the story, the concept or the technology? The readers might agree on this point and say yes! all the above-mentioned things get transferred. Shall this ‘transfer’ be seen as a ‘transformation’ for both the media? Such as in terms of Benjamin, a “Nach-Leben” an “after life”? Let’s understand the concept of Intermediality with the Comic *The Adventure of Tintin-Secret of the Unicorn* (1943) by George Remi and its adaptation in the film *“The Adventure of Tintin-Secret of the Unicorn”* (2011) by Steven Spielberg.

When the Hollywood film director Steven Spielberg decided to bring the famous comic character Tintin by the Belgian cartoonist George Remi famous as Herge, on the screen almost after more than 65 years and

that too at a time when already so many videos and films on Tintin were existing, what took Spielberg so long? Was it because of copyright issues. The answer will be 'no'. Spielberg got the copyrights from Herge's wife long back, in fact soon after the death of Herge.

Spielberg confessed that the Tintin comic is such a wonderful art work that somehow he felt unable to bring it on the screen and do justice with it.

Hergé's Tintin

Tintin is a comic character developed by George Remi in the comic series *Adventures of Tintin*. There are 24 albums. Herge or George Remi is known for his ligneclaire (clear line) style of writing. The comic series has inspired generation after generation. The main protagonist of this comic series is a young boy named Tintin who along with his dog Snowy explores the adventure of the world and fixes almost all the problem. He does not possess any super-power but what he possesses is his super brain, through which he solves almost all the cases. He alone can fly an airplane, he can even fix the engine when needed. Tintin is accompanied by Captain Haddock, Professor Calculus, two police detectives Thomson and Thompson, Bianca Cast a fiore, etc.

Jean-Marie Apostolides in his book *The Metamorphoses of Tintin: or Tintin for Adults* explains tintin as an "impressive social phenomena".

Tintin was not merely a passing fad but a formidable social Phenomenon. It is no exaggeration to claim that tintin was part of

the education of most of the young francophone boys and girls growing up after the Second World War. With Tintin they discovered the world: with Tintin, they developed the taste for adventure. Taking Tintin as their role model, they learned generosity, daring, tolerance, openness, self control, and the need to understand and explain everything. (Apostolides11)

The fandom of Tintin is huge. Although the comic series have been accused of being colonialist, homosexual etc. In words of Patrick Thévenon:

This hypocrite, this boy feigning innocence, this ugly little monkey cannot fool us any longer. It's time we expose him for what he really is. Tintin is a forty-year-old dwarf, a colonialist and a zoophile, with homosexual tendencies to boot. This is the despicable character we setup as a hero for our dear little children. (Thévenon41)

Whereas Apostolides ignores the accusation on Tintin by saying the following:

Tintin was born at the end of the 1920s, when his author, who had grown up in a right wing, catholic environment, was only twenty-two years old. The first two albums are witness to "the sins of his youth", subsequently disavowed. The first which smacks of an elementary anticommunism, was republished only much later and only as an archival document. The other represents a colonialist ideology of the 1930s. If the hero bears a certain paternalistic attitude towards the blacks, he is not really racist because we see that he actually defends them against the wicked whites. Later on, Tintin consistently takes the side of the underdog, and we see him coming to the

rescue of Native Americans as well as oppressed Chinese. As for the accusation of anti-Semitism, even if Her géadmits to having presented “a disagreeable businessman with Jewish features and a Jewish name” still he plead innocent: who could have foreseen that Jew is histories would end in the way we know they did, that is the death camps of Treblinka and Auschwitz?(Apostolides2)

Nonetheless all can be on agreement with Frederic Tuten, where he says Tintin is “an adventure in ästhetics”. In his own words: “Tintin is an adventure in aesthetics, which is the only kind of adventure are adder can really goon.

As you turn the pages of the book, you cross unfamiliar and sometimes difficult terrain” (Tuten03).

The answer to the question, why Tintin is being read generation after generation and is being interpreted and transferred or adapted in video games, films, animated TV-Series etc., lies in the fact that when the reader opens the pages of the comic series, he is being transferred into the world of adventures. While journeying with Tintin the reader also comes across philosophical and political rendering. Skilling Pierre highlights the concept of good government according to Tintin,

The Adventure of Tintin also lends themselves to a political reading. One of the fundamental questions of political philosophy is that of the best form of government, and Tintin, in the course of his travels around the world, offers his readers some thoughts on this question. His position is simple though not necessarily simplistic.

Hergé himself had at best a rudimentary conception of politics and was certainly not a militant, yet through Tintin he introduced hundreds of thousands of children to politics and awakened in them an interesting history and current events. (Pierre173)

Spielberg’s Tintin

Tintin is more than just a comic character. It was a challenge for Spielberg, who himself is a fan of Tintin, to bring Tintin from the comic book *The Adventures of Tintin-the secrets of the Unicorn (1943)* to his fans, who might have grown old by the year 2011 and to the young fans of Tintin and also to the non-fans, who are just film lovers. The intermedial phenomena gave Spielberg the opportunity to rejuvenate the love for Tintin through the film medium. Spielberg was very conscious about the fandom of Tintin therefore he did not want to use fictional look alike characters to play Tintin in his film *The Adventures of Tintin-the secrets of the Unicorn (2011)*. Any fictional character might disappoint the viewers. Spielberg waited till he got the sufficient technology in the medium film to transfer Tintin from comic to screen, i.e. from a linear medium to a digital medium. Spielberg used the animation. In his own defense he says:

Because of the medium of animation, suddenly my imagination wasn’t limited by the exigencies of physical outdoor production. All the production was from the imagination right to the computer and there’s nothing better than that. (Murphy 2012)

The Performance-Capture technic was used in the film to bring the drawing style of Hergé i.e. *Ligne Claireon* screen.

Spielberg in an interview expresses his experiences about how he synthesized the medium comic into film. He explains also how he transferred the panels of comics through the movie frame.

Everyone of the panels in Hergé "Adventures of Tintin" book tells a story. Beyond the dialogue that is encapsulated in a common bubble above the characters' heads, Hergé used body language to communicate emotion, anxiety, tension, anger. I simply created a style guide from many of those illustrations and put them on the walls of the performance-capture stage. So all the actors started to study their poses. Then I was able to shoot rather lengthy, continuous shots where I was attempting to create the same visual panels with a movie frame around them that Hergé had done in exploring his stories. The Hergé books: the art direction, the kind of cars, the kind of telephones, the kind of facial expressions- that was our bible. (Murphy2012)

During this transfer or exchange of comics into film Spielberg has to remove certain scenes because many things perform well in comics but they do not function the same on screen. Such as the funny scenes, which may look funny in comics but might not reciprocate the same emotion on the screen? Many panels or scenes from the comics were deleted or only partially dealt with. Spielberg had to added many scenes which are not to be found in the original comics. The viewers had this complain that the film looked more like an Action-Thriller. This is the beauty of the media-exchange. One medium takes certain things and leaves certain things behind. Media exchange should not be understood as a Xerox or Photocopy process. It is not the process of reproducing the exact same copy but it is a process to give a new meaning and a new life to a forgotten text. Intermediality is an exchange of ideas and concepts from one medium to another.

Works Cited:

1. Apostolides, Jean Marie. *The Metamorphoses of Tintin*. Stanford University Press, 2010.
2. Thévenon, Patrick. *Tintin et le Temple du Soleil*, L'Actualité, no 12, 8-14 janv. 1970 (quoted after Jean-Marie Apostolides).
3. Tuten, Frederic. *Tintin in the New World: A romance*. Black Classic Press, 2005.
4. Skilling, Pierre. *The good government according to Tintin, Long Live Old Europe?* In: McLaughlin, Jeff (Ed.). *Comics as Philosophy*. University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
5. Rajewasky, Irina O. *Intermedialität*, A. Francke UTB 2002.
6. Murphy, Mekado. "The Adventures of Spielberg: An Interview." *The New York Times*, 20 Dec. 2011, carpetbagger.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/the-adventures-of-spielberg-an-interview.