

## Abstract

This introduction to the special issue of *Adaptation* devoted to adaptation and the public humanities focuses on the ways the once-anodyne term 'public humanities' has become more sharply politicized and contested over the past few years. In many ways, adaptation, which generates new versions and new readings of old texts instead of cancelling, erasing, or unpublishing them, offers the possibility of transcending the conflicts in contemporary culture. But the creation and the study of adaptations offer not a retreat from the culture wars but an array of new tools for waging them more productively by reframing them in ways that lead to more open and fruitful dialogue on the subjects proposed by the essays in this issue: theatrical performances cast for the public good, the costs of performing adapted versions of oneself or of encouraging adaptation-induced tourism, the ecological implications of adaptation, and the shifting valence of adaptation when it is practiced by public figures and posthuman agents.