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Cinema & Comics

a cura di Barbara Maio

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Cinema & Comics: Quando i Mondi si Scontrano

di Barbara Maio

Il numero su cinema e comics arriva in un momento particolare dell’industria cinematografica. Attingere ai fumetti e agli albi classici, mutuando eroi dai superpoteri strabilianti da riproporre sul grande schermo con l’ausilio di effetti speciali o utilizzando l’estetica camp e trash, non è usanza di oggi ma, anzi, il genere è uno di quelli di grande successo dell’industria Statunitense ma, anche, di quella orientale.

L’assunto di partenza dei producers è quello di contare su personaggi già amati e conosciuti dal pubblico. Inoltre, le storie narrate nei fumetti si prestano perfettamente ad adattamenti cinematografici per la loro costruzione narrativa spesso legata alle strutture classiche.

Ma la scelta dell’adattamento dei comics ha anche ragioni commerciali: in tempi di narrazione crossmediale, il film tratto dal fumetto può rappresentare una fonte inesauribile di universi narrativi che sfociano poi in merchandising, serie, saghe, videogiochi, spin-off e così via.

In una industria che sceglie sempre la via meno rischiosa e con una larga fetta di pubblico cinematografico in giovane età, questo tipo di adattamento sembra essere un sicuro investimento.

Una dimostrazione la possiamo trovare nel tipo di personaggi adattati. Dai classici Superman e Batman, si è passati a personaggi un tempo considerati meno mainstream come Iron Man e Lanterna Verde. Lo scopo è ovviamente quello di trovare sempre materiale nuovo da proporre al pubblico magari anche utilizzando eroi “secondari” che si rivelano spesso poi essere tra i più amati dagli appassionati di fumetti.

Pur essendo quindi un prodotto popolare - almeno e soprattutto in ottica occidentale - l’adattamento del fumetto riveste anche una forma autoriale da non sottovalutare: il regista cult Sam Raimi ha adattato i primi tre capitoli di Spider Man, Bryan Singer ha diretto/prodotto la saga degli X-Men, e in questa ultima stagione cinematografica perfino due autori come Kenneth Branagh e Michel Gondry hanno diretto rispettivamente Thor e The Green Hornet.

Ma il binomio cinema e fumetto va anche oltre il semplice adattamento di storie su medium diversi. Esiste, infatti, una estetica del fumetto che si evidenzia in film che magari non hanno una
origine in un albo. E’ il caso del recente *Sucker Punch* di *Zack Snyder* che aveva già proposto la sua estetica in film come *300* e *Watchmen* (questo si tratto da un *fumetto*).

Vi è poi tutto l’universo orientale che propone la sua filosofia ed estetica in opere anche molto diverse tra loro. L’adattamento di *Akira* di *Katsuhiro Ōtomo* ha aperto la strada in occidente ai film animati tratti dai manga e dagli anime giapponesi e si parla ora di un suo adattamento anche in terra Americana. O, ancora, lo *Yattaman* di *Takashi Miike*, passato quasi inosservato in Italia. Insomma, cinema e fumetto si rincorrono, si usano, si sfruttano a vicenda, a volte si trasformano, ma riescono a trovare sempre nuova linfa vitale l’uno nella vita dell’altro.

E il numero di *Ol3Media* di questo semestre offre una breve panoramica su questo mondo, tra cinema e fumetto, tra oriente e occidente, con un focus speciale sul fenomeno *Scott Pilgrim*, tratto dal fumetto di *Bryan Lee O’Malley* che ha dato vita ad un film di scarso successo ma di sicuro interesse.
Wonder Woman TV incarnations: contexts, images and popular culture
by Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns

In the transfer from the printed page to television or cinema, both Batman and Superman, icons of the DC Comics Universe, carry on a number of elements of their years of history enough for the characters to be recognizable to the viewing public. Batman, on its TV series in the sixties, or in the films directed by Tim Burton or Christopher Nolan, is surrounded by identifiable aspects, be it his city (Gotham City), his enemies (Joker, Riddler) or his suit. The same goes for Superman; both in the TV series Smallville, as in its various incarnations in the film medium, Clark Kent always end up running into Lex Luthor and Lois Lane. Wonder Woman, however, is quite another story.

In some of its incarnations for television, Princess Diana has not had the luck of her masculine partners and has barely had her name to be recognized on the screen, and little else. We can see that over the years, of Wonder Woman only some aspects have been taken and the rest has been obviated. We might ask what the reasons are for this to happen. Perhaps it is related to that, despite her popularity, the Amazon has not had more than one monthly comic book since its inception in the late 40’s by Charles Moulton’s mind, while Batman and Superman had grown to four or five monthly series, which determines that the symbolic universe of both characters is much more established in the popular culture. In this paper we shall not dwell on this complex issue, but on what was the cutting performed on the character of Wonder Woman in the different transpositions for television [1], which aspects were taken into what contexts and to what those choiches could be it could be due. We believe that these transpositions speak volume about how popular culture mediates the way in which women are seen in certain contexts.

When we mention television versions, we refer to three incarnations: the first one, Who’s afraid of Diana Prince? was created by William Dozier in response to the success of the Batman’s show in the sixties. The second incarnation was played by Cathy Lee Crosby in 1973, already with the title Wonder Woman and the third one, a year later, which spawned a cult TV show that lasted three years and led Lynda Carter to fame as the amazon Princess.

Before analyzing each of the transpositions, we must note that one aspect that this character took with her in all her television appearances was the colours of her uniform. While the latter
did not appear in all the opportunities in a manner that respected the exact design of the suit created in the comics, the red, blue and white have been present in all the TV's embodiments.

Of course, the use of the colours presents its own rhetoric and has certain readings. The mentioned colours respond to the uniform but in turn they correspond to those of the American flag and it is to this to which it denotes first, before any conception of the character of Wonder Woman. But the fact that the uniform’s colours and certain design structures are present (the stars, for example) would demonstrate that the creators have had in mind a relationship between the visual recognition of a uniform already installed in the society’s visual/popular culture and the character that wears it. Semiotically, a woman wearing a uniform that makes use of the colours mentioned above and the stars will always remit to Wonder Woman, even in a parodic way.

What indicate above is important if we consider that some embodiments of the characters did not take much more than some version of the uniform, the character’s name and little else.

The first attempt responds aesthetically to the camp that dominated the Batman’s show in the sixties. William Dozier had achieved success with the Caped Crusader and tried his best to recapture the same colourful high camp with *The Green Hornet* and it was only a matter of time before he cast his eyes on the supreme female hero. Along with writers Stan Hart and Larry Siegel, the three men decided to follow the same path and created a half-hour TV pilot that was never filmed, except for a small part that was know as *Who’s is afraid of Diana Prince?*

In this segment, in a stormy night, a young woman called Diana Prince (Ellie Wood Walker) argues with her mother about the need that the world has of Wonder Woman, while the mother, a mundane woman who apparently knows all about the secret identity of her daughter, tries to keep her at home, as she complains about her daughter concerns to save the Nation while she disregards other matters of importance, such as getting a boyfriend. When the mother retires momentarily, Diana enters a hidden room and comes out dressed as Wonder Woman, to look herself in the mirror for a while, to finally leave flying out of the window to the chagrin of her mother. There is not very much else in those short five minutes, but it is enough to wonder what image William Dozier had in mind when he tried to take Diana Prince to the media in this way.

We can understand that pursuing an aesthetic that had been successful (at least in *Batman*) is a right move, but it does not justify some choices.

There is a clear interest in playing with the figure of a woman whose mundanity can generate
empathy in the female adolescents among the potential spectatorship, with problems such as the lack of communication with the parents. This idea has lines of contact with the comic book’s version, which, in the sixties, was aiming at female youths with the romantic relationships and possible male partners in the daily life of Diana Prince. Even Steve Trevor is mentioned as a possible romantic interest.

This strongly deviates from the comic book and what makes this short peculiar is the great emphasis in the dichotomy “ugly/pretty woman”. The segment’s last minutes are dedicated to Diana, already dressed as Wonder Woman, looking at her reflection in the mirror at the time that accompanies this exhibition with silly gestures and poses. There is something pathologically disturbing in the distorted view that the mirror returns. Even that image does not correspond to that of Wood Walker’s, but to that of actress Linda Harrison’s, who also wears the uniform. In others words, the short plays with the idea of a teenager who wants to reach an impossible ideal of beauty as an escape from an unsatisfying life prospect. We find a glamorization of feminine attributes at the same time as we see their standardization as a Hollywood/stardom product.

The core of this episode was to work with the social fear always present in teenagers, of being an outcast, of feeling inadequate for their physical attributes and physical development and to take and bring these fears to national TV in a comedic key. “Ugly young girls often hold out hope that they will metamorphose into loveliness” [Wright, 2000: 32]. The fact that Diana attempts something more in her life than getting a boyfriend as her mother wants shows a certain approach to a feminist way of thinking, much in accord with these times, and raise interesting ideas, but these are denied in the mirror’s scene, in which the role goes for the stereotypes. The mentioned dichotomy, although it seems related to female praxis, responds willingly to a masculine value system: only to the male gaze the female ugliness is a serious problem.

The second version features a blonde Wonder Woman without superpowers, in the TV movie of the same name, directed by Vincent McEveety, which was broadcast on ABC in 1974, with the hope of generating a series. In the seventies, the roles of women underwent many changes in television, especially thanks to characters like Emma Peel in The Avengers, which established new parameters for the female heroes on TV. The previous dichotomy “ugly/pretty woman” is not present here, as a new context in television called for a new Diana Prince. We have the Amazon’s island to which Diana belongs; we have Steve Trevor (Kaz Garas), who is Diana’s boss, and not much else. David Hofstede argues that if it were not for its name, no one would recognize
the character. While this may be debatable, the fact is that this character incarnation has more Emma Peel in her configuration than Wonder Woman. Not only she is blonde, and has no powers, even Diana's last name is not given. Only the colours of her costume resemble its counterpart in the comic book.

However, it is interesting to note the similarities with the long period of time in which Wonder Woman loses her powers in the comic book, a story arc which in turn was inspired by Emma Peel, to the point of imitating her clothing. But could there have been an Emma Peel without a Wonder Woman before? This way, we find a circulation of images in popular culture that feeds and self feeds from their own creations and positive acceptance that they have on the audience. The latter is important because it shows how the image of our Amazon takes shape in agreement with the images that society has of “modern” women in certain specific contexts, more than with a specific a priori idea about Wonder Woman based on the comic books.

One year after the telefilm starring Lee Crosby, a new pilot came, The new original Wonder Woman (in an obvious attempt to differentiate from the early TV movie), again on ABC, directed by Leonard Horn, starring Lynda Carter as Diana Prince/Wonder Woman and Lyle Waggoner as Steve Trevor. The pilot’s success led to the creation of the television series that lasted three years and would become a hit.

This series (that in its second and third year would pass to CBS) has settled in the popular media to such an extent that Wonder Woman and Lynda Carter becomes one. The show had everything going for it: a strong female character that although had the help of magical attributes, fights on her own against dangerous criminals, and came from a island of warriors and wise women that represented symbolically all the new women in the America of the seventies. The show had a beautiful woman in the title role to satisfy all men fantasies, with a suit that was faithful to the comic book and, at the same time, highlighted Carter’s body, plus a series of camp adventures that allowed the viewing by both adults and children.

The popular (in fiction) duplicity ugly/pretty was also present, since this image plays an important role in women’s anxieties as well as men, in a social and historical context in which women were beginning to gain male spaces, and independence of the masculine opinion, creating their own subjectivity. In the first year of the show, Diana Prince is presented as “duller than a fat lapdog after dinner”. For future seasons, when the series leaves the historical time of the Second War World, Diana goes for a more graceful look, without hiding her beauty.
At the same time as this happens, the role of Lyle Waggoner is more and more reduced, often only having a telephone conversation with Diana who is now a special field agent out to do dangerous work. Interestingly, this way she resemble the Wonder Woman played by Cathy Lee Crosby, a normal but well trained woman who faces the danger on her own.

This show brought together two perspectives that appear to produce only potential short-circuits: first, the iconic image of Wonder Woman is the quintessential female, a sort of utopian feminism figure [2]; on the other hand and at the same time, her beautiful image of an Amazonian woman in a minimal swimsuit invited the use of this artificial creation as an answer to all type of male sexual fantasies. “The dominant perception of Wonder Woman remains one of sexual fantasy regardless of how heroic her adventures are” [Brown, 2005: 241]. But a new audience was emerging, mostly at the serie’s end and over the years: gays. The image of Wonder Woman twirling, turning into a beautiful woman in the middle of a flash of light is an iconic image that assaults the senses and lingers until today. Now, we can find meanings in it that were not intended at the time.

Without going any further, the twirl was removed in the last year of the show, something that establishes that the producers and directors were not aware of the visual impact of this sequence. So powerful was the twirl that it has been incorporated into the comic books of today, as can be seen on the cover of issue 44 of Wonder Woman with the publication date 2010. Even Phil Jimenez, openly gay artist and writer, found, according to his words, the time of his life when he was commissioned to draw and write Wonder Woman for DC Comics, between the years 2000-2003. For the gay magazine OUT, Jimenez drew a small moment in which we can see the author himself declaring his love to Wonder Woman and commenting, among others memories of his childhood, his fascination for the twirling transformation of Diana into the superheroine [3] (Jimenez was one of the first to bring the visual twirling in the post Crisis in Infinite Earths).

Superman and Batman also transform, especially Superman, with great speed, leaving a false identity behind. However, in this process, Wonder Woman is unique. She does not “disguise”, rather lets out the female warrior that exists inside her. When Diana Prince twirls, she is “coming out of the closet”, showing to the world her real self in the midst of a glamorous explosion of light that dazzles. Wonder Woman is the true self that Diana, a pretty but common woman, hides inside and that can display visually and with pride to the world.
Perhaps that is one of the reasons that prompted Dara Birnbaum to choose this particular moment for her video art piece “Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman” in which Diana Prince (Lynda Carter’s version) can be seen spinning in a process of perpetual transformation (practically the entire piece consists of a repetition of just this event). This is unsurpassed in illustrating the current situation of global women. Unlike in previous decades, the progress of feminism seems to have stalled. Women have made significant progress with respect to their position in society, but insufficient and at a slower pace when compared to that produced by feminist movements in the sixties and seventies. Modern women are at a crossroads as their relationship with society becomes more complex. Women, as expected, have to be mother, father and worker, sexually active, glamorous, young, strong, cute and fragile, all in the same individual. That is why, we believe, the artist uses the visual fragment of a transformation in something else, but whose outcome we cannot yet see. Diana lets out the interior Wonder Woman, but then does nothing with her. Feminism is at a point in its development in which the obtained achievements are not able to find a social conduit that transcends the specific strengths to achieve a stable and lasting improvement in women’s condition.

In conclusion, we can say that the Wonder Woman image/character has been rendered in many different ways in television. Perhaps this is related, as mentioned, with the fact that her history in comic books is not strongly established. Diana seems to be reinvented every time, rather than building her up with a historical background that serves her as support. We believe, and this short review of the character's incarnations on TV may show it, that the media version of Wonder Woman is more than anything else a sum of two elements with no relation to the comic book. On the one hand, the Amazon princess represents the modern and positive image that a particular cultural-historical context has of women. Those social images always tend toward feminism, since only that current of social thought is advocated as a principle for a positive role of women in society.

These are undeniable values in the character of the Amazon warrior. But then, on the other hand, Wonder Woman is built on images of women dependent on a visual culture constructed on a patriarchal epistemology, and these images tend, according to John Berger in Ways of Seeing, to be constructed by the hegemonic (male) politics for an ideal spectator, which is interpreted as predominantly masculine. It is this impossible intersection of levels in the circulation of images that created Wonder Woman, as new ideological ideas about women proposed by feminist
thinking and waves clashed with the material images of women based on stereotypes, such as the dichotomy “ugly/pretty woman” under a masculine gaze. This clash of levels in its social construction is illustrated in the new TV incarnation that is filming at the present time, in which Wonder Woman, according to reports, will be “crime fighter, a successful executive and a modern woman” (Entertainment Weekly, January 21, 2011). Many layers trying to represent today's women, in red, blue and white.

Notes
[1] In the present study we do not take into account the TV incarnations made for cartoons shows in animation format, since we believe that this device presents an entirely different and complex problem.

[2] Wonder Woman was on the cover of the very first issue of the feminist journal Ms. Magazine, returning to the cover for their thirty-fifth –anniversary issue.

[3] On the pages 65-66 of Out Magazine March 2001. Their exact words are: “I’d been in love with you since I was a little kid, watching Lynda Carter twirl around as she played you on TV” on p 65.

Bibliography
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Quando Alice preferisce tirare le bombe a mano anziché prendere un té con il bianconiglio: Il paese delle meraviglie di Sucker Punch
di Elisa Rampone

Per la cronaca: alla prima di Sucker Punch fra gli addetti a lavori girava voce che il film fosse nato sotto una cattiva stella. Prima nel 2008 Zack Snyder accarezza e ventila al suo pubblico la possibilità di far uscire Sucker Punch in contemporanea con Watchmen, salvo poi dover ritrattare e rimandarne l'uscita di quasi cinque anni per comprensibili ragioni di marketing e non ben chiarite questioni di censura che tuttavia fanno decrescere il rating del film da vietato ai minori di 18 anni a vietato ai minori di 14 anni, passaggio che – sia detto per inciso - in certi paesi è un bel vantaggio. Poi, a tormentare il percorso di Sucker Punch verso le sale, si aggiunge l'abortita riconversione in 3d che Zack Snyder e signora, la produttrice del film, si affrettano a giustificare sostenendo che a differenza di 300 o Il Regno di Ga’Hoole - La Leggenda dei Guardiani nati per la terza dimensione, Sucker Punch è stato concepito e realizzato da subito in un genuino 2d e che nessuna della versioni 3d proposte dalle diverse compagnie contattate è pertanto risultata soddisfacente. Infine, fra la creatura di Snyder e la fama si frappongono le critiche che cadono a pioggia su ogni aspetto del film, dalla sceneggiatura giudicata presuntuosa e inconsistente alla recitazione finto-onirica delle cinque lolite armate di katana.
A onor del vero e per amor dell’equità e dell’equilibrio corre l’obbligo di ricordare che la materia con cui Snyder si confronta, ovvero la forza centrifuga che spinge gli individui lontano dalla causa del dolore e la forza centrifuga dei sogni, è sfuggevole e traditrice almeno quanto la materia di cui sono fatti gli uomini. Non essendo Sucker Punch ancora stato graziato dallo scorrere del tempo che, si sa, è gentiluomo e fa apparire meno gravi certi peccati veniali di superficialità e approssimazione, vale la pena di ripercorrerne brevemente la trama.
Come nelle migliori storie di disperazione e ribellione, Baby Doll poco più che adolescente assiste impotente alla morte della madre e al montare della violenza di un padre ubriaco e affatto addolorato che prima tenta di abusare della figlia più giovane e poi, per non dover spartire un’eredità che si immagina cospicua, non esita a far rinchiudere la figlia maggiore in un ospedale psichiatrico accusandola dell’omicidio della sorella. Lennox House, il ricovero per malati mentali, non si sottrae a nessuno dei cliché tragicamente credibili e prevedibili dell’immaginario collettivo: la psichiatra Vera Gorski che vigila sulle pazienti ignara delle sevizie a cui sono
realmente sottoposte, il sinistro infermiere Blue che tutto vede e a tutto provvede, le pazienti iconograficamente rappresentate in cerchio o sedute sul letto con lo sguardo perso, e la terapia applicata sulle ragazze, una specie di psicodramma che mettendo in scena i disturbi delle pazienti, ha lo scopo di favorirne la guarigione. Naturalmente qualora si ritenga che serva, una bella lobotomia non si nega a nessuno. Baby Doll evidentemente la merita a pieno titolo se l’infermiere Blue, mentre intasca il suo compenso, non esita a garantire al patrigno della ragazza che l’intervento avverrà entro cinque giorni.

Cinque giorni soltanto, neanche una settimana. Cinque giorni sarebbero un tempo troppo breve per attuare qualsiasi proposito degno di nota, figurarsi per progettare una fuga da uno dei luoghi più restrittivi che il sistema conosca. Per Snyder e Steve Shibuia, coscenegiatore, invece cinque giorni sono abbastanza perché Baby Doll e le sue nuove compagne di lotta si confidino, si proteggano reciprocamente e si affiatino tanto da mettere a punto un piano comune di fuga. Ora, stilisticamente Sucker Punch ibrida fumetto, animazione giapponese e fantasy, giusto? Può quindi il percorso di redenzione e liberazione delle cinque ragazze compiersi senza ricorso al fantastico, intenso in senso lato? No, non può. E infatti Snyder, Shibuia e il direttore della fotografia Fong studiano una vera e propria quest da gioco fantasy che porta le ragazze a vivere intersecando senza sosta il mondo reale in cui lavano pavimenti e pelano patate come novelle cenerentole punk, e quello rovesciato dell’immaginazione in cui sono armate fino ai denti, guidano mecha decorati da vezzosi conigli rosa e affrontano, sconfiggendoli, nazisti zombie, samurai ninja, pistoleri meccanizzati e draghi che conservano nelle vene l’ampolla del fuoco primigenio. La sovrapposizione fra la dimensione trista di Lennox House e lo spazio onirico e contestualmente la trasformazione del ricovero in un grottesco Bordello gestito dall’infermiere Blue, si compie nel segno della musica che ha la scoperta funzione di raccordare il livello reale e quello immaginato. Nella sala del ricovero destinata nella realtà allo psicodramma e nel sogno alle esibizioni delle ragazze davanti a facoltosi e laidi clienti, Baby Doll è una Salomé con le ciglia finte che si offre in una danza mai mostrata se non attraverso gli effetti che produce: un incanto irresistibile, un offuscamento dei sensi di tutti gli spettatori le cui azioni o reazioni vengono congelate per tutta la durata dello spettacolo e lo stato trasognato di Baby Doll che viene sbalzata in un mondo surreale e violento, governato dalla necessità della vittoria sui nemici. Hai paura... non devi. [...] Quello che stai immaginando in questo momento? Tu controlli questo mondo.
Mentre nella sala dello psicodramma Baby Doll sospende la necessità di agire, nella dimensione parallela si dipana la quest dei quattro oggetti, una mappa, un coltello, il fuoco e una chiave, che una volta riuniti permetteranno a Baby Doll, Rocket, Sweetie, Blondie e Amber di evadere dalla cattività del ricovero.

Tanto per mettere i puntini sul i quando si parla di ricerca e di percorso evolutivo: non siamo in un Bildungsroman, gli oggetti della ricerca non sono il Graal anche se Snyder ci prova ad ammantarli di una potente carica simbolica, Baby Doll non ricorda in niente il Parvizal di Wolfram von Eschenbach o l’Heinrich von Ofterdingen di Novalis e l’ambientazione fantastica in cui si snoda il percorso delle ragazze non è né quella strutturatissima di Final Fantasy né quella strutturalissima delle opere folli dei maestri tedeschi del fantastico, dal gran visir del genere, E.T.A. Hoffmann, ai suoi degni compagni di merende Chamisson (Peter Schlemils wundersame Geschichte - 1814), Tieck (Der blonde Eckbert - 1797), La Motte-Fouqué (Ondina - 1811), persino l’austero Schiller (Der Geisterseher - 1794)... Ora, nessuno pretenderebbe da Sucker Punch la stessa visione estetica o costruzione della visione estetica che si ritrova negli autori indicati perché il film di Snyder è un fanta-action che diverte a suon di sventagliate di mitra, clienti dalla morale discutibile e sali quantici e che in qualche passaggio butta lì l’idea che la mente sappia trovare risorse inaspettate in momenti critici. La questione è che nessuno lo pretenderebbe, ma Snyder e Shibuia ci provano ugualmente con il risultato che il concetto portante, la vita come un infinito campo di battaglia in cui ognuno deve combattere con le armi che ha in dotazione, si perde un po’, non fosse altro che per l’eccesso di tributi ai predecessori (Final Fantasy, Metal Gear Solid e Killzone per il genere fantasy videogame, Shutter Island e Inception per citarne alcuni) a cui si vuole pagare dazio e di stimoli (la psicanalisi, la costruzione di mondi alternativi virtuali per fuggire dalla realtà, i processi della mente per resistere al dolore) a cui si fatica a dare un ordine. Trarre materia dagli ambiti più diversi e recepire suggestioni di insospettate provenienze è indubbiamente un pregio. Non organizzarle attorno ad uno schema narrativo coerente e consequenziale è un vizio che nel caso di Sucker Punch non è neanche troppo occulto se si pensa al fatto che le fughe di Baby Doll e compagne nello spazio virtuale si replicano meccanicamente e seguono tutti un uguale schema: la danza ipnotica che permette l’astrazione nel mondo immaginato, lo scontro con i cattivi per recuperare l’oggetto e il ritorno alla realtà. E questa, come si osserva giustamente “è la struttura di un videogioco, non l’architettura di una qualsiasi opera narrativa di finzione” [1]. In effetti in certe scene il film è
proprio un pastiche che trita senza amalgamarli troppi elementi:
“[…] (nel medesimo segmento “narrativo”): a) le rovine di una cattedrale gotica e di una città che potrebbe essere Dresda o Berlino nella seconda guerra mondiale, b) trincee della prima guerra mondiale (uscite da “L’esercito delle dodici scimmie” di Gilliam o da “Una lunga domenica di passioni” di Jeunet?), c) soldati tedeschi zombie (o robot con gli occhi di brace), d) una capsula spaziale dalla foggia mostruosa… […] che tutto questo sia mero scenario di un’azione priva di una progressione narrativa diversa da quella di un personaggio-eroe che si muove verso una meta, e sulla cui strada si interpongono avversari da eliminare fisicamente [2].

Se l’idea che sottende al film fosse “Se pastiche deve essere, pastiche sfrenato e divertito sia”, la figura archetipica [3] del vecchio saggio che accompagna le missioni nel regno del fantastico e impartisce alla ciurma di ragazze interrotte le istruzioni per realizzare la fuga dal ricovero, avrebbe una sua collocazione. Se invece, nelle ambizioni della sceneggiatura, il vecchio saggio rappresenta la guida che soccorre il protagonista nei momenti critici ed è portatore di saggezza, prudenza, coraggio e conoscenza, l’aura mistica del personaggio in Sucker Punch prende forma con fatica quando pronuncia la quinta ed ultima istruzione “La quinta cosa è la ragione, è il vero scopo, sarà un profondo atto di sacrificio e una vittoria perfetta. Solo tu puoi trovarla e riuscirti ti renderà libera” e si infrange contro alcune sue perle: “Se avete firmato un assegno a parole, assicuratevi di poterlo pagare col c***”.

L’ultimo oggetto della ricerca che solo una delle ragazze (anche perché le altre, a parte Sweetie, sono nel frattempo cadute vittime dell’eccessiva ambizione del progetto) può recuperare è quindi, in ultimo, Baby Doll medesima, che, rafforzato lo spirito guerriero con i successi e raffinati gli ingranaggi del meccanismo con cui sopisce i suoi spettatori, deve frugare nel fondo della sua volontà per trovare il coraggio di attuare l’estremo sacrificio e perseguire la vittoria, appunto, perfetta.

“Chi è realmente al centro della storia, chi manovra il sipario, chi è che decide la coreografia della danza, chi ci porta alla follia? Chi è che ci sferza e chi ci incorona vincitori quando sopravviviamo all’impossibile, chi, chi fa tutte queste cose? Chi ci insegna ad onorare chi amiamo con la nostra stessa vita, chi manda mostri ad ucciderci e allo stesso tempo canta che non moriremo mai, chi ci insegna cos’è reale e come ridere delle bugie? Chi decide per chi viviamo e per che cosa dobbiamo morire, chi ci incatena e chi ha la chiave che può renderci liberi? Sei tu, hai tutte le armi che ti servono. Combatti!”
Così recita la voce narrante in apertura, così vogliono Snyder e Shibuia e questo in effetti si avvera nel finale del film che si consuma su una sedia chirurgica. L'infermiere Blue è stato di parola con il padre di Baby Doll: fra la fine delle ribellioni della figlia e la punta del trapano che sta per lobotomizzarla ci sono solo pochi centimetri. La punta si avvita su stessa, penetra nel cranio e uscendo si porta dietro anche gli ultimi fiotti di consapevolezza di Baby Doll. La vittima è immolata, la fuga di Sweetie garantita, la fedeltà allo schema da fumetto in cui i buoni vincono e i cattivi sono puniti manomesso, almeno in parte. Un **happy end** infatti non si nega a nessuno, neanche allo sceneggiatore, soprattutto quando dimostra di credere che sia davvero possibile. Mentre la truffa di Blue viene scoperta e l'infermiere trascinato via sotto gli occhi indignati della psichiatra Gorski, Sweetie, deposto il mitra e assunte le sembianze di una collegiale delle orsoline, sale sull’autobus del destino, guidato non a caso dal vecchio saggio.

Fin qui la trama. Una guasconata che pasticcia una psicanalisi un po’ all’ingrosso ed elaborazioni digitali secondo alcuni, una sofisticata lente di ingrandimento puntata sulle potenzialità della mente in situazioni limite secondo altri. A conti fatti, è probabile che **Sucker Punch** non entri nella lista dei dieci film migliori di sempre e nell’ottica di questo lavoro importa anche poco stabilire se l’obiettivo di Snyder fosse girare una storia di riscatto femminile, di sacrificio individuale o semplicemente togliersi qualche capriccio estetico. Non sarà un capolavoro assoluto, eppure il film ha il merito non trascurabile di intercettare e sviluppare una duplice tendenza che si sta diffondendo nel cinema degli ultimi vent’anni: l’elezione di soggetti pescati dal mondo del fumetto e la rappresentazione di tali soggetti attraverso tecniche, come quella dell’elaborazione digitale, senza le quali quelle storie non potrebbero essere raccontate.

Proviamo a partire da zero. C’è chi va al cinema per vedere una storia d’amore in cui lui si innamora di lei, ma si dimentica di dirle che ha una grave malattia, che ha già un’altra moglie e qualche figlio sparso per il paese oppure che sta per partire in missione. C’è chi vuole tornare a casa dal cinema guardandosi le spalle a ogni metro e con la convinzione di essere destinato a morte certa per mano di un serial killer che semina il terrore sotto le mentite e innocue spoglie di un lattaio. C’è chi al cinema chiede di rappresentare una dimensione che sovverta o alteri o ribalti le dinamiche della vita reale. Queste categorie di preferenze che dividono grossolanamente il pubblico, valgono anche per la schiatta dei registi. Ora, si chiuda un occhio sugli accostamenti irriverenti, ma se si traccia una mappa dei registi che cedono alle lusinghe del fumetto o alle blandizie del soprannaturale oppure che si misurano con le suggestioni un po’ sfacciate del...
fumetto o si affidano quasi esclusivamente al potenziamento dell’aspetto visivo attraverso la tecnica, la fascinazione nei confronti delle potenzialità ipertrofiche della realtà virtuale appare evidente.


Ammettiamo quindi, che le prove di questa flangia di registi e sceneggiatori impegnati con l’irrealtà intesa in senso lato, non siano esattamente rivoluzionarie, soprattutto sul piano dei
contenuti, e che le loro sperimentazioni tecniche rimangano, almeno in parte, fini a loro stesse; tuttavia meritano che si spezzi una lancia a loro favore perché rimettono in circolo una consapevolezza che ha alimentato tanta parte della letteratura degli ultimi due secoli: la necessità di ignorare, almeno a volte, la richiesta di spiegazioni che la realtà pone. Quello che in un fumetto è non solo possibile, ma addirittura plausibile, non potrebbe reggere nella realtà perché la realtà ha leggi, quelle fisiche che impediscono ad un individuo con il peso specifico di un culturista di volare leggiadro sopra ai tetti, e quelle sentimental che complicano le esistenze. Quello che un’elaborazione digitale permette, la realtà nega o demolisce. Quello che alla luce dei sogni è poetico svela nella sua volgarità se illuminato a giorno. È ancora una volta la lezione dei romantici che coltivano testardamente un approccio visionario alla vita, che rifiutano la realtà, la allontanano, la bollano come irreversibilmente mediocre e tentano di confinarla, di strapparle almeno un momento, quello della notte. È l’esperimento ancora un po’ impacciato o acerbo, del cinema di offrire una sospensione convessa alla monotonia e alla prevedibilità della logica e di tentare una comunicazione su un nuovo piano, quello delle tecnologi [4], con il mondo sconosciuto, indisciplinato da leggi e norme, dell’irrealtà.

Note
[2] Ibidem
'The Complete Saga': Southland Tales, Graphic Novels and the Challenges of Transmedia Production

by Gareth James

Imagined as an ‘epic, political cartoon,’ [1] Richard Kelly's 2006 feature *Southland Tales* explores a dystopian near-future Los Angeles, while connecting a dense mythology to diverse stylistic influences. The follow-up to Kelly's independent success *Donnie Darko* (2001), a near-three hour first cut however received almost universal criticism at the Cannes Festival in 2006. This led to studio negotiations, multiple re-edits and an eventual box office failure in 2007. An understanding of *Southland Tales'* ambition, extensive production problems and commercial failure can be linked to Kelly's attempt to produce a trans-media project, and the particular role of comic books. Using the film as a case study for the challenges of trans-media marketing and storytelling, it is possible to emphasize some of the ongoing tensions between creative ambition and commercial failure within contemporary industry trends.

The success of *Donnie Darko*, building word-of-mouth and a lucrative after-market on DVD for its inventive time travel narrative and assured style, associated Kelly with a wave of directors such as Christopher Nolan and Paul Thomas Anderson that moved from independent to major studio deals in the early 2000s. Having originally developed a screenplay before the release of Darko, Kelly undertook revisions after the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001, and looked towards financing for an increasingly ambitious project. With independent backing for a budget of approximately $15-17 million against expectations of selling the film on the festival circuit, pre-production and shooting progressed between 2004 and 2005.

Kelly's ambition emerged through an elaborate, more than two-hundred page screenplay mapping out a dense science-fiction world and pop culture allusions. Set in a near-future America hit by nuclear attacks, Southland focuses on a nation where government agency US-IDENT monitors internet traffic and citizens' rights. In Europe, a German company has developed ‘Fluid Karma,’ a new substance that promises to disrupt reality. Meanwhile, a Los Angeles neo-Marxist rebellion plots against the expanding powers of the US government. Within this, Boxer Santana (Dwayne Johnson), an action movie star experiencing amnesia, becomes involved in a media plot incorporating former porn star Krysta Now (Sarah Michelle Gellar), and apparent twin brothers
Roland and Ronald (Sean William Scott).
Kelly primarily cited influences from reality television, the internet and previous dystopian satires such as *Brazil* (Terry Gilliam 1985) and the work of Philip K. Dick, combining shadowy corporations with metaphysical comedy. Stylization through sequences paying homage to classic Hollywood musicals and music videos then led to Kelly defining the film as ‘pop art’ in its avant-garde style, while noting how ‘it’s political and it’s aggressive and it’s confrontational’. [2] In this way, *Southland Tales* represented an unusual hybrid, part art-film experiment, more accessible genre picture, and hoped-for cult hit for its backers.

For the latter, Kelly looked towards the marketing potential of prequel graphic novels to clarify his elaborate narrative and find a loyal audience, which would also be supported by a website. Cut down from nine to six parts,
Kelly secured independent distribution for three 100 page stories: *Two Roads Diverge* (May 2006), *Fingerprints* (Sep 2006) and *The Mechanicals* (Jan 2007). [3] Setting up the film as divided into three further segments (*Temptation Waits; Memory Gospel; Wave of Mutilation*), the prequels lay out the development of the US nuclear attacks, the neo-Marxist uprising, and the back-stories of the film’s lead characters. Efforts were also made to align the comics’ style to Kelly’s plans for *Southland Tales’* branding through a futuristic, pop-art-influenced range of influences.

The official website took a similar direction, offering interaction and story clues for users. Led by the front-page tagline ‘enter the Southland,’ the site was modeled after the fictional USIdent Corporation, and featured short films, documents, and links to the graphic novels and film trailers. [4] Promoting *Southland Tales* at Comic-Con, Kelly explained that the graphic novel series in particular offered ‘die-hard fans’ a better ‘understanding of the back-story leading up to the film’s release.’ [5] Adding that ‘if you want to have the six-part experience, it begins with the book and then continues into the film,’ Kelly’s confidence in the process can be viewed within trans-media marketing and production trends for the entertainment industry by the mid-2000s.

‘A Unified and Coordinated Entertainment Experience’: Transmedia and the Value of Comic Books

The relationship between comic books, graphic novels and film has been long and productive. While examples of trans-media, or adaptation and cross-promotion between different mediums
has a broad history, the term has more specifically been used in the past ten years as part of digital convergence and coordination of global brand identities across media platforms. Henry Jenkins has defined the latter as a ‘process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience’. [6] Jonathan D. Polk argues here that comic books’ history of dense fictional universes, serialized storytelling and the licensing of iconic characters to other mediums offer ‘rapid prototyping’ for film and television production. [7] From early radio and theatrical serials to the current box office success of Marvel and DC superhero franchises, the medium’s adaptation and exploitation of copyright has become an essential part of contemporary blockbuster and more niche marketing.

Adaptations from original film and television properties into comic books, from *The Matrix* (Andy Wachowski; Lana Wachowski, 1999) to *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010), *Heroes* (NBC, 2006-2010) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (FOX, UPN, 1996-2003) have also looked to the medium as a way of cross-promoting and extending their story-worlds. In this context, producers typically use comics and graphic novels to introduce characters, tell side-stories, and in the case of *Buffy*, officially continue plotlines from their television origins. The relatively low-cost of comic adaptations and marketing tie-ins has also produced more unique examples, with Avi Santo citing a deal between daytime soap opera *The Guiding Light* (CBS, 1952- ) and Marvel for special cross-promoted episodes and issues. [8]

Relatively low costs have also encouraged more specialist niche crossovers that use comic books and graphic novels as source and tie-in media, including underground series adaptations such as *Ghost World* (Terry Zwigoff 2001), *American Splendor* (Pulcini, Springer Berman 2003) and *Persepolis* (Vincent Paronnaud; Marjane Satrapi 2007). Moreover, director Kevin Smith has successfully translated a cult series of films (*Clerks* 1994; *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* 2001) into a branded line of comic books, merchandise and other spin-offs. Taken together, Kelly’s use of graphic novels to market and expand his original story-world into a trans-media experience seemed to provide a logical extension of the diverse experiments taken by both conglomerate brands and independent producers by the mid-2000s. However, and despite the significant attention paid by Kelly to building this potential, problems emerged by 2007 that highlight some of the conflicts between imagining and actually delivering a ‘unified and coordinated’ trans-media experience.
‘The biggest, ugliest mess I've ever seen’

This began with almost universally negative reviews of the first cut at the Cannes Festival in May 2006, with criticism focusing on the confused range of influences and plotting. Described by Roger Ebert as a ‘pitch session on speed’, Andrew O’Hehir attacked Southland as the ‘biggest, ugliest mess I’ve ever seen.’ Some reviewers were however more favorable, with The New York Times’ Manohla Dargis praising the film as a blast of conscience’ capable of pushing past ‘audience’s comfort zones.’ [9] These however remained in the minority, leading to pressure on Kelly to edit the film down to a more accessible length. With Samuel Goldwyn, Sony and Universal Pictures eventually acquiring domestic and foreign theatrical and ancillary rights, Kelly maintained that with the right marketing campaign it could ‘hopefully make a lot of money in the theaters.’ [10]

His confidence relied on emphasizing the graphic novels and trans-media experience as essential to this process, arguing that ‘I want to make sure that we can hold on to the complicated structure because it’s very, very thought-out. We spent years designing it, and I think upon first viewing it rushes over you and leaves you in a daze’. [11] Despite these hopes, Southland opened to 63 US theatres on November 1st 2007, and after a gradual domestic and partial international release, eventually grossed just $373,743 worldwide. [12] The film’s failure can arguably be linked to its difficulty in reconciling a trans-media and self-contained identity as a coherent narrative.

While praising the elaborate ways in which Southland complements its comic book prequels, Peter Sciretta has noted how ‘I frankly don’t understand how anyone would be able to understand the plot of this film without first reading them.’ [13] Others have suggested that audience demands for reading the 300 page graphic novel series before viewing the film created an ‘additional effort, rather than accompanying immersive experience.’ [14] This ‘additional effort’ has been a key issue for debates over the challenges for coordinating the different parts of a trans-media narrative. Henry Jenkins uses the shift by The Matrix franchise from inventively marketed initial release to a saturation of video games, comic books and animated series as a key case study for this problem, producing a narrative experience where ‘the sheer abundance of allusions makes it nearly impossible for any given consumer to master the franchise totally’. [15]
These challenges for narrative coherence and a strong commercial identity might be attributed to several factors. Saito has argued that comic book franchises employing trans-media storytelling benefit from being ‘already part of major conglomerates,’ [16] making them more easily comprehensible across different platforms. More independent franchised worlds, including Kevin Smith’s Askewniverse comics and tie-ins, also emerged from established films, rather than being produced alongside or as a prequel to them. For the latter, Southland Tales’ problems arguably reflected pragmatic issues over second-guessing a transmedia experience without the backbone of a strongly realized feature film. By attempting to build a franchise from the ground-up, Kelly arguably lost sight of the film’s own self-contained narrative accessibility, admitting that the process pushed him to the ‘edge of my sanity’ and ‘almost killed me.’

Despite this, Southland Tales remains a useful case study for innovative trans-media marketing and storytelling. Recent discussions of the film cite its ambition as a complex narrative and example of digital authorship, [17] with Steven Shaviro praising its ‘hallucinatory displacement’ and ‘fractal patterning’ as engaging with multi-platform subjectivity and interactivity. [18] With a DVD release in 2008, and subsequent distribution online, Kelly has also encouraged audiences to engage with the graphic novel prequels in order to ‘rediscover the movie.’ [19] This has more recently extended to plans to produce animated versions of the graphic novels, with Kelly reflecting on how

‘I still want to figure out a way to tell the entire Southland Tales story over six chapters because I think it would make a lot more sense to people and I think people would reassess the entire film and what it is’ [20]

Whether this will occur might however depend on Kelly’s further commercial and critical slide with 2010 science-fiction drama The Box, confirming for some critics a suspicion of the director’s fluke success with Donnie Darko. [21]

‘...it’s nice to be able to have some companion media sometimes’

Southland Tales might ultimately represent a cautionary example of the ambition and difficulties of producing a graphic-novel enhanced trans-media narrative. Unable to reconcile it’s the latter’s multi-platform strategy with accessible storytelling, its meager returns arguably demonstrate the low strike-rate and coordination problems of originally-produced properties. With the most
durable successes drawing on well-established comic book brands, or extending older media properties such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer, more self-contained future projects might find more impact with complementary, rather than narrative-building extensions. A useful comparison here might be Darren Aronofsky’s problems with The Fountain (2006).

Another ambitious, metaphysically-oriented film that suffered budget cuts in production, Aronofsky chose to spin-off an earlier version of the film’s screenplay into a stand-alone graphic novel adaptation. Providing an alternative perspective on the film’s development, and a self-contained tie-in, Arofnosky's solution ultimately bypassed the risk associated with attempting to substitute a complex narrative design by segmenting the final film into prequel installments. As Kelly ruefully noted in 2011, while ‘it’s nice to have some companion media sometimes,’ [22] whether this can compensate for clear storytelling remains questionable.

Notes
[19] Richard Kelly qtd Gandert
Bios

Dr. Gareth James received his PhD from the University of Exeter in 2011. His thesis explored the history of HBO as a subscription network. He has previously published on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and American independent cinema, and has presented papers on various aspects of HBO. He is currently working on future book chapters and papers on *Torchwood*, *Glee* and Clive Barker.
True to The Spirit? Film, Comics, and the Problem of Adaptation
di Federico Pagello

During the last decade, film adaptations of comic books and graphic novels have received increasing attention from the industry, the public, and the critics, as proved by the large number of scholarly essays and anthologies devoted to the subject. However, the field of adaptation studies, which in the same period became one of the liveliest within film studies, has scarcely taken this phenomenon into account. Focusing on Frank Miller’s underrated debut as a director, I will try to draw from the ongoing debate on adaptation some analytical tools useful to discuss the process of translating comics into film.

Critical reception

The Spirit was not only a commercial flop at the box office, but also a total failure according to the critics and most of its spectators. Looking for this movie on the Internet, one finds out that it got a discouraging 4.9 score on the Internet Movie Database, a disastrous 30% on Metacritic, and a catastrophic 15% on Rotten Tomatoes.

Summing up the general opinion of its contributors, Rotten Tomatoes’ final judgment is that ‘[t]hough its visuals are unique, The Spirit’s plot is almost incomprehensible, the dialogue is ludicrously mannered, and the characters are unmemorable.’ The common opinion, indeed, was that the film was simply not cinematic enough. Other exemplary comments (which can be found on the same website) accord with this view: ‘Miller shoots it in the inky graphic style of Sin City, but he clearly hasn’t a clue how to stage a scene, or shoot it, and he singly fails to animate his actors’ (Times). Comparisons to other comic book adaptations are also common and particularly revealing: ‘If this summer’s The Dark Knight raised the bar for seriousness, ambition and dramatic realism in the comic book-based superhero genre, The Spirit reps its antithesis: relentlessly cartoonish and campy, it’s a work of pure digital artifice, feverishly committed to its own beautiful, hollow universe to the exclusion of any real narrative interest or engagement with its characters’ (Variety). Contrary to most Hollywood adaptations, The Spirit in fact approaches comics through their specific language. It builds an uneven narrative structure, incompatible not only with
Hollywood’s dramatic realism, but also with ‘faithful’ adaptations, and its visual look intentionally makes it neither trendy nor nostalgic.

**Comics Adaptation in Theory**

As we have seen, the critics (but also the public) deplored Miller’s inability to translate the comic book aesthetic into a cinematic language, which is regarded as more ‘narrative,’ ‘dramatic,’ ‘serious,’ ‘realistic,’ or even simply ‘human’ than that of comics. In terms of adaptation theory, these opinions relate to implicit assumptions about cinema’s specificity: the reviewers reproached Miller for not having tried to rework the source text to make it more coherent with what they think cinema has to be. The adaptation should not reveal itself as being an adaptation, it is supposed to hide its origin and ‘camouflage’ itself as ‘pure cinema.’

However, this idea has been frequently challenged by contemporary theorists working on adaptation. Robert Stam denies all negative assumptions about adaptation based on notions such as fidelity or medium specificity. Stam sees adaptations as a perfect example of Gérard Genette’s ‘hypertexts,’ that is, works ‘transforming, modifying, elaborating, or extending’ an anterior text ‘by operations of selection, amplification, concretization, and actualization.’

Furthermore, Stam looks at cinema as a ‘composite language by virtue of its diverse matters of expressions, able to use the visuals of photography and painting, the movement of dance, the decor of architecture, the harmonies of music, and the performance of theater. Adaptation, in this sense, creates an active weave, a relation tissue wrought from these various strands. Perhaps the relation between source text and adaptation is less like that between original and copy than that between the sounds and styles and verbal snippets that are *sampled* in a rap CD’ (Stam 2000, p. 23). Miller’s reworking of Eisner’s series and the comics language reflects this *sampling* process: even if it may contradict reductive ideas about the potentialities of cinema, it proves that Hollywood pseudo-realism is not the only way to make films.

To better understand which kind of adaptation *The Spirit* is, it may be useful to look also at Dudley Andrew’s concepts of ‘borrowing,’ ‘fidelity of transformation,’ and ‘intersecting’ (1984). Most comic book adaptations belong to the first category, in which ‘the artist employs, more or less extensively, the material, idea, or form of an earlier, generally successful text’ (1984, p. 98). These adaptations take from their sources only some elements (such as the characters, the
narrative, etc.) and organize them as any other film does, without problematizing the adaptation process. The *mise en scènes* of films like Bryan Singer’s *X-Men* (2000) and *Superman Returns* (2006) as well as Christopher Nolan’s *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) adopt visual and narrative codes coherent with (if not actually taken from) other movie genres such as the action movie, the noir or the gangster movie, the science-fiction film, or simply the digital-SFX-summer-blockbuster.

With ‘fidelity of transformation,’ Andrew refers to films trying to strictly respect ‘the letter’ or ‘the spirit’ of their sources (whatever this may mean, or whether or not this is really possible) (1984, p. 100). Dealing with literary or theatrical sources, these films, Andrew states, tend to treat the original sources as ready-made screenplays, reducing their visual dimension to a mere illustration of the written text. In any case, this approach is not really common in comics adaptations. The main obstacle here is the visual nature of comics: to be strictly faithful to a comic source would necessarily imply to be faithful also to its visual style, from the appearance of characters, objects, and places to the composition of the panels, their shape, and their placement on the page. Robert Rodriguez’s *Sin City* is undoubtedly the most coherent attempt so far at transferring a graphic novel into film, introducing the smallest number of changes possible. Even in this case, though, the result is not far from Andrew’s diagnosis: in some respects, *Sin City* paradoxically ends up being more conventionally ‘cinematic’ than other, less zealously ‘faithful’ adaptations.

Andrew’s third category, that of ‘intersecting,’ defines those films in which ‘the uniqueness of the original text is preserved to such an extent that it is deliberately left unassimilated in adaptation’ (1984, p. 99). In these cases, filmmakers do not try to hide their source text or to ignore the differences between cinema and the language in which that work was first created. On the contrary, ‘they present the otherness and distinctiveness of the original text, initiating a dialectical interplay between the aesthetic forms of one period with the cinematic form of our own period. (...) Such intersecting insists that the analyst attend to the *specificity* of the original within the *specificity* of the cinema. An original is allowed its life, its own life, in the cinema’ (1984, p. 100). In my opinion, this is exactly what Miller is doing in *The Spirit*, not only as far as the relation between film and comics is concerned, but also with respect to the relation between his personal poetics and that of Eisner.

Both Stam’s and Andrew’s approaches are rooted in André Bazin’s groundbreaking reflections
on adaptation theory and practice. In his celebrated essay ‘In Defense of Mixed Cinema,’ Bazin proposed the notion of ‘impure’ (or mixed) cinema to reject the critical dismissal of literary and theatrical adaptations and to defend those directors who developed their films in close bond with their sources. According to Bazin, cinema should claim no aesthetic specificity; it may even claim no artistic status at all, if this can increase its expressive possibilities. For Bazin, this lack of a stable identity is not a weakness, but rather a direct consequence of cinema’s unrivalled modernity. As early as 1948, Bazin had thus stated that critics should analyze a novel and its theatrical and cinematographic adaptations as ‘a single work reflected through three art forms, an artistic pyramid with three sides, all equal in the eyes of the critic. The “work” would then be only an ideal point at the top of this figure, which itself is an ideal construct’ (Bazin 1999, p. 26). Following this reasoning, we may argue that Eisner’s and Miller’s Spirits should not be juxtaposed but considered parts of a larger text, because there is no ‘authentic’ source against which we are supposed to judge the other one, and because the relation between the two (their similarities as well as their differences) is a characteristic of this ‘ideal construct.’

Bazin’s notion of cinema as an impure art can be used also to talk about comics. Apart from their fundamental mixture of words and pictures, comics have absorbed all kinds of influences, from cartoons and illustration to literature and painting, from circus and theatre to advertising and journalism. Of course, cinema was one, and actually the principal, influence on comics. The Spirit made no exception; quite on the contrary, it has always been regarded as one of the most cinematic comic books ever made. From a formal point of view, Eisner’s series is indeed a totally ‘impure’ work, mixing comics, film, literature, and also theatre (especially vaudeville). Compared to other comics such as Chester Gould’s Dick Tracy or Milton Caniff’s Terry and the Pirates, Eisner’s Spirit seemed to appropriate elements of film genres and language, without trying to transform them into ‘pure’ comics (as it happens with Dick Tracy) or to imitate closely the film language (as does Terry and the Pirates). In Bazin’s and Andrew’s words, The Spirit presented the specificity of cinema within the specificity of comics.

Furthermore, Eisner’s series constantly mingled the superhero genre with noir, comedy, adventure, as well as more realistic or dramatic pieces. Highly self-reflexive, The Spirit comics series was a potpourri of multiple allusions, and it alternated – in different stories but also within a single issue – contrasting registers. Miller’s adaptation, consequently, would have been totally ‘unfaithful’ to the ‘letter’ and the ‘spirit’ of its source, if he had chosen a single genre,
trying to make it as homogeneous as a classical movie. Its uneven narrative structure and its ‘campy’ elements so lamented by critics are thus actually coherent with its source. Furthermore, they are not so uneven and so campy as they may seem at first glance. They look so if compared to standard Hollywood features, including comic book adaptations.

Eisner/Miller

It is absolutely true that Miller superimposes his own vision on that of Eisner. Something of *Sin City*'s look and technique is certainly present in the film but much less than it may appear. Rather, we witness a fusion of Miller’s and Eisner’s styles and imageries, and the result is far from being a *Sin City* revision of the original series. The above-mentioned camp quality of the movie, for instance, was totally absent from *Sin City*, because it represents Miller's rereading of the comedy features of Eisner's work. Some iconographic details are also coherent with this approach. For instance, while Spirit’s costume is blue in the 1940s series, it turns black (with a red necktie) in the movie; while this is certainly coherent with Miller’s darker visual style, it does not affect in any measure the film’s overall tone: Spirit remains a lighthearted hero, unlike Miller’s typical characters, from Daredevil to Batman and from Marv to Leonida.

The most interesting way to discuss the film, however, is probably by analyzing the way in which it adapts the crucial elements of Eisner’s series as a sort of commentary on the entire superhero genre – a genre to which, paradoxically, the original *Spirit* did not really belong. The four *topoi* that I will consider are the hero, the villain, the woman, and the city. All of them are necessary elements of every superhero story. Let us start with the first.

In Miller’s film, Spirit comes back from the dead thanks to the villain’s magical intervention, thus becoming invulnerable. In Eisner’s series, on the contrary, he only pretended to be dead. Nevertheless, in the original comic book, Spirit was not a completely realistic or rounded character either. As critics have always remarked, he often ended up playing more the role of an external narrator than that of the main character. Furthermore, Eisner did not really want to write a superhero saga. The creation of the Spirit was indeed a pure, commercial compromise: in order to be offered the possibility of having his comics printed in newspapers for an adult audience, Eisner accepted the publisher’s request to create a ‘costumed hero.’ We may argue therefore that Spirit was first and foremost a purely narrative device. In fact, this is what Miller
makes of him in the movie: both human and not human, a mythological entity but also the hero of a secular age, Miller’s Spirit is the idea itself of the superhero, an explicit commentary on the genre. Just as in the comics, the character should attract the reader but does not try to provoke a real identification with him: the Spirit represents narration itself, or the narrator, that is, Eisner and Miller. For both, the hero is primarily the tool with which they can tell their stories.

Miller’s villain is equally abstract. Octopus is designed to symbolize a purely nihilist will of power and sadism as opposed to the hero’s unequivocal positive qualities. While Spirit is a creature between life and death, the villain is described as obsessed by the desire of becoming immortal, that is, by his straightforward refusal to die. Here again Miller’s movie only seemingly departs from Eisner. Even if the original series rarely staged such purified superhuman figures – while the movie emphasizes some of its elements, according to Miller’s personal poetics – the ethical perspective of the original comics is preserved exactly through this idea. Octopus’ denial of death is revealed as a nihilist desire of total control and a killer instinct, whereas Spirit represents the embodiment of human finiteness, his adventures dealing with the inextricable mixture of life and death, love and loneliness, pleasure and melancholia that attracted Eisner.

The (image of the) woman is crucial in both the comic and the movie. Here once again we are faced with an abstract representation, which has to be juxtaposed with that of the hero to become meaningful. Depicted as projections of Spirit’s (and Miller’s) desire, always sexy and potentially in love with him, women actually remain totally unreachable. The impossibility of having a romantic or even a sexual life for traditional superheroes is well-known. If Miller, as usual, exaggerates the traditional male teenage vision of the female body to be found in superhero comics as well as the supposed misogyny of film noir, it is above all the hybrid nature of the Spirit that explains his choices in the film. The real reason for the hero’s loneliness is his total involvement in the heroic mission, which one of the female characters openly describes as ‘his job.’ In fact, Spirit is dead to society, because he has sacrificed his private life to his mission. While Octopus, being virtually already dead because of his nihilist attitude, looks totally asexual, Spirit is deeply involved with women, but he is condemned to remain ‘sterile,’ being neither dead nor alive. This is true for all traditional superheroes, Eisner’s ‘fake’ superhero included.

Finally, the city proves to be once again the most important aesthetic and symbolical source of inspiration for the superhero, as for the noir genre in general, within which both Eisner and Miller were working. The character and the narrative seem to be little more than conduits of the
authors’ love for the big city. Even if using completely different styles, both authors devoted most of their works to the description of the American city, and especially New York. In the movie’s blog, in interviews, as well as in the DVD commentary, Miller declared indeed that he considered this movie a ‘love letter to New York City,’ (2008) because this love was something that he and Eisner had in common [1]. But there is more. While Spirit opposes himself to Octopus, as obsessed with death, and to his women, as part of the life from which he is excluded, he and the city are totally superimposed. Spirit is the city, and vice versa. The city, in fact, is as hybrid as the hero. It is partly alive and partly dead. It is the subject and the object of desire. It perpetually ages but will never die. It can love and be loved by its inhabitants, but it cannot really be someone’s lover.

This is why the hero can have a real relationship only with the city. In the movie, Spirit himself openly admits it in one of his monologues: ‘My city. She’s always there for me. Every lonely night, she’s there for me. She’s not some tarted-up fraud all dressed up like a piece of jailbait. No, she’s an old city, old and proud of her every pock, and crack and wrinkle. She’s my sweetheart, my plaything. She doesn’t hide what she is, what she’s made of: sweat, muscles and blood of generations.’ This is also exactly what the film is supposed to be: a recreation of Eisner’s series by a different author in another medium and another period, without trying to fill the gaps between them. It is an elegy for a 1940s comic book in a hyper-contemporary digital movie; a real superhero film based on a ‘fake’ superhero comics series; the story of a character who is a mythical hero and a funny figure at the same time, who has all women and none, who is neither dead nor alive. Just like comics, and cinema, and the city, which are the hybrid, mixed, impure spaces where these paradoxes can take place.

**End Note**


**Works Cited**


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**Bio**

Federico Pagello received his PhD in Film Studies from the University of Bologna. He is currently a post-doc researcher at the University of Limoges, France. His dissertation was published under the title *Grattacieli e superuomini. L’immagine della metropoli tra cinema e fumetto* (*Skyscrapers and Supermen: The Image of the City in Film and Comics*, Genova: Le Mani, 2011). He has edited the exhibition catalogue *EPOP: Popular Roots of European Culture 1850-1930* (Pescara, Italy 2010).
Ci piacciono le storie. Su questo non c'è nessun dubbio. Questo assunto può apparire banale, ma non è inutile ricordare da dove parte la fioritura multiforme del modo di narrare di cui siamo entusiasti testimoni ai nostri tempi. Che noi si stia seduti a gambe incrociate a pendere dalle labbra di un aedo che ci racconta le sconvolgenti e fantasiose peripezie di Ulisse o che si stia sprofondati in poltrone hi-tech a camminare per i vicoli tortuosi e saturi di pericolo di una strada virtuale che ci promette mille avventure virtuali in un mondo virtuale (stile Caprica intendo), quello che ci spinge è sempre provare emozioni per qualcosa che proviene da fuori di noi senza il rischio di un reale coinvolgimento, per immergerci nella vita di qualcun altro senza danno, per ricavarci, alla fine, magari, una maggiore conoscenza di noi stessi e del mondo.

Dal Fumetto Alla Televisione

C'era una volta il fumetto...

Detto questo, forse sarebbe il caso di sorvolare in questa sede sulla controversa separazione fra letteratura alta e letteratura popolare; eppure c'è una definizione di “fumetto” che si presta a qualche riflessione utile a questo proposito, quella di Scott McCloud, autore del volume Capire il Fumetto - L'arte invisibile, saggio scientifico sul fumetto [1] realizzato interamente a fumetti: «Immagini e altre figure giustapposte in una deliberata sequenza, con lo scopo di comunicare informazioni e/o produrre una reazione estetica nel lettore». Leggendo questa definizione può venire anche in mente un'altra sequenza di immagini, ben più antica e su un supporto decisamente più solido, cioè la storia di San Francesco narrata dagli affreschi di Giotto sui muri della Basilica di Assisi; o, se è per questo, molti altri cicli pittorici e scultorei di tutta l’antichità e del Medioevo che avevano lo scopo di raccontare storie importanti per qualche ragione a persone che potevano anche non saper leggere.

E allora sì, letteratura popolare. E già che ci siamo, cosa ci impedisce di scomodare, con voluta impertinenza, altre manifestazioni artistiche basilari della storia della civiltà occidentale, come il teatro greco, che, prima di diventare letteratura, aveva lo scopo molto concreto di canalizzare messaggi densi di intenti didascalici ai cittadini delle poleis per portarli al pensiero del ceto
dirigente, che quegli spettacoli anche a questo fine finanziava? [2]
Prima che il messaggio, per l’incisività del contenuto e per la bellezza della forma, diventi arte e letteratura, c’è una necessità di comunicazione che usa la scrittura e/o l’immagine per giungere ai destinatari. La semplicità o la complessità del messaggio attengono a un’altra storia che non può essere trattata qui; ma dissertare di cinema, di televisione e di fumetto implica in generale contenuti non troppo elitari.

Letteratura popolare?
Torniamo dunque a parlare di letteratura popolare, intendendo ora, in questo contesto, quella che, dopo la rivoluzione della stampa nel Cinquecento e l’allargamento della borghesia, rispose al bisogno immediato e apparentemente poco riflesso di tali classi genericamente definite borghesi che, nel corso dell’Ottocento, maturarono un bisogno di cultura immediatamente fruibile, che non si dovesse insomma decodificare da strofe in endecasillabi. Ecco quindi che ci troviamo, senza nemmeno accorgercene, a leggere, puntata dopo puntata, le vicende dei nostri eroi preferiti nel nostro romanzo d’appendice e poco importa a questo punto che sia Dostoevskij o Liala che ci stregano dalla carta stampata della nostra rivista, a guardarci la nostra bande dessinée, o comics o fumetto che dir si voglia, attendendo con ansia la prossima razione settimanale. A questo punto della vicenda appassionante del nostro congenito amore per le storie, non è troppo cambiato il nostro ruolo di fruitori paganti: dovremmo retribuire l’aedo alla fine della sua performance, acquistare il nostro libro, comprare la rivista che vende pubblicità grazie alla nostra passione o corrispondere la quota mensile dell’abbonamento a Sky o ad altri.

Le sfumature della serialità
Soffermiamoci allora sui legami che, traendo origine dalla serialità del feuilleton, collegano il fumetto alla serie televisiva con fermate intermedie e ricorrenti per il cinema.
Questo il fenomeno in questione: la reciproca influenza che questi media hanno esercitato ed esercitano gli uni sugli altri proprio sull’onda delle mode cui noi lettori/spettatori diamo origine.
Qui si vorrebbe avanzare alcune ipotesi a partire da alcuni casi specifici che possono essere significativi di tale influenza.
Focalizziamo la nostra attenzione sul fumetto: nato all’inizio dell’Ottocento, soprattutto per una fascia adulta di lettori, trova nel Novecento la sua vocazione: quella di narrare ad adolescenti, e a
chi adolescente non voleva smettere di sentirsì, avventure mirabolanti di eroi senza macchia e senza paura che, soprattutto nel primo dopoguerra, rispondevano al bisogno di rassicurazione delle masse. Capitan America della Marvel, Superman della DC Comics e via così. Le avventure erano autoconclusive, nel senso che, rispondendo alle elementari norme della narratologia, in base allo schema di Propp, c’è un “equilibrio iniziale (inizio)”, una “rottura dell’equilibrio iniziale (movente o complicazione), le “peripezie dell’eroe”, e alla fine, il “ristabilimento dell’equilibrio (conclusione)”. Sostanzialmente ci si immedesima nei problemi del protagonista e quando lui, usando forze che pure noi vorremmo avere, finalmente ne viene a capo, noi possiamo finalmente tirare quel sospiro di sollievo che è il fine di tutto. Quindi fumetto vuol dire genere di consumo. Dagli anni Settanta i fumetti hanno cominciato a cambiare. Accenno solo di sfuggita a qualcosa che ha già fatto scrivere saggi in merito e che altri ne necessiterebbe: la svolta che Chris Claremont nel 1975 diede alla testata marveliana degli X-Men. I personaggi, nelle mani di questo apprezzato autore, diventarono a tutto tondo, le loro storie coralì acquistarono un percorso diacronico trascendendo e toccando livelli di approfondimento esistenziale che coinvolsero sempre più una fascia giovanile più alta e più matura. Le trame dunque non si svolsero più in una puntata, o in una manciata di puntate, ma si dipanarono nel corso di anni, ottenendo l’effetto di fidelizzare un gran numero di lettori. Il fumetto, per certi fenomeni e certe testate, tornò agli adulti da cui parecchio tempo prima era partito. Nello stesso tempo non mancava il villain di turno e la vicenda dell’albo e quella del mese o dell’annata convivevano armonicamente. Claremont lavorò con Dave Cockrum e John Byrne e la “Saga di Fenice nera” è forse una delle storie più celebri delle serie. E di serie appunto qui è il caso di parlare; al di là del fatto, noto a tutti, che dalla Saga di fenice nera è stato tratto il film X-Men - Conflitto finale (X-Men: The Last Stand) del 2006 diretto da Brett Ratner. Il punto da focalizzare è proprio invece il fenomeno della serialità. Da quel momento in poi i telefilm hanno cominciato a seguire la stessa strada. Non più o non solo sit-comedy che lasciavano il protagonista allo stesso punto da dove era stato preso. In precedenza i personaggi rimanevano cristallizzati nei loro tratti fondamentali, fissi a volte in una caratterizzazione da macchietta che garantiva allo spettatore di trovare quello che si aspettava di trovare, senza complicazioni, in modo rassicurante. Morticia Addams riscuoteva l’effetto voluto, proprio nella sua placida coerenza al proprio sistema morale ed estetico alternativo, che, per la legge del contrario, suscitava ilarità. Non ci si aspettava che cambiasse. Un po’ come una
maschera del teatro dell’arte: non ci si può aspettare da Arlecchino niente al di là di quello che è solito dare. Eppure Goldoni nel Settecento di lì è partito per ampliare, approfondire e rendere più umani i personaggi. In modo simile la psicologia dei protagonisti e comprimari dei fumetti e poi delle serie ha cominciato ad acquistare rilievo e quindi profondità, soprattutto grazie alla possibilità del tempo lungo.

In televisione quindi nel frattempo lo svolgimento seriale ha cominciato a “schiavizzare” lo spettatore, ma a livelli diversi; è ovvio che si può citare Beautiful, ma si può anche osannare gli X-Files che, come sappiamo, hanno prodotto fan in ogni parte del mondo e creato un nuovo modo di fare telefilm (come li chiamiamo in Italia). Il fascino della storia risiedeva proprio nel fatto di poter esplorare, lentamente e gradualmente, le profondità psicologiche del personaggio, di poter scoprire, attraverso magari flashback, i motivi reconditi dei suoi comportamenti, e soprattutto di poter assistere e condividere i mutamenti e le evoluzioni della sua personalità, la sua crescita umana. Il tempo lungo rendeva possibile ciò.

Che si può aggiungere a quanto di autorevole è stato già detto? Nulla. Si vuole solo umilmente sottolineare che l’evoluzione narrativa e la crescita personale ed esistenziale di Shadowcat, adorabile personaggio degli X-Men, e la lenta mutazione di Scully, dall’inizio alla fine delle nove annate di X-Files da scettica scientista a razionale credente (l’ossimoro è solo apparente), sono associative, e non solo dalla X. I mutamenti, quelli che ci fanno soffrire nella realtà, mediante l’arte sapiente di una sceneggiatura autoriale, non lasciano i personaggi allo stesso punto di quando sono partiti.

**Avventure a lungo termine**

Nel frattempo nel 1987, l’Uomo Ragno, nei fumetti, si è anche sposato, dando addio per un po’ all’eterna dinamica di fidanzamento perpetuo stile Topolino e Minnie di molte coppie fisse della carta stampata e della fiction televisiva. Non si cita a caso lui fra i supereroi, infatti l’Uomo Ragno, nato intorno al 1962, raggiunge proprio dagli anni Settanta la massima diffusione e sembra essere il primo supereroe che interessa i lettori anche per le proprie vicende familiari e personali, per l’intimo dissidio fra la vita normale del timido Peter Parker e le avventure a difesa dell’umanità dell’”amichevole Uomo Ragno di quartiere”. “Da un grande potere derivano grandi responsabilità” e via con i dilemmi morali e i problemi quotidiani che avvicinano l’eroe al lettore.

Nel frattempo più o meno in quegli anni la serie Moonlighting (1985-1989) vede Bruce Willis e
Cybill Sheperd nei panni di due improbabili detective porre fine alla “tensione sessuale irrisolta” mettendosi insieme e dimostrando quanto proprio quella tensione calamiti l’attenzione degli spettatori. Infatti gli ascolti della serie calarono da quel momento. Da allora gli sceneggiatori delle varie serie con coppie fra i protagonisti hanno dovuto cominciare a fare i salti mortali per non far cadere gli ascolti, tipo le otto stagioni prima che Mulder e Scully portassero a conclusione il percorso di reciproco avvicinamento e riconoscessero l’importanza sentimentale del loro rapporto nella serie scatenando così il planetario sospiro di sollievo che ne è derivato.

Anche recentemente i rapporti fra i protagonisti più che le trame verticali del singolo episodio sono oggetto di gradimento da parte degli spettatori, e non solo rapporti di coppia, ma le dinamiche fra fratelli (Supernatural, The Vampire Diaries) o fra genitori e figli (Fringe). Tutti processi che hanno nella durata e nella lenta evoluzione il loro segreto e che consentono agli attori impegni e soddisfazioni professionali forse maggiori che nel passato, tanto che star del grande schermo approdano con soddisfazione alle serie. Gli sceneggiatori poi non sono più degli sconosciuti, noti solo agli addetti ai lavori, ma diventano famosi al grande pubblico, quelli almeno capaci di dare impronte originali e profonde ai personaggi, ai rapporti, alle trame, alle serie insomma, riconosciute a naso dai fan, che tributano onore al merito del tocco autoriale.

**Romanzi di formazione?**

I personaggi che amiamo e seguiamo puntata dopo puntata, anche più di quelli che pur ci conquistano dalle trame necessariamente sincopate dei film, che quindi subiscono perdite, sconvolgimenti emotivi, che crescono, osano e si rifugiano nelle regressioni, e spesso, contrariamente al passato, muoiono a volte, sono allora forse figli dei romanzi di formazione, intendendo con questo termine però non strettamente i romanzi tedeschi della fine del Settecento e inizio Ottocento, ma tutte quelle storie che dall’Asino d’oro di Apuleio, attraverso la maratona ultraterrena di Dante Alighieri [3] fino alla Recherche e oltre ci hanno proposto percorsi di cambiamento che potevamo scegliere di intraprendere o no. Liberi sempre. E sempre, nella lettura, a vari livelli, in rapporto con l’altro, con il personaggio preferito. L’autorialità e una progettazione di largo respiro delle storie resa possibile dal tempo della serialità ha spesso dato spazio agli autori per usare i propri vissuti culturali, per osare mischiare generi e livelli con citazioni “colte” in riferimento alla cultura più o meno popolare.
**TV colta o cult TV**

E qui menzionare Joss Whedon è d’obbligo. Non solo per la densità di tali riferimenti, ma anche per il percorso evolutivo della personalità della famosa “cacciatrice di vampiri” e della sua inusuale famiglia. Come esempio si può ricordare, fra numerosi altri, l’episodio numero quattro della terza serie di *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) *Beauty and the Beasts*, quando ben tre dei personaggi devono confrontarsi con la parte selvaggia di sé: Oz, che tre giorni al mese con la luna piena diventa un licantropo, Angel che, tornato dall’inferno, sembra aver perso la sua personalità cedendo alla regredita ferocia di chi è stato costretto a subire torture per tempo immemore, e Pete, compagno di scuola di Buffy e company, che assume una mistura chimica nell’intento di divenire più macho agli occhi di Debbie, la sua fidanzata. Tutti fronteggiano la propria parte oscura e il riferimento, per l’ultimo personaggio soprattutto, a *Lo strano caso del dottor Jekyll e del signor Hyde* di Robert Louis Stevenson è chiarissimo. Il contesto poi è ricco, la tesi non è per così dire uni-lineare in quanto l’intento è dimostrare come

1. Oz il licantropo, il primo ad essere accusato delle uccisioni che mettono il gruppo in agitazione, è innocente: come a dire che la vicinanza alla propria parte ferina non è sempre un male,

2. che Angel, quello apparentemente regredito allo stato bestiale, può riprendere coscienza di sé, infatti salva Buffy e la riconosce: come a dimostrare che l’amore può cambiarti in positivo, che è sempre una questione di libero arbitrio e che c’è sempre una speranza,

3. e che, infine, Pete, lo studente che assumeva una pozione per potenziarsi ed essere più degno della sua ragazza, credeva di usare la scienza e di poter controllare la situazione e invece cade vittima della propria arroganza: proprio a confermare la lezione stevensoniana sulla ambivalenza fra la parte brutalmente istintiva e la parte morale e controllata dell’uomo e sulla hybris di chi usa la scienza senza rispettare i giusti limiti.

In un altro esempio magistrale tratto sempre da *Buffy*, nella quarta stagione, in cui la cacciatrice va all’università, le categorie freudiane di io, es e super-io vengono citate e usate come chiave di lettura delle crisi e dei percorsi dei personaggi.

Il modo come Joss Whedon ha costruito il dipanarsi delle esistenze dei membri della Scooby Gang
è stato anche usato da terapeuti ed insegnanti per esemplificare i passaggi dei momenti della crescita.
E infatti c’è chi è cresciuto con *Buffy e X-Files*, mentre queste serie, in quanto pietre miliari della storia della televisione, hanno cambiato la storia dei telefilm, spingendo gli autori a concepire prodotti sempre più intriganti e complessi.

**Dalla fiction televisiva alla fiction letteraria**
Qualche parola deve necessariamente essere spesa per ricordare anche come i tempi di certe serie, stringati ma ricchi di azione e di dinamiche narrative complesse, abbiano influenzato una buona parte della letteratura minore, (e quindi alla lunga anche l’altra magari), lo confermano gli scrittori di fantasy, di urban fantasy e di altri generi correlati, che affermano di tener presente proprio serie televisive come *Buffy o Supernatural* nello scrivere i loro romanzi, apprendendo la lezione dei tempi sincopati e dei dialoghi veloci dei telefilm, ma anche dell’ironia fulminante e della capacità di sdrammatizzare dei nostri eroi che sparano battute stendendo gli avversari con le loro mosse letali estratte e miscelate da arti marziali varie. Ecco un altro aspetto in cui Buffy e l’Uomo Ragno potrebbero risultare parenti

**Da Fumetto e Tv al Cinema**

**Dalla serie televisiva al cinema**


**Dalla serie televisiva al fumetto**


Nel caso di Buffy, lo stesso Joss Whedon, che aveva anche scritto sceneggiature per gli X-Men della Marvel e quindi aveva dimestichezza nell’ambiente, ha visto nel fumetto la possibilità di portare le avventure della Cacciatrice verso scenari potenzialmente illimitati senza limite di costi per gli effetti speciali e altre necessità con cui i budget non eccelsi della serie, finché era in svolgimento, avevano sempre dovuto combattere. Così la storia è potuta continuare e i fan, almeno parzialmente, hanno potuto consolarsi della notevole perdita.

**Dal fumetto al cinema**

Ora invece guardiamo il fenomeno macroscopico, quello che ha portato i personaggi del fumetto felicemente al cinema. L’elenco è facile e difficile al tempo stesso, perché questi film sono rimasti nell’immaginario e perché sono veramente tanti.

Flash Gordon, Dick Tracy, Superman, persino Asterix, e le creature della Marvel: L’Uomo Ragno, I Fantastici Quattro, Devil, Hulk, Iron Man, gli Avengers (I Vendicatori) che cominciano a essere girati proprio in questi giorni, Thor, che è al cinema mentre leggiamo. È’ facile ormai raccontare le
storie di esseri “superumani” con gli effetti speciali incredibili di quella tecnologia che ha creato anche un film come Avatar (2009), e che sicuramente non si fermerà qui. E’ entusiasmante creare una realtà dal nulla, ma, del resto, non lo faceva anche Georges Méliès agli albori della cinematografia? La domanda sul perché così tanti personaggi dei fumetti diventino protagonisti di film al cinema non si esaurisce con il fatto, pur fondamentale, della possibilità e della relativa facilità degli effetti speciali. In fondo la locomotiva che sembrava precipitarsi sugli spettatori delle prime proiezioni cinematografiche ai tempi dei fratelli Lumière voleva scuotere, stupire e sconvolgere gli astanti: era il primo effetto speciale.

Torniamo però un po’ indietro a quanto detto prima sulla funzione di certi personaggi come Flash Gordon o Capitan America in un periodo come quello fra le due guerre del Novecento in cui le persone avevano bisogno di rassicurazioni. All’epoca emergeva l’esigenza di figure forti, patriottiche, fonti di certezze, paladini senza paura, sintomatico era proprio lo scudo, il simbolo di Capitan America. E quello che si vuole suggerire è proprio che sia il valore simbolico il motivo di questo successo.

Il cinema porta alla ribalta le storie dei fumetti, perché forniscono simboli immediati, coniugati in un sistema semplice. Attraverso i personaggi si accede ad archetipi in cui ci si può riconoscere come singoli e come gruppo. Per esempio gli X-Men e le minoranze, gli eroi e la paura del diverso. Interessante è infatti la contrapposizione fra il Professor Xavier, mentore degli uomini X e Magneto, il leader dei mutanti malvagi. Tutti insieme costituiscono un gruppo discriminato: il gene mutante li rende diversi e reietti a causa della paura che suscitano, ma Xavier e i suoi vogliono proteggere quegli umani da cui pure sono malvisti, mentre Magneto vuole affermare la superiorità della razza mutante per dominare il mondo. E, significativamente, Magneto porta sul braccio il simbolo della paura della diversità, il numero che gli è stato impresso sul braccio ad Auschwitz. Lui rappresenta la rabbia e la voglia di rivalsa di chi è stato schiacciato ingiustamente.

E’ ovvio sottolineare come il tema delle minoranze e della loro integrazione o demonizzazione sia sempre alla ribalta, nel mondo anglosassone, ma non solo. La minoranza ebraica, la minoranza nera, la minoranza omosessuale: si può continuare, il fenomeno è sempre quello.

E’ interessante e significativo il fatto come Alan Ball abbia trasposto questo stesso concetto nella serie True Blood (2008-in produzione): li i vampiri, da sempre nascosti e odiati, vengono allo scoperto e chiedono e ottengono il riconoscimento dei loro diritti paritari. E quindi anche qui, come nel fumetto e al cinema, il focus è la scelta morale, la coerenza o la ribellione.
Nel terzo film degli *X-Men* il bene e il male si combattono nell'intimo della stessa Jean Grey: nella trasposizione cinematografica della saga di Fenice Nera di cui abbiamo già parlato, che in parte rielabora la trama originale, la potenza distruttrice della rabbia e del desiderio istintivo si scatenano nel personaggio, una volta che i blocchi imposti dal prof. X quando Jean era ragazzina si dissolvono. Il dissidio interiore fra la Jean controllata e buona e il suo alter ego malvagio si risolve dramaticamente. Sempre il bene e il male si fronteggiano e a volte il male è dentro di noi. Messaggi antichi. Figure e contesti semplici li veicolano. Le sfumature di grigio con cui dobbiamo fare i conti nell'esistenza concreta, così difficili da riconoscere e gestire, il realismo, in una parola, rimane fuori e noi spettatori ci rilassiamo nella evidenza delle opzioni, ci immedesimiamo o troviamo noiosi i buoni e/o aborriamo o troviamo simpatici i cattivi.

Superman ad esempio è l'eroe che si nasconde nella normalità del nostro quotidiano, dietro gli occhiali, la cravatta e la banalità di un impiego borghese. “La grandezza e la forza che ci sono dentro di me, ometto apparentemente normale, tu mondo non le conosci”, in caso di pericolo via la camicia, fuori la S di Superman e il nemico sarà sistemato, costi quel che costi; la tenacia e il coraggio costeranno quasi la vita, ma dall'umiliazione (quel malvagio di Lex Luthor!) si risorge più forti di prima.

Hulk invece rappresenta l'altra versione della storia del borghese piccolo piccolo: “Se con l'ingiustizia suscitale la mia rabbia, non sapete che cosa potrebbe capitarti!”. La scienza, nel suo aspetto bifronte di ancora di salvezza e di fonte di tutti i mali, tira fuori (e fa diventare verde!) tutta la rabbia accuratamente repressa e lo scoppio fa tremare i muri. La scienza (con i raggi Gamma o con altre più moderne definizioni), se non la si maneggi con cura, fa venire fuori il mostro che è in noi, proprio come in Stevenson. Oppure...

La scienza ti salva quando sei perduto e ti rende forte, fortissimo: Iron Man, con il suo cuore tecnologico che risolve un grave infarto; un ragno radioattivo ti morde e da timido e perseguitato diventi forte e strafottente. Quest’ultima categoria la si potrebbe catalogare con la rivincita dei Nerd. Nerd Peter Parker e nerd Reed Richards, che da scienziato secchione diventa l’incredibile Mister Fantastic e tutti e due si conquistano l’amore di donne niente male.

La tua debolezza può diventare la tua forza: come per Devil per il quale la cecità diventa un potenziamento dei suoi sensi.

I Vendicatori, come anche gli X-Men, rappresentano i gruppi di guerrieri che difendono il popolo, gli innocenti, la nazione. I Marines americani? La paura di un nemico esterno soverchiante e come
demonizzato genera il bisogno di essere difesi da chi incarni l’idea di una potenza superiore.
Tempi semplici, ma temi forti. Soprattutto temi ricorrenti che rappresentano simbolicamente paure, necessità, desideri condivisi: la paura del diverso e il desiderio di essere accettati, la popularità contro l’essere nerd, la debolezza che diventa forza, la paura dell’invasività della scienza e il desiderio che risolva tutti i problemi, la costanza e la tenacia dell’uomo che vince contro lo strapotere dell’ingiustizia. Questi sono miti [5]. I miti che sempre vengono rappresentati nelle storie che amiamo, ma che trovano negli eroi dei fumetti una rappresentazione stilizzata, semplice, immediata. Una rappresentazione però che si presta a possibili approfondimenti, e dunque può essere fruита a vari livelli. La tesi è dunque che i personaggi dei fumetti, che arrivano attraverso il cinema al grande pubblico, siano i moderni miti, quelli del mondo globalizzato. Anche se, in effetti, anche i miti antichi erano i riferimenti accettati dalla gente comune del mondo globalizzato della koinè greca e poi di quella romana. Eracle, Ermes, Zeus, Edipo, Cassandra, Efesto, Achille e Ulisse. Guerrieri indomiti (Eracle come Capitan America); re potentissimi e altezzosi (Zeus come il Galactus dei Fantastici Quattro); uomini e donne perseguitati dalla sorte o dai propri stessi doni (Edipo e Cassandra come il Punitore o Destiny, la compagna di Mistica); Titani indomabili (Prometeo come Wolverine); veloci e intelligenti messaggeri (Ermes come Silver Surfer); eroi invulnerabili con qualche tallone debole (Achille come Iron Man); eroi furbì con il gusto dell’intelligenza (Ulisse come l’Uomo Ragno). Potremmo continuare, i Trecento Spartani che hanno salvato il mondo greco a costo della vita come i gruppi di eroi (X-Men, Vendicatori, appunto) disposti a tutto per la propria missione; uomini saggi, mentori di eroi: Il Professor X come Chirone, il centauro istruttore di Achille (entrambi, guarda caso, con un potenziamento supplementare agli arti). Nomi che esprimono categorie immediatamente catalogabili per un mondo e per l’altro, grumi del pensiero che favoriscono inquadramento e giudizio.
I miti dei fumetti favoriscono l’identificazione culturale, costituiscono una lingua franca comune, almeno al livello superficiale della cultura occidentale globalizzata. Niente di troppo difficile, ma passibile di valenze più complesse.
Per questo, fra altri motivi più immediati (effetti speciali, spettacolarità, attori di grido), forse i film con i personaggi del fumetto sono proposti frequentemente ed hanno successo abbastanza sicuro.
Sarebbe interessante elaborare un giudizio di valore su questi miti, chiedersi da quale società
provengono, verso quali traguardi di civiltà si dirigano e in che misura siano manipolati dal potere o scaturiscano dalla base, ma sicuramente non è questa la sede per questo approfondimento.

**Aspetti Estetici dal Fumetto al Cinema**

L’ultimo argomento che si vuole trattare è uno specifico portato del fumetto al cinema: un certo linguaggio narrativo per immagini, una certa stilizzazione, non distinti, come finalità, dalla mitizzazione di cui si è parlato prima.

Solo alcuni esempi di questo fenomeno si vogliono qui riportare: *Dick Tracy, Ultraviolet, Wolfman, 300*.

Questi film presentano un’accentuazione estetica, un modo di trattare i colori, le inquadrature, i ritmi in modo che citano volutamente quelli del fumetto. Di *Dick Tracy* film vincitore di tre premi Oscar nel 1990 per la migliore scenografia, miglior canzone e miglior trucco, si dovrebbe dire molto: è un film visionario fortemente voluto da Warren Beatty, che precorre di molto i tempi, tanto da non conseguire, all’epoca dell’uscita nelle sale cinematografiche, tutto il successo che avrebbe meritato. Il personaggio di Dick Tracy risaliva agli anni Trenta dai comics di Chester Gould. Beatty chiamò molti colleghi attori famosi a partecipare; Al Pacino, Dustin Hoffmann, Madonna, rappresentarono i gangster, gli sgherri e la pupa del boss contro cui l’integerrimo poliziotto combatteva, ma la caratteristica che balzò di più all’attenzione degli spettatori fu l’esagerata caratterizzazione dei personaggi: il trucco esasperato riproduceva l’elaborazione caricaturistica del tratto dei disegnatori del fumetto, in una voluta ridondanza.

Anche le ambientazioni, soprattutto le immagini della città, quasi sempre rappresentata di notte, alludono ad una dimensione irrealistica e sono a metà fra le quinte teatrali e le tavole a colori puri dei fumetti. Il blu, il verde, il rosso delle strade bagnate dalla pioggia, delle case nell’oscurità simbolo del malaffare imperante fanno da sfondo agli inseguimenti fra guardie e ladri, con le prospettive deformate degli scenari dei comics, mentre il giallo solare del cappello e dell’impermeabile di Tracy sono la lama incorruttibile dell’integrità del detective. Il film in questo caso cita l’immagine del fumetto, il suo stile, anche ovviamente perché proviene da un fumetto.

Quindi l’estetica dei comics passa in una pellicola cinematografica come valore aggiunto. *Ultraviolet* di Kurt Wimmer del 2006 invece non proviene da un fumetto, eppure, attraverso
l’elaborazione digitale delle immagini, gli sfondi, i movimenti degli attori, di Milla Jovovich soprattutto, le inquadrature, i colori optical, giocati sul contrasto e su simmetrie geometriche, i simboli, la forma stessa della città, tutto ricorda la libera fantasia dei cartoonist, le tavole dei fumetti. Persino la frangia della bellissima Jovovich assomiglia a quelle delle donne dei fumetti, Mary Jane Watson, all’epoca solo amica di Peter Parker/Uomo Ragno, nei disegni del leggendario John Romita. I movimenti resi possibili dalle notevoli coreografie e dagli effetti speciali vogliono evitare il realismo, tendono alla stilizzazione simbolica, alla perfezione sintetica dei parti della mente che non deve fare i conti con i pesi costrittivi del realismo.

Nei due casi sopra citati stiamo parlando di due film che non hanno riscosso un successo unanime, sia l’uno che l’altro sono stati accusati di vari difetti. Warren Beatty in Dick Tracy sembrava coinvolto dalla fissità dell’espressione del personaggio cartaceo, in entrambi i casi la trama e l’approfondimento dei personaggi e della storia sono stati sacrificati alle trovate innovative ed estetiche. Ciò non toglie che la contaminazione fra i due media ci sia, anzi forse proprio lo sguardo allo stile del fumetto ha generato le distorsioni, per una difficoltà a trovare l’equilibrio fra i due linguaggi peculiari.


Il primo meriterebbe una più ampia trattazione per i suoi legami con i B-movie e con l’originale di George Waggner del ’41 con il celebre Lon Chaney Jr, qui vogliamo solo sottolineare come un film, legato all’origine a originali cinematografici, usi il linguaggio del fumetto, in un prestito vicendevole peraltro, per ottenere effetti emotivi specifici in chi guarda. Chi ama e frequenta il fumetto li riconosce, chi invece non ha familiarità con questo mezzo non perde nulla. E’ ovvio che il cinema citi le altre arti visive: chi conosce i dipinti di Caspar David Friedrich li riconosce in certe inquadrature di Orgoglio e pregiudizio (2005), ma le atmosfere nebbiose dell’inseguimento finale, la silhouette della protagonista femminile tutta giocata sui toni scuri che ricordano l’inchiostrazione delle tavole dei fumetti, la stessa inquadratura della mano-zampa del mostro in primo piano con, sullo sfondo, il luogo dove sta per arrivare e che avrebbe ragione di temerlo, fanno pensare alle inquadrature caricate di pathos di un certo tipo di fumetti. Simbolo e mito, in un gioco di richiami che contano su una specie di imprinting nello spettatore, producono atmosfere ad alto impatto visivo ed emozionale che vogliono essere calligrafiche fino al manierismo.

Concludiamo con 300 di Zack Snyder. Qui il legame è chiaro poiché il film vuole trasporre la
graphic novel del 1998 di Frank Miller e la tecnica sofisticata, usata per rimanere aderenti il più possibile alla forza e all'espressività dei disegni del grande Miller e contemporaneamente esaltare la dinamicità del movimento, soprattutto delle preponderanti scene di battaglia, consente di arrivare al top della coniugazione dei due linguaggi. Il realismo è definitivamente abbandonato, insieme all'attendibilità storica peraltro, che è volutamente messa da parte, e l'effetto è notevole. Ritroviamo qui, nei personaggi degli Efori, astoricamente rappresentati come mostruosi, la caricaturizzazione esasperata di certi personaggi di *Dick Tracy*, la fotografia con i chiaroscuri imita la profondità delle chine, le inquadrature mirano ognuna alla perfezione e alla potenza dell’immagine propria delle tavole. Gli scenari spogli e poveri di particolari ricordano gli sfondi nudi dei riquadri del fumetto utili a mettere in risalto gli elementi essenziali dell'oggetto o del personaggio rappresentato. Ogni immagine è ritoc cata e perfezionata in studio per ottenere l'effetto, sostanzialmente, dell’epica, del mito, della lontananza dalla realtà e dell’esaltazione ideale della storia rappresentata.

**Conclusioni**

Quali conclusioni potremmo trarre da quanto detto finora? Abbiamo cercato di documentare la tesi di una reciproca influenza fra i media, di un “passaggio” di contenuti e forme espressive fra fumetto, televisione e cinema, sostenendo che la serialità, infondendosi come per osmosi da un mezzo all’altro, sviluppa storie più coinvolgenti e complesse, risponde a un bisogno e svolge una funzione che non è estranea al ruolo stesso della narrazione e quindi della letteratura. E la dialettica fra letteratura alta e letteratura popolare, che costituisce certo un capitolo importante fra le tematiche che ci interrogano in questa società complessa e globalizzata, deve cedere il passo di fronte all’esistenza di una mole ingente di messaggi e di feedback che vanno indagati e spiegati, anche perché influenzano e toccano davvero tante persone. Anche il fenomeno dei social network e dei tanti siti e blog dedicati ai fumetti, ai telefilm e ai libri, che mostrano tante riflessioni e dialoghi che mettono a tema passaggi o avvenimenti della fiction dimostra che per noi rispecchiarsi nelle storie è vitale. Come afferma Roberta Rigo “la scrittura letteraria, ha come scopo quello di dare ordine alla vita umana”, così dialogare con le vicende e le storie di un “tu” fittizio ma probabile ci mette in relazione con noi stessi e con le nostre propensioni e scelte, ci facilita una razionalizzazione e un giudizio nel migliore dei casi, quantomeno favorisce un riconoscimento attraverso la simbolizzazione del mito e attraverso il rispecchiamento. Ci mette
in movimento comunque e ciò è bene in quanto ci pone nella condizione di “accettare e riconoscere che è dal dialogo, continuo ed ininterrotto, che nasce la nostra identità, che non è fissa, ma mobile ed in continua evoluzione”. [6]

Parlando invece delle forme espressive che si trasdano dall’uno all’altro media, poi, si potrebbe concludere che, qualunque esse siano, sempre contengono le concettualizzazioni della civiltà che le esprime e la contaminazione, nel contenuto e nell’estetica, è una notevole risorsa, feconda di sempre nuove e stimolanti esplorazioni.

Note
[3] *La Divina Commedia* non è ovviamente un romanzo, essendo in rima, ma svolge la funzione dei romanzi di formazione in quanto, come forse in nessuna altra opera più chiaramente, Dante passa da una condizione di incertezza (il buio della selva oscura) a una di esaltante consapevolezza di sé e della realtà (la luce del rapporto fra lui e Dio) attraverso un difficile percorso educativo.
all'accezione in cui qui si intende il mito: “la funzione principale del mito è quella di fissare i modelli esemplari di tutti i riti e di tutte le azioni umane significative, in modo da fornire loro un modello extratemporale e astorico ogni volta che si tratta di «fare qualcosa» di per sé inaccessibile all'apprendimento empirico-razionale”.

With Great Budgets Comes Great Responsibility
by Daniel Smith

I remember it like it was yesterday. It was May of 1989 and I was a comic book geek; a "fanboy" as they say. I was particularly a Spider-Man fan, and when I walked into my local comic book shop I overheard an interesting conversation. They said that a Spider-Man movie was in the works and that it could be out by the following year. My little 10-year-old heart burst with excitement as I purchased my usual comics and left to contemplate how great it would be to see Spider-Man on screen. It turned out that the rights to a Spider-Man film and the many iterations of scripts created from the mid-80s through the mid-90s were on a roller coaster of legal issues, financial issues and bankruptcies that kept my hero from ever getting to the big screen. I followed faithfully every little bit of information I could for an entire decade until finally, in 1999, Columbia Pictures acquired all of the rights necessary to start production.

I was no longer a boy, but my comic book collection had only grown immensely and my fanboy status was still completely intact. After thirteen years of anticipation, my desire to see Peter Parker don the mask and web-shooters and use his proportionate strength of a spider to foil the evil-doers was finally going to be fulfilled. May 3, 2002 was going to be the day my anxious heart would finally realize its dream. I had been satisfied that I had to wait so long for two major reasons: first, at least a film was finally being made, and second, the technology was far better than a decade before so it would be even more visually stunning than it could have been in 1990.

Spider-Man 1: From the comic panel to the movie screen

Peter Parker as Spider-Man was introduced in 1962 as a teenage super hero without a sidekick in an age where teenagers were always the sidekicks taught to be super heroes by the greats by fighting along side them. "Mr. Lee recognized that young readers didn’t want to stand next to the superheroes. They wanted to be the superheroes.” (Mitchell, 2002). The popularity of this character certainly began 40 years before the film was released, but the film sky-rocketed his popularity into a franchised gold mine. Stan Lee and Steve Ditko’s Peter Parker was an awkward, timid teenager who developed into a confident, yet responsibility-laden college student. His love interests were just as important to his character as the villains he fought as the Webcrawler. If a film of Spider-Man was to be successful, it would have to capture the essence of the character as
well as the nature of his super hero responsibility.

What made Spider-Man such a great film was its ability to capture this character on screen in a well-told story with great actors. Most film critics agree that the super-hero film is often short-changed when it comes to the story and script, but most critics agreed that Toby Maguire's portrayal of Peter Parker was “pitch perfect.” (Ebert, 2002). Sam Raimi managed to combine comic book silliness with a well-paced artistic elegance. He captures Maguire's soft-spoken yet poignant energy so well that the viewer becomes very attached to Peter Parker in very much the same way that Mary Jane gradually falls in love with him as the film progresses. By the end, everyone is as heartbroken as Mary Jane when responsibility wins out over love and Peter tells her they are just “friends.” (Spider-Man, 2002).

The interaction and chemistry between the two actors is almost perfect with a script that imaginatively captures the awkward eloquence of Peter Parker with the spunk and hidden sadness of Mary Jane Watson. This is evidenced in the hospital scene where Peter Parker confesses his feelings for MJ in a mini-soliloquy overheard by a supposedly sleeping Aunt May. The film slows down just enough to bring us into the intimacy and tension of the teenage angst shared by these two characters.

Fanboys and fangirls alike originally hated the idea of Toby Maguire being cast in the role for many reasons “given that Maguire is not the first actor who springs to mind when thinking of adrenaline-pumping, tail-kicking titans.” (Fleming, Brodesser, 2000) They also disagreed with the organic webshooters instead of the man-made ones originally created by Peter Parker himself. This change made by Sam Raimi spawned a website and had fans begging for him to stay true to the comics.

Though both major issues seemed to dissipate when the film was released, the major consensus among fans and critics was that the Green Goblin character was utterly disappointing. He was “handicapped, too, by his face, which looks like a high-tech action figure with a mouth that doesn't move.” (Ebert, 2002). Critics certainly felt that Willem Dafoe's portrayal of the Goblin/Norman dual personality was done well. However, the costuming choice made here did not do the character justice making him seem like a joke rather than an evil villain not to be messed with.

The movie was visually stunning, but lacking in the effects department. “It’s not that the effects look cheap. Quite the opposite: they look like a waste of money.” (Scott, 2002). The super fan
may be pleased to finally see a live-action version of Spider-Man, but often the movements seemed cartoonish and ineffectively fake, “lacking in grace or the feel of real movement, human or animal.” (McCarthy, 2002). However, due to the overall satisfaction of the film’s faithful portrayal of Spider-Man and Peter Parker, the inadequacies of the visual effects were minute in comparison to an overall incredible ride. Overall, old fans enjoyed it for its loyalty to the character they knew and loved, and new fans were made because of its quality of production. Box office numbers also show that it succeeded immensely having grossed $403,706,375 domestically and $418,002,176 internationally.

**Spider-Man 2: The sequel to beat all sequels**

Fanboys and movie-goers only had to wait two years to see the obligatory sequel and the expectations were ridiculously high after the financial success of the first film. The critics overwhelmingly agreed that the sequel was “even better than the first.” (Morgenstern, 2004). The film combined a fantastic new super villain with the popular returning cast as well as improved computer generated imagery (CGI) on epic levels to create a visual masterpiece. It is very rare to have a sequel that equals the original, but to have one that exceeds its predecessor is a feat to be praised. The production team “rather than equating bigger with better, have conscientiously applied themselves to improving all aspects of the franchise.” (McCarthy, 2004). “One of the keys to the movie’s success must be the contribution of novelist Michael Chabon to the screenplay; Chabon understands in his bones what comic books are, and why.” (Ebert, 2004). The story and the visual combine to make for an incredibly believable film. What is easy for the fanboy to believe due to his loyalty to the comic book became easy for all to believe by simply watching the film.

The characters were just as stunning as the effects. Alfred Molina’s Doc Ock was not the typical monster villain who becomes so distorted and twisted as to be unrecognizable. The audience has an edge of sympathy for him because it is not completely his fault that he is evil. The chemistry between Maguire and Dunst is increasingly more intense as MJ gets closer to discovering Peter’s secret. A secret revealed in a riveting scene where the unmasked Spidey is holding up a wall in order to save the woman he loves. The whole film captures the audience, brings them along for the ride and absolutely no one wants to get off.
The scene is reminiscent of a comic book scene in *Amazing Spider-Man #33* (February, 1966) where Spider-Man is trapped under a collapsed roof in order to bring a serum to his Aunt May to save her life. The incident began as a cliffhanger from issue #32 and kept me on the edge of my seat in hopes that Spider-Man would succeed. The success of this film is its ability to capture that intensity and drama just as Ditko and Lee did nearly 4 decades prior. This film appeases every true fanboy’s dream in its ability to bring these beloved (or detested) characters to life and make us care about them.

The box office numbers were $373,585,825 domestically and $410,180,516 internationally. Ironically, the acclaimed sequel made around $38 million less than the original despite the abundance of praise it received. However, do box office numbers truly measure a movie’s success?

**Spider-Man 3: A trying trilogy tragedy**

“I’d never thought I’d say this in the age of superfluous sequels, but I can’t wait for Spider-Man 3!” (Mergenstern, 2004). Unfortunately all of us who agreed with this at the end of *Spider-Man 2* (2004) must eat our words following the disappointment of *Spider-Man 3* (2007). Despite visually eye-pooping scenes and realistic CGI, this time around the merging of story with character are completely forgotten. The story is “in short a mess. Too many villains, too many pale plot strands, too many romantic misunderstandings, too many conversations, too many street crowds…” (Ebert, 2007)

Anticipation of Venom’s part in the film was buzzed about for nearly a year when it was announced that the villain would debut on screen in the third installment of the franchise. The first teaser with a split second view of Venom wowed fans and literally brought us to the theaters on opening night. One of the more hated yet beloved villains of Spidey seemed to be the selling point for the whole film, yet we do not even see the villain until the final battle scene that took far too long to get to.

The characters seem tired and halted in their similar ruts. In fact, the “big problem with the third Spidey is the script, the very same element that elevated the second yarn.” (McCarthy, 2007) Alvin Sargent failed to gain any assistance from Michael Chabon and relied on the Raimi brothers to create a script that was apparently written to show off all of the CGI the third film could afford
and accomplish. The Sandman’s visual effects were incredibly believable, but the story behind him was preposterous as he reveals his blame for being the real killer of Uncle Ben. This twist could have easily been the entire film but with two other villains to give screen time to, the character was lost in the jumble.

The alien symbiote/black costume was completely unbelievable when the goo attached itself to Peter Parker and suddenly looked like spandex and a simple blackened version of the same old costume. Loyal fans know that the costume was organic and was almost a character in and of itself, but the movie did nothing to create a character from the symbiote so we do not care that Spider-Man get rid of it or that Eddie Brock be the one to find it accidentally.

Admittedly, the opening fight scene with the new goblin satisfied my desire for a different costume following the first film’s plastic nemesis. However, the amnesia plot twist given to Harry Osborn’s character simply seemed like a way to keep the villain out of the way while the other two villains get some technically stunning screen time. When the director and his brother became a part of the film’s writing, it seemed that they were writing through dollar signs instead of advancing the characters’ development. In fact, Ted Raimi (Ivan and Sam’s brother) gets a far bigger speaking role in this film than he had in the previous two.

MJ’s character becomes the most pathetic of all. “The plotting is so flimsy at times that...it depends on Peter and Mary Jane’s not talking when they most certainly would...That’s just cheap and it betrays these characters who’ve been lovingly built over the course of two features.” The one love scene that should have been climactic is stolen by Bruce Campbell’s character as we find ourselves focusing more on what he will do next. “Dunst seems to be weary of the whole damsel-in-distress routine” (Lumenick, 2007) as she mopes around the film more whiny than spunky, losing any lackluster she might have had in the second film. She “now rivals Scarlett Johansson as the most useless ingenue in Hollywood.” (Lee, 2007). The chemistry is gone because none was written there in the first place.

The costumes go retro as Gwen Stacy’s character is introduced perhaps because the character only existed in the comic books from the mid-sixties into the early seventies. Instead of acting as an artistic choice made by the director it almost seems to be making fun of the genre. MJ and Peter Parker are completely lost in the Jazz club scene as any recognizable character from the comic and this is the point at which the film crashes into inane despair.

What this film does that the other two did not, is make me say that the book was so much better
than the film. I was not left wanting more, but left relieved that it was over and hoping and praying that the same director and writers do not return for the inevitable sequel. Is this what happens when too much money is used to honor such a beloved character and the screenplay is unworthy? The first two film’s success show the capability of the actors and the director, but the third film can’t be redeemed by them when the writing is so bland. It obviously takes a combination of them all to make a great super hero film. *Spider-Man 3* (2007) grossed $336,530,303 domestically and $554,341,323 internationally; nearly $70 million more than the first and over $100 million more than the second. Based on these numbers Sam Raimi and the whole cast were inevitably asked to return for a fourth. It seems the money did a lot of the decision making.

By some miracle Sam Raimi backed out and Sony has opted to do a reboot. What looks to be an amazing new film can only succeed if the screenplay matches the greatness of the actors’ abilities and the director's vision.

### Spider-Man sings and soars

The final point to bring home is blatantly obvious as *Spider-Man: Turn off the Dark* (2011) has blackened the Great White Way. The $65 million spent in production of this show is more than any other Broadway show has spent to date. The musical fails by way of the exact same problem as the third film. Too much money blinded the director. Julie Taymor neglected a worthy script at the expense of mounting an amazing spectacle. The result is a show that does not offer the most basic element of any play or musical – a coherent story. “The sheer ineptitude of this show...loses its shock value early.” (Brantley, February, 2011) At one point there is literally a fashion show of villains, one of which she created, that have nothing to do with the plot and are obviously there to show off Taymor's costume-making abilities.

The show was eventually put on hiatus for a revamping of the script and Julie Taymor was fired as director. Critics all agree that nothing can save the show now. The money has all been spent, and none of it went to a decent playwright. As a fan of live theater it is incredibly tragic that $65 million was spent so poorly, and most importantly, as a fan of Spider-Man I am incredibly disenchanted by the fact that Peter Parker’s character was done such an injustice as to turn the Spidey name into a huge joke.
The power and responsibility to the hero

“The improbable heroics and arch villainy of the comic book demand a...world in which something is at stake and the outcome really matters.” (Thompson, 2002) The first two films depicted these demands and the outcomes mattered so much that we demanded a third. Does “the number of comic-book films now pipelined...simply indicate Hollywood's poverty of ideas and serve further to underline the studios' reluctance to take risks with original material”? (Thompson, 2002) It is incredibly difficult to find an original screenplay out there these days. At the same time, “As genetic patents, climate change and postmortem impregnation become facts of 21st-century life, the bold extrapolations of comic-book science fiction now seem uncomfortably pertinent.” (Thompson 2002)

It is quite apparent that comic book heroes have stories to tell. Pertinent or unbelievable as they may be, they can most certainly be entertaining as well as thought-provoking. However, if the film industry is out to exploit these characters and their stories simply to make a buck, then they are doing a disservice to the characters. The super-hero industry should be ashamed for selling out these characters. These films have the potential to entertain as well as matter, as seen in the first and second Spider-Man (2002, 2004) films. But they also have the potential to mock and destroy what so many fanboys love. Here’s hoping that the comic book industry pushes the limit and requires more genuine storytelling. Marvel has made the right move in starting its own film production company with the incredibly successful Iron Man film being its first. Let’s hope that they will use the extensive resources at their disposal to honor the legacy of the Marvel canon.

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Recreating the fantasy world of Dororo. Transcoding manga into cinema

by Francisco Javier López-Rodríguez

The dissemination of comics in Japan is so high that manga can be considered an important mass media comparable to cinema or television. Japanese comics have become what Noël Carroll calls “mass art”, emerging in the space of urban, post-industrial, capitalistic society [1]. Unlike avant-garde art or classic art, manga is characterized by its mechanical and digital production, distribution, and even consumption. It embraces the commercial and has become a very lucrative business, attracting all kind of audiences. In Japan, this artistic and cultural industry generated in the year 2005 a profit of 502.3 billion yen. The business of manga makes up approximately 27% of the total book sales and 20% of magazine sales, so it is evident that comics are an important support of the Japanese publishing industry [2].

Jaqueline Berndt points out that manga has become one of the most important medium of mass communication in Japan. She argues that the influence of comics has permeated all other forms of expression and it is more than evident in literature, videogames, or advertising. As a result, it is possible to speak of a “manganization” of printed media and television because of the high number of comics published within newspapers and magazines as well as the numerous adaptations of these works into animated TV shows [3].

Japanese comics are part of a wide system of mass communication marked by the phenomenon of transmedia, which implies a multiplicity of possibilities regarding different media, hybrid types of expression, and forms of storytelling exchanged between media. In the case of Japanese comics, we can find a continuous transfer of stories, contents, and characters that are recycled and transformed from one medium to another. The most successful manga are frequently turned into television shows, videogames, or even novels. In fact, the dominant tendency at the moment is the elaboration of big franchises composed around a product that can be commercialized through different media.

One of the most common transfers is that from the graphic narrative into the cinematographic medium. The high number of filmic adaptations of comics in contemporary Japanese cinema is a clear sign of the influence of manga on the film industry. It demonstrates not only the popularity of manga among Japanese audiences but also the constant hybridization of cinema, which uses other forms of expression (novels, plays, TV shows, videogames) as its source materials. Vicente
Peña explains this phenomenon by pointing to cinema's capacity for absorbing other types of structures, languages, and codes in order to produce a unified text [4]. Similarly, Robert Stam claims that an adaptation “can be seen as an orchestration of discourses, talents, and tracks, a 'hybrid' construction mingling different media and discourses and collaborations” [5]. Nonetheless, although from its very beginnings cinema has developed a deep relationship with other discourses, research and studies on filmic adaptations have focused mainly in comparative analysis with a strong emphasis in the question of fidelity and truthfulness to the original work. Recently the contribution of narratological studies or the concept of intertextuality have offered new approaches to this issue, but the analysis of the processes of adaptation still focuses primarily on literary sources while other discourses like comics, television, or videogames tend to be ignored.

According to Linda Hutcheon, the adaptation of works from different forms of expression into the cinematographic medium can be defined in three levels: 1) an adaptation is a process of transcoding one work or works into another medium; 2) it is a process of creation that always implies a reinterpretation and a re-elaboration of the previous work; and 3) it is a process of reception which depends on the experience, the memory, and the knowledge of the spectator [6]. In this article I will focus on the process of transcoding the visual features of Japanese comics into cinema and I will use, as an example, the filmic adaptation of the manga Dororo. This comic, by Osamu Tezuka, was published in the magazines Shukan Shounen Sunday and Boken O between 1967 and 1969. The story takes place in the feudal period and it tells the adventures of Hyakkimaru and Dororo. Hyakkimaru is a powerful samurai who must defeat demons in order to recover some parts of his body while Dororo is a little thief who follows Hyakkimaru with the intention of stealing his sword. This manga, compiled in four volumes, was adapted to cinema in 2007 by Akihiko Shiota.

First of all, I must point out that the translation of a comic into a film implies a change of languages and codes because of the different characteristics of both media. Several authors find the essence of comics as a medium in the combination of graphic and textual elements. According to Will Eisner, “the format of comics presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art (perspective, symmetry, line) and the regimens of literature (grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other” [7]. Manga, as a form of graphic narrative, has certain...
peculiarities in its treatment of this visual language [8]. Scott McCloud argues that Japanese comics are characterized by their use of iconic characters with simple faces and figures easily recognizable, a strong sense of place, a broad variety of character designs, frequent uses of wordless panels and fragmentary transitions between panels, subjective motion generated by streaked backgrounds, and various expressive effects such as expressionistic backgrounds, montages and subjective caricatures [9]. All these elements, as well as its reading (manga are read from left to right), its diversity of genres and audiences (it is possible to find comics about any issue), and the use of specific graphic metaphors make Japanese comics different from other traditions like American comic books, French bandes dessinées, or Spanish tebeos.

If comics have two main expressive codes (pictures and words), cinema offers many more. Robert Stam states that “the film has at least five tracks: moving photographic image, phonetic sound, music, noises, and written materials” [10]. All these different tracks can be used to adapt, simulate, or even absorb other different discourses. In fact, filmmakers can mimic the images of comics through certain uses of the montage, the composition of the shots, the lighting, the colour, or the performance of the actors. In the case of the adaptation of Japanese comics into cinema, some directors try to recreate the aesthetic experience of a comic by the manipulation of the cinematic expressive codes. This experimentation with stylistic codes from other discourses can be seen as a trend in contemporary Japanese cinema. As Roberto Cueto puts it, “postmodern Japanese cinema is essentially meta-narrative and it plays with representational codes” [11].

Amongst those expressive codes which contemporary Japanese cinema experiments with, we can find new technologies, documentaries, experimental animation and, of course, manga.

One of the main changes in the process of adapting a comic into a film is the transformation produced in the nature of the images. The images of comics are creations based on what the artist perceives visually, they are graphic representations of reality that only share a visual resemblance to what they represent. According to McCloud, the images of comics are the result of a process of abstraction of reality in which, instead of eliminating details, they just focus on specific elements. Through this process of simplification, an artist can amplify the meaning of an image and achieve an almost universal legibility [12]. However, the images of cinema are mainly indexical since they are linked to the physical reality from where they have been taken. If the cinematographic image shows a concrete person in a specific place is because that person was there. There is no place for interpretation because the filmic image is constructed from reality
itself, not recreating it. This essential difference in the nature of their images is a key element in the translation from comic to cinema. When a manga is adapted, the simplified image of the comic is substituted by the concrete filmic image because we are passing from an iconic image to an indexical one. A clear example of this process' implications can be seen in Dororo. The character of Dororo in the comic is an eight-year-old girl who dresses and acts like a boy. The iconic graphic style does not allow the reader to discover her real gender until other characters reveal it. In the case of the film, since a young actress is playing the role of the character, we know from the very beginning that the character is female, although she dresses and speaks in a masculine way.

The adaptation of the image of comics into the filmic image implies a materialization of the drawings, a physic concretion of the actions. While the comic artist has not limits beyond the paper and his/her own imagination to illustrate any character or event, the filmmaker is “limited” by physical reality. In a manga, incredible actions like amazing jumps seem easy and perfectly natural because they are possible in the graphic world of the comic. By itself, the cinematographic medium cannot record these actions since they are not possible in the physical reality, so it has to simulate them. In fact, cinema can show actions that defy the limits of the human action through special effect techniques and the montage. In Dororo we can observe the amazing skills of Hyakkimaru, who is able to jump very high and has a prodigious strength.

Another example of the difficulty to recreate the iconic images of manga is the representation of supernatural creatures. The Japanese mythology is very rich and it is very common to find all kind of monsters in comics for boys. In Dororo there are plenty of supernatural creatures, such as a spider-woman, demons and spirits. In order to represent these beings, the filmic adaptation of the comic used Computed Generated Imagery (CGI). These images created by computer are different from the traditional cinematographic image since they have been generated artificially. They are as iconic as the images of the comics and, in the sequences where these digital creatures appear, we find a crash between the images. Unless the digital images are very realistic and their artificiality is not perceived, this recreation of the supernatural may not be acceptable. If digital elements are inserted in a satisfactory way, the spectator will assume them as a something possible in the fantastic world of the films [13]. However, in the contrary case, the digital would be an abrupt element that would bring the attention to itself and it would provoke a distanciation effect in the audience similar to the Brechtian techniques. Therefore, the use of CGI makes the
film a more plastic and malleable work because it allows the direct creation and manipulation of the image. The film based on *Dororo* can be seen is an example of this “artificialization” of the cinematographic image because there are several sequences where we find digital characters. The pass from a traditional filmic sequence to one of these virtual sequences can be shocking for the spectator because of the different aesthetic qualities of these two types of images. In fact, there is a different perception when make-up, costumes, masks, and characterization techniques are used to illustrate supernatural transformations or fantastic creatures instead of virtual imagery.

Another visual aspect of the Japanese comics that has an influence on the cinematographic medium is the sequential expression of the actions. In this aspect, we must point out the pioneer role of Osamu Tezuka because this author experienced with the language of comics and he eventually developed a “cinematographic method” in order to achieve more expressive drawings [14]. Since he was very keen on cinema, Tezuka found inspiration in films and he incorporated in his works all kind of montages and zoom effects [15]. His dynamic graphic style had a great impact in the following generations of comic creators and, in fact, a distinctive feature of contemporary Japanese comics is its fluid visual narrative and the high degree in the representation of the movement. According to Donald Richie, *manga* decompresses actions and prolongs them sequentially in such a way that the result is “something approximating a film” [16]. So, when dealing with the translation of *manga* into the screen, filmmakers have a great amount of graphic material in which the actions of the characters are clearly detailed. It is not uncommon that the composition of some shots of the film is based on the panels of the comic, transferring literally the images of the *manga*. In fact, Japanese comics are so cinematographic in their visual narrative that such a filmmaker like Takeshi Kitano considers them good storyboards for a film [17].

In general terms, Japanese live-action films based on comics have developed some formal and aesthetic particularities in their attempt to find expressive equivalences between the codes of the cinema and the comics. The consequences of this assimilation are several and varied. First of all, the filmic images tend to be more artificial since, in order the simulate some iconic aspects of *manga*, special effects and digital techniques are constantly used. So the audiovisual work becomes progressively a more plastic and malleable entity. Secondly, the interest in adapting some particular images from the comics (specially symbolic and abstract images) has provoked a
certain stylization of the audiovisual language. Based-on-\textit{manga} films, although they are commercial and mainstream productions, allow the exploration of new uses of the expressive codes in films. And, finally, these films evidence the ability of cinema to absorb and simulate the aesthetic features of other media.

The development of this spectacular and denaturalized cinematographic style in contemporary Japanese cinema can be seen as a consequence of the massive popularity of relatively new media such as comics, animation or videogames. The iconicity of these media has affected deeply the indexical images of traditional cinema. Donald Richie argues that, despite some exceptions, "a certain apathy to realism" seems to dominate contemporary Japanese cinema because of the seduction of the virtual [18]. And this is evident since the visual and thematic features of \textit{manga} have an influence not only on films based on comics but also in the work of other filmmakers. They incorporate, consciously or unconsciously, many of the characteristics of the graphic language of Japanese comics in their audiovisual works, achieving through this a stylization of reality that fascinates the audience.

Notes


**Bios**

Francisco J. López-Rodríguez graduated from the University of Seville with a Bachelor in Media Studies. He holds a Master's Degree in Film Theory and Criticism (MSc in Film Studies) from the University of Edinburgh. He is a Founding Member of the research team ADMIRA. He is currently working as a professor at the Department of Media Studies, Publicity and Literature in the Faculty of Communications of the University of Seville (Spain). He is working in his doctoral thesis, focused on the filmic adaptation of Japanese comics, and he has written on Japanese cinema, Japanese animation as well as television and gender.
"Oh check it out! I learned the bass line from Final Fantasy II": Scott Pilgrim vs. Geek Culture

by Sean Ahern

The 2010 release of *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*, Edgar Wright's adaptation of the popular *Scott Pilgrim* series created by Bryan Lee O'Malley, introduced a worldwide audience to the adventures of Scott Pilgrim (Michael Cera) as he fights for the affection of Ramona Flowers (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) via her seven “Evil Exes.” Both O'Mally's original comic book series and Wright's big screen adaptation rely heavily on the application of video game narratives and aesthetics to push the storyline forward. As Scott defeats each of the members of The League of Evil Exes, he collects the bonus coins left behind in their defeat and moves onto the next level of his relationship with Ramona in hopes of finally saving his princess from the final Evil Ex (and final boss)- Gideon Gordon Graves (Jason Schwartzman). The application of familiar video game narratives to the story, classic video game characters and titles for band names, and “8-bit” styling in both the comic and movie appropriates hip, geek culture for a mainstream audience. Using Dick Hebdige's theories on Subcultures, I will look at the use of geek culture as a new storytelling tool that brings subcultural ideas and images to the forefront of summer movie events like *Scott Pilgrim*.

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Hebdige writes about punk culture in England in the late 1970s and the appropriation of safety pins, fetish wear and household items by members of the culture to create a fashion style that undermined normal styles of dress alongside new style of music.

“They display their own codes (e.g. the punk’s ripped T-shirt) or at least demonstrate that codes are there to be used and abused (e.g. they have been thought about rather than thrown together). In this they go against the grain of a mainstream culture whose principal defining characteristic, according to Barthes, is a tendency to masquerade as nature, to substitute ‘normalized’ for historical forms, to translate the reality of the world into an image of the world which in turn presents itself as if composed according to ‘the evident laws of the natural order’ (Barthes,1972).” (Hebdige, 101-102).

Hebdige explains that through fashion and music the subculture of punk was able to upset the cultural norms of the time and create a new style of dress and genre of music through bricolage, appropriating commodities and reintroducing them into society under new terms (Hebdige,
I would argue that in the *Scott Pilgrim* series, O’Malley uses well-known video game aesthetics and pop culture references to 1980s video games to create a style that sets itself apart not only from other comic books, but also current video games—harking back to a simpler time when one only needed a directional pad plus A and B buttons. As Hebdige states in relation to punks found culture:

“Objects borrowed from the most sordid of contexts found a place in the punks’ ensembles: lavatory chains were draped in graceful arcs across chests encased in plastic bin-liners. Safety pins were taken out of their domestic ‘utility’ context and worn as gruesome ornaments through the cheek, ear or lip. ‘Cheap’ trashy fabrics (PVC, plastic, lurex, etc.) in vulgar designs (e.g. mock leopard skin) and ‘nasty’ colours, long discarded by the quality end of the fashion industry as obsolete kitsch, were salvaged by the punks and turn into garments (fly boy drainpipes, ‘common’ miniskirts) which offered self-conscious commentaries on the notions of modernity and taste” (Hebdige, 107).

In relation to Hebdige, then, I argue that while the images that have been taken from pop culture (most often early video games and the superhero genre) might not have been as shocking as the fetish wear of punk rockers he wrote about, but are nonetheless similar to the culture that is being highlighted by O’Malley and their movement from the mainstream, using earlier commodities to set themselves apart from the overarching culture. With Wright’s adaptation, we again see a split from the mainstream, comic book inspired, summer movie as the character looks less like a typical hero and embodies not the style of Superman but that of a 23 year old, Toronto hipster.

*Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* revolves around the life of the title character, Scott Pilgrim, as he deals with dating (and then breaking up with) 17 year old girlfriend Knives Chau for the American, rollerblading, subspace traveling, Amazon.ca messenger Ramona Flowers. As the bass player in the band Sex Bom-Omb, Scott works to fight Ramona’s seven evil exes while dealing with the repercussions of breaking up with Knives and gaining the respect of his band mates and friends. With the help of his gay roommate Wallace, sister Julie, band mates Kim Pine, Stephen Stills, and “young” Neil Scott works towards defeating each member of the League of Evil Exes as Sex Bomb-Omb gains notoriety in the indie rock scene as a part of an international battle of the bands. The main villain (and leader of the League of Evil Exes) Gideon Gordon Graves works to get Ramona back for himself while playing the part of the final boss and “the man,” appropriating the style of
the burgeoning indie scene for his Chaos Theatre (Scott Pilgrim vs. the World). Overcoming both internal and external conflicts- Scott is able to defeat each of the seven evil exes and win both the love of Ramona, come to terms with Knives, and the respect of his band mates during the final showdown at the newly opened Toronto branch of the Chaos Theatre.

The characters are hyper saturated, nerdy versions of modern-day hipsters. Pulling from the past with references to Nintendo Entertainment System and Super NES titles such as Zelda, Mario, Final Fantasy, and Earthbound among others O’Malley creates characters that are cool for being uncool (for liking video games and being for all intents and purposes lame). Much like the ironic-cool that separates hipsters from mainstream culture comes from the appropriation of decades-old fashion in new contexts, the appropriation of obscure 8-bit gaming references by O’Malley (and later Wright) create a style that appeals to a specific nerd audience. In the movie adaptation of the comic book, Wright goes a step further and employs the soundtrack of these games to enhance the aesthetics of the movie. In much the same way Wright showed his own love for the Resident Evil series or Star Wars in the television show “Spaced” (or his love for zombie and cop movies in Shawn of the Dead and Hot Fuzz, respectively); Wright uses the sounds of the video games as a way to keep the audience deeply entrenched in the storyline and also recognize the specific niche that the movie appeals to while still trying to relate to a wider audience.

As the movie begins, the audience is subject to sounds that are seemingly ripped from the cartridge versions of Zelda: A Link to the Past as the camera pans down towards Sex Bomb-Omb’s practice space (Scott Pilgrim...). While Kim and Scott argue about his relationship with Knives in a later scene, we hear the sound effects of a Windows operating system as “Young” Neil works on a computer in the background. The different sounds highlight the main parts of the argument between Kim and Scott: while Scott looks at the positives of dating a 17 year old high school student, Kim questions the legitimacy of his relationship with Knives, highlighting each of the main parts of the argument we hear the error message of a Windows operating system multiple times during the conversation. During fight scenes, the audience is also introduced to cliché video game fight sounds that are reminiscent of the Street Fighter franchise, and, when each of the ex-boyfriends are defeated, coins are left in their wake. After the defeat of the first evil ex (Matthew Patel) at the ROCKIT club, Scott even mentions that the coins aren’t enough for the bus fare home (O’Malley, Scott Pilgrim’s Precious Little Life). The characters are clearly entrenched in a world based in a comic book/video game hybrid. O’Malley mixes music and video game culture
to draw readers in and allow them to relate back to the characters themselves. If the characters are cool for being uncool, I argue that O’Malley is writing for an audience who has had similar situations occur in their own romantic relationships- using video games and comic references to create a bridge between his fictional adventures between Ramona and Scott and the audience member.

On top of Wright’s addition of sounds and 8-bit aesthetics in his movie adaptation, O’Malley applies video game culture to the rock scene of his fictionalized Toronto. Each of the band’s names is also a reference to video game culture. Scott’s band Sex Bomb-Omb is a mixture of the Tom Jones song “Sex Bomb”and the Mario Bros. villain “Bomb-Omb,” a walking cartoon bomb that explodes when Mario (or Luigi) steps on it. Crash and the Boys and Clash at Demonhead are both taken from titles of NES games while Gideon’s Toronto Chaos Theatre is a reference to the cult-classic SNES game *Earthbound* (Ward). In the second book in the series, we also told that Kim and Scott had a band in high school called Sonic & Knuckles- referencing a sequel in the Sonic the Hedgehog series for the Sega Genesis (O’Malley, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*).

These sounds and references may not be apparent to an audience member who is new to the franchise, but help to connect with the nerd audience on a second level- while the comic book narrative is played out on the screen, we see a transformation of the comic and nerd culture references in the comic book in a new form. Pulling directly from the comic, in the film after Scott has broken up with Knives and shown up for band practice, to get around the question of the breakup with Knives, Scott proclaims, “Oh check it out! I learned the bass line from Final Fantasy II” (O’Malley, *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*). Those who are not in the know may not get the reference to the long-running Role Playing Game, but this reference allows those who are already in the subculture further access and credibility.

These ideas run parallel to the one-upmanship we see in the hipster culture, where credibility is based on an obscure knowledge base. A mixture of popular culture from past decades with a specific knowledge of indie bands, modern artwork and fashion- the hipster takes specific images from mass culture and uses them as the basis for a specific skill set. Douglas Haddow, in a 2008 *Adbusters* article said it best-

“An artificial appropriation of different styles from different areas, the hipster represents the end of Western civilization- a culture lost in the superficiality of its past and unable to create any new meaning. Not only is it unsustainable, it is suicidal. While previous youth movements have
challenged the dysfunction and decadence of their elders, today we have the ‘hipster’- a youth subculture that mirrors the doomed shallowness of mainstream society," (Haddow).

The *Scott Pilgrim* series (and the film in particular) uses popular culture references as fuel for the main storyline. With *League of Evil Exes* (bosses), 1-Up Bonus Lives, RPG-esque “stats,” and other video game references O’Malley and Wright each create a text that is filled with cult imagery that is only apparent to specific audience members. While the movie may be more accessible to a mass audience that the comic book series, that mass audience must already have prior knowledge of the franchise (or where it is pulling its influence from) to make an impact. O’Malley has also created a mixture of hipster style (rock clubs, indie music) with geek culture (comic books, video games and movies) that is further applied by Wright in his adaptation that shows (often jokingly) the intricacies of hipster culture. As Scott enters the Chaos Theater (Level 7) for the first time he is asked by the bouncers what the password is, Scott replies “whatever,” and is let in by the hip guards. Stopped by two more guards asking for a second password, Scott replies with a shrug and a groan, allowing him to pass (Wright). As much as the movie plays on the fact that the character himself is a geeky twenty-something hipster, it is the aesthetic of the hipster embodied by his enemies and those employed by Gideon that are the enemy. Much like Haddow points out-

“Punks wear their tattered threads and studded leather jackets with honor, priding themselves on their innovative and cheap methods of self-expression and rebellion. B-boys and b-girls announce themselves to anyone within earshot with baggy gear and boomboxes. But it is rare, if not impossible, to find an individual who will proclaim themself a proud hipster. It’s an odd dance of self-identity – adamantly denying your existence while wearing clearly defined symbols that proclaims it,” (Haddow).

During the last fight scene, as Scott returns to the Chaos Theatre for a second chance at saving Ramona (thanks to an extra life picked up earlier in the movie) we hear background characters talk about the differences between the movie and the comic book- Wright most likely poking fun at other comic book movie adaptations as well as himself (*Scott Pilgrim*...). In the fight before at the Chaos Theatre, we hear the same characters talking about the difference between unnamed bands first and second albums. I argue that Wright while pulling from the source material is also adding his own commentary on the hipster culture through Scott Pilgrim and his friends, showing what he believes is a key part of living in your twenties is creating a library of
knowledge in a specific area of popular culture be it music, video games or otherwise. Unlike Superman or Batman, characters who were either born with extraordinary powers or honed their skills through intense training, Scott Pilgrim is able to fight the overly-powered evil exes by using his wits alone. He is not particularly strong or powerful but is thrown into a situation where he must improvise with what he already knows. The *Scott Pilgrim* franchise helps to also apply comic book heroics in the context of a twenty-something loser while reinforcing the structure of a myth that is made apparent to a new audience. This relates to how Claude Levi-Strauss wrote about looking at the structure of a myth as it is retold orally. “First, the question has often been raised why myths, and more generally oral literature, as so much addicted to duplication, triplication or quadruplication of the same sequence. If our hypotheses are accepted, the answer is obvious: repetition has as its function to make the structure of the myth apparent,” (Levi-Strauss, 443). The *Scott Pilgrim* series helps to recreate a new way to look at a story by using hip, geek culture as its base. The character is unlike other American superheroes and, as Jamie Weinman states is “innocent compared to the more violent, powerful Americans (plus bad guys from India and Japan),” (Weinman, 78-80). Instead of mythological beasts to slay, Scott must win back his love through a series of modern-day tasks that often revolve around the motifs of videogames embedded in live music concerts. In defeating evil exes #5 and 6, for example, Scott and the rest of Sex Bomb-Omb had to go “amp to amp” with the Katayanagi Twins- fighting each other above the crowd with rock and roll powered beasts (*Scott Pilgrim*...). The heroic fight to the top by Scott is reminiscent of video games like *Super Mario Bros.* and *Megaman*, where a final boss meets the hero at the end of each stage. What differs with Scott is that we are led to believe that his predicament could happen to any of us and is relatable to anyone who has ever had to deal with exes while dating, even if the exes don’t transform into coins after a fight.

O’Malley and Wright use video game culture as a way to tell a story of romance and self-realization, using geek and hipster culture as a basis for the tale, with O’Malley pulling from popular culture as a way to connect with a specific audience. The film adaptation also builds upon popular culture knowledge of the audience to strengthen that specific idea of what it means to not only be hip but also what it takes to be a hip geek. *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* is, at its core, a romantic comedy that uses youth culture to forward the storyline that updates the perils of Mario and Link in a modern, Canadian setting.


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Scott Pilgrim Vs. the World as Postmodern Parody of Parody: Allusion, Exclusion, and Consumption in the Film Adaptation

by Erin Hollis

Upon opening the first page of Bryan Lee O’Malley’s comic book series Scott Pilgrim, it is clear to many readers that the series seeks to parody not only common conventions of comic books, and in particular manga, but also video games and the hipster subculture. The style that O’Malley adopts in his work consciously and repeatedly satirizes the big-eyed style so common to manga and the frequent references to video game conventions highlights the absurd, yet appealing, nature of that genre. The written series is full of inside jokes and allusions to certain cultures that will leave the uninitiated reader lost and confused. Such readers may experience similar confusion when watching the movie adaptation, Scott Pilgrim vs. The World. The movie adaptation functions as a further level of parody that at once seems to embrace the parody of the original but also adds a self-reflexive, postmodern layer of commentary that criticizes the consumption of these cultures. In this essay, I will argue that the movie adaptation both disseminates and subverts a sort of hipster subculture that is attuned to obscure allusions and has a recurrent focus on the idea of selling out, by illustrating how the movie demonstrates that the hipster subculture itself is in the process of becoming a product to consume. Creating a movie version of the series appeals to hipster subculture with its inside jokes, but also parodies the desire of hipsters to know something is cool before everyone else does and to consume what is deemed cool before anyone else can.

Triple Parody in Scott Pilgrim, the Written Series

O’Malley’s Scott Pilgrim series persistently references popular culture in order both to create and to parody a certain kind of audience. Because the series references two of the hipster subculture’s common obsessions, manga and video games, it is able to play to the desires of the audience for inside jokes and exclusive content. Much like the secret surprises that can be found in video games or the specific knowledge needed to read and understand manga, to fully understand and enjoy the written series, readers must have knowledge of secret and often esoteric references. The feeling of knowing a reference invites readers into the exclusive world
of the characters even as they are repeatedly thrust out of that world when they don’t get a reference. The series, then, urges readers to seek out knowledge that they might not have in order to feel as if they belong in the audience of the series. Without such knowledge, much of the humor is lost, and the parody of both manga and video games becomes less meaningful. O’Malley has also added a third layer of parody to his text, as he parodies those who read his books, creating characters that resemble his audience in their desire to get inside jokes. Thus, the series not only provides references to manga and video game culture, but also parodies those who partake in that culture, commenting on the hipster subculture within both the United States and Canada.

**Manga**

The style of the written series consciously uses some of the conventions of manga [1] in order to exaggerate the style of manga and demonstrate the absurdity of its conventions. Because manga typically does not follow the conventions of typical western comic books, the style of O’Malley’s series immediately strikes the reader as out of the ordinary. Even the size of the books is different from the typical trade paperback American comic book. Such conventions as the size of the books and the style of O’Malley’s drawings immediately cue the reader that they must approach reading this text in a different way. Even though the series mimics the manga style, however, it doesn’t entirely require readers to have knowledge of how to read manga. Typically, manga are read from right to left and from what western audiences would perceive as back to front. O’Malley eliminates these conventions, allowing for a more conventional western-style reading experience. But O’Malley does regularly employ other common conventions from manga that would appear odd or confusing to the uninitiated reader. One such convention is how O’Malley draws the characters. Typically, manga characters are known for their large eyes, small mouths and abnormal hair color. Paradoxically, the various hair colors make characters appear more western to Japanese audiences. O’Malley consistently employs these characteristics in his drawings, giving all of the characters the recognizable big eyes and small mouths of the manga genre. He also pokes fun at the abnormal hair color so commonly used by having Ramona change her hair color quite often. Even though the series is mostly black and white, Scott’s reactions, the covers and one section of volume 4 depict Ramona as constantly changing her hair color much to Scott’s dismay. O’Malley also uses the manga convention of displaying emotion in the way the character is drawn. Sometimes, a character will have heavier outlines to denote a more negative
feeling, and he often has them appear dotted to express embarrassment or anger. Finally, manga is typically divided into several genres based on the audiences they attract. Two of those genres, shonen and shojo, are employed in O’Malley’s series. Shonen manga are typically aimed at boys and focus on adventure whereas Shojo manga are aimed at girls and focus on romance. O’Malley combines the adventure of Shonen with the romance of Shojo, creating a style that may attract a more diverse audience in terms of gender. This combination also helps to point up the absurdity of both genres as O’Malley exaggerates both the romance and the adventure so central to those genres.

Video Game Culture

In addition to the mimicry of manga conventions, throughout the six volumes in the series, O’Malley consistently references common video game characteristics in order to establish inside jokes with his audience. Such references do not initially occur in the early parts of volume one as O’Malley creates an expectation from his audience of a realistic world that he subsequently undermines with unrealistic video game references. The series is essentially structured like many video games, with each volume introducing an evil ex that Scott must fight. The evil exes function as the “bosses” of each volume that Scott must defeat in order to move on to the next level (or in this case, volume). After Scott defeats each ex, they turn into Canadian coins, echoing series like *Super Mario Brothers* in which Mario and friends are rewarded with coins for killing different creatures. At one point in O’Malley’s series, there is a save point that Scott can access in order to save his progress, and he also gets a one-up, giving him an extra life at the end of the series. Scott also levels up throughout the series after experiencing particular moments of growth in his life. Finally, the doors that Ramona and, subsequently, Scott use to access the subspace highways are direct allusions to the *Super Mario Brothers* series as they have stars on them like the doors in many of the *Super Mario Brothers* games. All of these references combined serve to give the series a surrealistic atmosphere. By bringing in these allusions, O’Malley both highlights the absurdity of video game conventions and how little they resemble reality and attracts audiences who can identify such references and relate them back to their own experiences. Using the unrealistic and exaggerated characteristics of both manga and video games places in stark contrast much of the realistic content of the series, with its commentary on
growing up, love and friendship. In addition, such frequent allusions allow O'Malley to create a sort of insider audience who will better understand his book through their experiences with reading manga or playing video games. However, O'Malley takes his parody a step further by poking fun at his own audience’s desire to be included by creating characters who resemble his expected audience and demonstrating the absurdity of such exclusivity, which is a hallmark of the current hipster subculture.

**Hipster Subculture: O'Malley’s Audience**

That O'Malley is purposely commenting on the current so-called “hipster” subculture in his work is immediately made clear in one panel in the last volume of the series. In the volume, Ramona is wearing a shirt that reads “hipster” (*Scott Pilgrim’s Finest Hour*). O'Malley put this reference into his work to indicate to fans who followed him on Twitter that this was last panel that he drew in the entire series. O'Malley plays with the prevalent attitude within the hipster culture towards exclusivity by giving his followers on Twitter this nugget of information, demonstrating how he is playing with his own audience in his creation of the series. In addition to this inside reference, the series is full of references to esoteric information that only those who are “in the know” will catch. The t-shirts that the characters wear reference bands, video games, or television shows, and the places that they go are mostly real places in Toronto that the uninitiated will not recognize. Ramona’s knowledge of the subspace roads also comments on the hipster subculture. Scott is shown as being less cool than Ramona because he did not know of the spaces until he met her. Overall, however, O'Malley’s parody of the hipster subculture is light and only gently mocking, suggesting an appreciation for his audience even as he criticizes some of the more silly practices. The movie adaptation, however, takes the parody to a ridiculous extreme, risking alienating its core audience in the process.

**Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The Movie as Postmodern Parody**

The movie adaptation stays true to the written series in many ways, using the video game references and giving a few nods to anime conventions as well. Indeed, it seems that the co-writer and director, Edgar Wright, has gone out of his way to include video game references in
the movie, giving the movie even more video game references than the written series. This is not entirely surprising given that the movie condenses the action of the written series in order to focus mostly on Scott’s fights with Ramona’s evil exes, which is where O’Malley makes the most video game references. The movie adaptation adds many references even in the non-fight scenes, however, including music and sound effects from various video games throughout. There are fewer nods towards anime, and thus manga, in the movie adaptation, but interior monologues and certain shots reflect some anime conventions. In this way, the movie adaptation uses many of the parodic elements of the written series.

In addition to adopting the written series’ original parody, the movie brings in another level of parody with its depiction of music culture. In the written series, music culture is brought up a little bit since Scott is in a band and he interacts with other musicians. However, in the movie, the role of music is elevated to a much higher level. This may be because music can work much better in a movie format than in a written format, but the movie also uses music to provide a parody of the hipster subculture that O’Malley also parodies in his series. The movie creates a battle of the bands as a central plot point and alters some of the evil exes into musicians. For example, in the written series the Katayanagi twins create robots to battle Scott, but in the movie they are DJs who have an amp vs. amp war with Scott’s band “Sex Bob-Omb.” Additionally, though Gideon Graves is a music producer in the written series, in the movie, he is a famous independent music producer who will give “Sex Bob-Omb” a recording contract if they win the battle of the bands. By introducing more music references into the movie, the commentary on the hipster subculture becomes more overt as the characters make frequent references to selling out and to what bands are considered cool.

In the movie, it is Gideon Graves who represents the most obvious criticism of hipster subculture. Although almost all of the characters in the movie fulfill hipster stereotypes in some way, with their thrift store clothing, lack of money, attention to what might be considered cool and repeated esoteric references, Gideon Graves turns the hipster subculture on its head, demonstrating to an audience full of hipsters many of the negative qualities of that subculture. From the beginning of Scott’s entrance into Gideon’s Chaos Theatre, references to hipster subculture abound. As Scott strides up to the entrance, he is immediately confronted with a stereotypically dressed hipster who asked him for the password. That a password is required to enter Gideon’s presence comments on how hipsters have an expectation of a certain kind of
knowledge from their friends. Scott, in his frustration, merely says “Whatever” in a dismissive tone, which turns out to be the password and to which the hipster says “cool,” once again parodying the hipster quality of indifference (Scott Pilgrim vs. The World). Scott continues through the entrance and is confronted with two more stereotypically dressed hipsters who ask for the second password, to which Scott responds, “eh,” which again turns out to be the correct password (Scott Pilgrim vs. The World). The movie pokes fun at the indifference so commonly displayed in the hipster subculture in this scene, but later demonstrates an angrier response when Scott re-enters the Chaos Theatre after having used his free life. Instead of giving the passwords this time, Scott tells the first hipster that his “hair looks stupid,” mocking the attention so often given to hairstyles in the hipster subculture, and beats up the hipsters asking for the second password (Scott Pilgrim vs. The World).

Once Scott enters the venue, he sees his former band performing and Gideon and Ramona perched atop a large pyramid observing the crowd. Clearly, the Chaos Theatre is the place to be; Gideon describes it as a “cathedral of cutting edge taste” (Scott Pilgrim vs. The World). The members of “Sex Bob-Omb” have clearly sold out and are unhappy with their current situation as they are playing a song called “No Fun” when Scott enters the club and Kim sulkily says, “We are Sex Bob-Omb. We are here to make money and sell out and stuff,” again referencing common hipster criticisms of bands that become financially successful, but also indicating that the hipster subculture itself is something to be consumed as Gideon turns their hipster music into something to be sold (Scott Pilgrim vs. the World). But it is with the actual encounter with Gideon that the movie provides its biggest criticism of hipster subculture. Gideon is obviously depicted in a negative light since he is controlling Ramona and trying to destroy Scott. He also exhibits many of the qualities of a typical hipster. He wears black-rimmed glasses, he claims to know what is cool, and he cultivates indifference. When Scott has to defeat a bunch of hipster henchmen before he can battle Gideon, the song that is playing in the background is called “Death to All Hipsters” (Trivia Track, Scott Pilgrim vs. The World); clearly, even Gideon’s henchmen are hipsters, demonstrating Gideon’s full subversion of the subculture into something to be consumed. When Gideon is about to die, he yells to Scott in his frustration: “You’re not cool enough for Ramona. You’re a zero. Nothing. Me. I’m what’s hip. I’m what’s happening. I’m blowing up right now” (Scott Pilgrim vs. the World). By having Scott defeat Gideon after Gideon so clearly espouses hipster philosophy but also seeks to profit from such philosophy, the movie
makes clear its stance on the hipster subculture—as soon as it becomes a culture that can be sold to consumers, it loses its validity as a subculture.

The written series *Scott Pilgrim* is a parody of many things—video games, manga, its own audience—but the movie takes such parody to a ridiculous degree by not only poking fun at these cultures, but by seemingly destroying the very culture that it is depicting by turning it into something to consume both through the character of Gideon and by trying to turn the written series into a Hollywood blockbuster. When the Chaos Theatre is ruined and Gideon is defeated, it is unclear what position the movie is taking towards its audience that, after all, is full of hipsters looking for esoteric references and inside jokes. By extending the parody beyond the lighthearted style of O’Malley’s original series into a commentary on the consumption of the hipster subculture, the movie risks losing the very audience that O’Malley had created. However, because hipsters are so quick to realize when something is no longer cool, watching such a movie may serve to make them realize that the hipster subculture is on its last breathe and about to die, just as Gideon Graves does at the end of the movie.

**Note**


**Works Cited**


---. *Scott Pilgrim, Volume 2: Scott Pilgrim Versus the World*. Portland, OR: Oni Press, 2005


---. *Scott Pilgrim, Volume 6: Scott Pilgrim’s Finest Hour*. **Portland, OR: Oni Press, 2010.**


Hypervisualizing English?: ‘Reading’ the Subtext and Supertext in *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*.

by Anjali Pandey

This paper explores the excessive-graphization, or hyper-visualization of written English text in *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* (henceforth, *Scott Pilgrim*), and contends that while some occurrences of the over 100 graphic visualizations of written English in the filmic adaptation of this graphic novel indeed function on an overt level as part of the *mise-en-scène* of the graphic-novel genre, visual ‘Englishing’ in this film goes beyond peripherized filmic wallpapering, to instead functioning in a more subversive and covert role, namely, English language exportation. There is enough semiotic evidence in this filmic adaptation of a bestselling graphic novel to suggest that the multifarious uses of picturized English while aesthetic in orientation also function as a “consensual hallucination” [1] to satisfy salient market orientations - a triggering of implicit and explicit mimesis for English proficiency.

After all, the numerous hyper-visualizations of English overlayed in over 100 frames in this film, as the analysis below reveals, often index the entirety of semiotic meaning of the unfolding action. Consequently, for viewers, who can read English there is a total comprehension of intended meaning, while for emerging readers such as English Language Learners not quite able to ‘read’ the spotlighted visual English, a partial uptake of meaning via listening is still possible. In several scenes, the content of the picturized message which while not translated or transliterated is still presented in conjugation with enough visual and verbal scaffolding as to trigger an aural comprehension of meaning. So, the film serves to both trigger comprehension, while also tease non-proficient youth-viewers into learning to read in English if they intend on getting the whole meaning. In frames where visual or voiceover scaffolding is absent, the semantic import of the picturized English message consists of subtle, nuanced, semiotic information which while not entirely pertinent to the simultaneously unfolding action with which it is synchronized offers innovative allusions to shared cultural scripts. [2] Such a strategy adds a creative and interactive dimension to the viewership experience particularly for native speaker audiences.

In a sense then, the filmic adaptation of *Scott Pilgrim* astutely embeds a convalency of filmic intent: a market orientation towards both national and international youth audiences. This
duality of semiotic intent is manipulated via the twin strategies of supertext-ing and subtext-ing—two strategies through which the filmic adaptation of a bestselling graphic novel become the perfect aesthetic alibi to promote and privilege visual English. These two renditions of picturized English are realized in and through a plethora of multimodal manipulations—deftly delivered via a multiplicity of intertextual and intratextual strategies. The net effect: Scott Pilgrim’s innovative use of ‘visual Englishing’ in countless cinematic frames permits comprehension in both readers and non-readers of English. Indeed, Scott Pilgrim is filmed to have a universal appeal, “interpretability,” [3] and “accessibility” [4] both for national and international audiences both in the now and in the future.

Defining Intertextual vs. Intratextual Strategies:

Within the first three minutes of the unfolding action, audience members are bombarded with a plethora of innovative strategies through which visual English is digitally overlaid onto almost every millisecond of cinematic action confounding audience eyes, and which like all graphic novels successfully “pulls viewers” [5] into the emerging story. In the DVD director commentary accompanying the film, the director comments on this “head-spinning effect” [6] adding that he wanted the film to have a “Sesame Street feel” [7] —a film, which like any graphic novel has to be both ‘read’ as well as ‘seen.’ Such a strategy prompts in viewers a transmediation or a “multisensory” [8] effect in which reader-viewers “have to interpret the words in terms of the pictures and the pictures in terms of the words, in an intricate and recursive process entailing a continual back and forth relaying between text and pictures.” [9] This strategy is perhaps what makes Scott Pilgrim so innovative in its mimetic effect.

A cursory analysis of the meticulous overlay of visual English in the film, however reveals two types of strategies at work: an innovative use of both supertexting and subtexting. These dual strategies are realized via inter-textual manipulations: a complementary conflation of multimodal clues within a cinematic frame in a bid to enhance the ‘supertexting’ of English script photographed in the frame; and intra-textual strategies: a solo, spotlighting of visual English [10] either as foregrounded or backgrounded filmic content in a bid to evoke ancillary subtextual meaning not present in the frame. These two strategies, in addition to having the desired result of a phrenetic picturization of text, in net effect simultaneously prompt a desire to ‘read’ the
visualized English copiously spotlighted in the film. *Scott Pilgrim* can thus be viewed to be the perfect media prod—a cinematically construed, globally-oriented, advertisement for desire and need for English fluency. This is yet another way in which “Hollywood manages to establish its powerful hold over the global imagination.” [11]

Why such a duality of approaches in the filmic adaptation of a graphic novel? Operating on the premise that 21\textsuperscript{st} century cultural production is both a product of and a product for commerce, [12] the current paper reminds readers of the causal link between the context of filmmaking and the concomitant textual effects on aesthetic output. The cinematic genius of *Scott Pilgrim* rests on its marketability both for national and international audiences—a film which deftly combines elements of the five most commercially lucrative “quadrants” (including but limited to: appealing to the Clearasil crowd, teenage orientation, coming-of-age drama, love-story, and with a potential for franchising) [13] in a current Hollywood economic climate majorly aimed at marketing itself to teen audiences—the most predictable and prodigious of consumers specifically of movie tickets and generally of everything. [14] We are apprised that:

The studios zero in on teens not because they necessarily like them, or even because the teens buy buckets of popcorn, but because they are the only demographic group that can be easily motivated to leave their home. Even though lassoing this teen herd is enormously expensive... the studios profit from the fact that this young audience is also the coin of the realm for merchandisers. [15]

Furthermore, topping the list of such lucrative movie-making ventures are “comic-books...which use conventional or digital animation to artificially create action sequences, supernatural forces, and elaborate settings” [16] - all filmic features present in *Scott Pilgrim*.

For English speaking youth audiences - the largest consumers of movie-theater tickets in the United States [17] the film cleverly affords several opportunities for an innovative ‘viewing dimension’ - an ability to intelligently ‘interact’ with the film. For youth not-proficient in English - also, a rapidly emerging market - the film offers sufficient visual scaffolding to permit a partial to almost complete uptake of most of the cinematic intent. For a film to “activate interest in a global mass audience,” it has to contain “universally appealing elements (action, graphic content) and easily comprehended themes” [18] - criteria happily satisfied by *Scott Pilgrim*. After all, “In France, one out of every five books sold is a graphic novel.” [19] Since the workings of Hollywood are in effect to “pre-sell to foreign markets” [20] - any filmic analysis cannot afford to
disassociate the effects and consequences of such market concerns on eventual production design. [21] Thus, the techno-commercial genius of the filmic adaptation of *Scott Pilgrim* rests on the film’s effective merger of market and aesthetic interests delivered in the form of a convalence of visual intent - a synergy of graphic rendition which manages to both convey enough clues for decryption in native-speaker youth audiences, while also at the same time providing a perfect prod for English acquisition in audiences desiring further proficiency in their bid to fully ‘read’ the subtextual details which might be beyond their current reach. It can safely be concluded then that the astute manipulation of both peripheral and spotlighted visual English [22] in this film prompts a more nuanced understanding of the workings of picturized English as both an aesthetic and commercial [pun intended] enterprise.

**Examining the Strategies of Intertextual Meaning-Making**

In the intertextual uses of visual English in *Scott Pilgrim*, graphic English operates in tandem with other meaning-making devices in the unfolding action so that audience members are indeed able to follow the unfolding sequence of action. In such uses, there is a careful ‘supertexting’ - a blending and bleeding of text forms and modalities (textual, visual and aural scaffolding) to create a complementarity of comprehension options either thorough voice-overs which ‘read’ the overlaid text, or through dialogic details which reiterate and repeat the semantic import of the overlaid text within the frame. In short, a plethora of semiotic scaffolds and clues are afforded viewing audiences in their uptake of the unfolding meaning. For a film targeted at today's youth, this intertextuality is intentional - evident in the DVD director commentary accompanying the film which notes the addition of a video-game sequence in the first few minutes of the film - a seemingly ancillary detail missing in the original graphic-novel. Also noted is the amount of meticulous effort needed to create the ‘pixel swords’; the two player mode of several of the video-game-inspired scenes as well as the use of ‘robotic’-like techniques for other video-game-like sequences. [23] After all, today’s youth “have grown up with TV, electronic games, video games, and graphic software, and they need graphics to help them understand the message.” [24] This strategic use of intertextuality or supertexting in *Scott Pilgrim* occurs via three unique devices of semiotic renditio-three strategies also noted in research on pictureless books [25] namely: *Symmetry, Complementarity* and *Enhancement* - to which we now turn.
1. **Enhancement:** In such uses of intertextuality, words and pictures extend each others meaning. Perhaps one of the most creative of strategies utilized in *Scott Pilgrim*, we encounter several of such enhancements. Immediately noticeable are the visio-verbal encodings of *Aural English* - graphic renditions of phrasal text synchronized to an onomatopoeic soundtrack which mimics the reduplicated lexicalizations [26] of for example, a dinging doorbell, a tingling telephone (which is also visually forefronted), a ringing school-bell (as heard outside), and a plethora of other such examples. This mix of live action with a picturized overlay emblematic of graphic novel overtones, when viewed in tandem with the dozen or more other picturization strategies at work in *Scott Pilgrim* points to visual English taking not a peripheral, but rather, a prominent role in the film.

As further testament, consider the one-word lexicalizations carefully overlaid in several frames in *Scott Pilgrim*. In some cases, there is a meticulous graphic rendering of easily learned ‘one-wordsers’ (at least for emerging language learners) such as the microphone check of an opening song, a choral refrain, or even a hop - all carefully visualized below in the form of *Animated English* - lively, anthropomorphic renditions of English lexicalizations each possessing their own digitized **dynamism** which effectively emanate onto the unfolding frame - a double strategy aurally evocative while also lending itself to a ‘highlighting’ of particular linguistic signifiers. Furthermore, with the accompanying and complementary aural vocalizations, it is not hard for emerging learners to actually learn a few words of English in their ‘first’ viewing of this film.
These filmic enhancements are not static verbal expressions clued onto the frame, which “unspool at a predetermined rate” [27], but rather, lexicalizations which surface onto the cinematic space at energizingly fast rates - in a sense demanding even more of the audiences’ attention eager to ‘catch’ onto every one of these words. Additionally, these speech acts are of different sizes and shapes and unpredictably pounce and bounce out of the frame in an assortment of vivid forms. How can viewers not notice them? Consider for example the visualization of sound rendered through a lateral as opposed to a vertical cluttering of screen-space in the form of alphabetized English in the first two frames in the figure. We also ‘see’ several picturized screams and other aural-alphabetizations in later frames. This use of alphabetic notation serves a dual function: a clever forefronting of ‘comic-book’ sound, as well as a spotlighting of basic English alphabet - in short the A, B, and D of English.

Such spotlighting is accomplished via repetitive sequences as for example in the scrupulous visualization of the amount of force with which Scott bangs his head in a moment of frustration - a graphic rendering which while capturing the transition of frustrated force from a gentle thud to a forceful bump also permits for a recursive spotlighting of an English word.

Again, non-proficient learners are likely to leave the viewing experience having learnt such repeated words. Such examples of visual ‘Englishing’ confirm recent trends of English language acquisition through recursive viewings of film - a scenario in which the “bimodal presentation of
text and sound” permits for a “better recognition and memory of learned language on the part of learners of Hollywood films.” [28] After all, one can't but ‘see’ as they ‘hear’ and eventually desire an ability to ‘read’ these multifarious overlays. There is no avoiding them - there are so many of them!

2. **Symmetricity**: We find several frames in the film which offer a virtual equivalence between uttered words and their forefronted picturizations, as in this forefronted echo of two ‘tween’ colloquialisms. Again, for non-proficient speakers of English, this viewership experience is likely to have added pedagogical outcomes.

One of the most obvious working of symmetricity in *Scott Pilgrim* occurs through the use of **Hyper-labeling** in which there is a redundant concordance between the emerging dialog and its visual rendition on the frame in real time. Consider for example how the film opens - a synergized match between voiceover and picturized English - one word at a time. Even for native speakers, the emerging textual details encode the necessary humor - since as most know, Canada is far from mysterious!

Examine further how the labels of “cook” and “drum” are visually and verbally rendered. In the case of the latter, we have two complementary strategies delivered in tandem - within a single frame: enhancement and symmetricity in the form of two ‘learnable’ words.

3. **Complementarity**: In such uses, we find a use of both words and pictures contributing to the meaning of the unfolding story. Perhaps the most obvious example of such complementarity occurs via the use of comic-book English, as in the following scenes where budding love is visualized in and through the diminutive reduplicated form: “Kissy-Kissy” as are other ‘typical’ sounds of comic-book action. There is no doubt that visual English in these instances works to evoke the adaptive feel of the graphic novel.
However, other uses of spotlighted English move beyond such ‘simple’ semiotic signification to more ‘complex’ cinematic meaning. Consider, for instance, the complementarity accomplished via a foreshadowing of text synchronized to a voiceover comment as in the following example where the clue to the seven deadly ex-lovers is commented upon at the very same time as the camera pans to the image of several Xs - (yet another alphabet, non-proficient learners could potentially learn?).

In other cases, complementarity is accomplished via careful camerawork- via the strategy of “read-alouds”. Consider the following hypervisualization of forefronted English which while simulating a typical teen’s reading habits (skimming and scanning) also affords ample opportunity to spotlight visual English. After all, English takes up all of the screen space. So, once again, non-readers are proffered enough visual scaffolding to both comprehend and perhaps even learn a few more words of English.
For non-proficient users of English then, we have enough pedagogical content to move from the realm of one-word expressions to phrase-learning. After all, English expressions are carefully scaffolded and spotlighted for maximal uptake. It is exemplars such as this of the hyper-picturization of visual English in *Scott Pilgrim* which point to a more subversive role of the abundantly occurring visual English in the film - a linguistic agenda which literally as it figuratively moves visual English from a peripheral screen space to one of solo prominence - a filmic strategy to which we now turn.

**Examining the strategies of Intratextual Meaning-Making**

In the intertextual uses of visual English in *Scott Pilgrim*, semiotic redundancy is missing. Instead, meaning comprehension requires an actual ‘reading’ ability in English text and schematic allusion [29] for any audience-viewer desiring uptake of the ‘extra’ subtextual nuances of meaning afforded in several frames. In such uses, visual English operates contralaterally - as the *sole* semiotic agent of meaning. Additionally, audiences need to be able to read visual English to ‘get’ the embedded message which while seemingly peritextual, tangential and ‘apparently’ frivolous in semantic import, as the analysis below reveals, embeds an innovative linguistic edge to the unfolding action in terms of humor, irony, subtextual depth, and eventually viewership experience. Here, we experience an embedding of text which moves the viewing experience from a passive act of merely ‘watching’ to an active, interactive act of ‘doing’ or uncovering new meaning.

Such intratextual uses of sole-spotlighted graphic English occur via semiotic devices including but not limited to the strategies of *Counterpoint, Contradiction, Peritexting* and *Subtexting* - four additional creative strategies which afford native-speaker English teens an added ‘interactive’ component in their viewing experience of *Scott Pilgrim*. These strategies on an overt level mimic the actual literacy effects of graphic-novel reading, while on a covert level effectuate a market-driven agenda of catering to the filmic tastes of native speakers audiences - a sizeable movie-market.

In the intratextual uses of visual English in the film, comprehension is more than the sum of the picturized words - a fact made clear in the following visual whose symbolic import for a budding teen romance is clear. Judging from the forefronting of the interrogative “Continue” we witness a
careful use of text to yield a wealth of subtextual innuendo regarding the continuation of this budding romance.

Here, the carefully positioned word, ‘continue’ (in the middle of the screen space) serves as both foreshadower and cliffhanger of action yet to unfold.

4. Counterpointing: Perhaps the most powerful of uses of visual English in Scott Pilgrim occur via manipulations of counterpointing in which we find that the words and pictures in the frame tell different stories. Mimicking the effect of political cartoons, such counterpointing invokes “irony and satire” [30] via comments which while appearing “deceptively simple, embed allusions to a cultural script of symbols, metaphors, analogies and exaggeration.” [31] In Scott Pilgrim, these are perhaps the most innovative of cinematic spaces where most of the trademark sardonic subtext, humor, and irony resides - a rendition presented either as Foregrounded or Backgrounded English in which the graphic visualizations of written English offer contradictory details about sighted characters.

Consider for example, our first introduction to the characters in the film in which a skewed “point-of-view” is proffered via embedded textual detailing. One gets the impression that it is Scott’s version of ‘people-reading’ that the audience is getting - exactly the self-obsessed manner in which a teen would view the world, and an effective example of what literacy encounters do provide - namely, knowledge and “opinion” [32]

Since this information is ancillary to the unfolding action - native speakers of English are able to understand the humor embedded in these pop-ups with non-native speakers still managing to comprehend the unfolding action. Consider the following rendition where visual
English is both foregrounded and backgrounded in and through the scope of the camera’s lens. In other cases, *Pop-up English* adds a necessary dose of subtle humor for the watching teen since without the presence of this text, such subtextual meaning would be impossible to garner.

Via pop-ups, we are proffered enough detail to understand the subtle nuances of character. Scott’s chauvinistic characterization of girls in contrast to his characterization of male counterparts soon becomes obvious as seen below.

A use of *Text-speak acronyming* is evident in yet another captioning of a scene via a pop-up comment - confirming the Director’s claim that “classic teen” dialogs were used. [33]

In yet another innovative use of subtextuality, consider the *picturization* of infatuation - (and of unrequited teen-love - done in pink) in the following split-second frame where Scott-insensitively brushes off [in both a literal and figurative sense], Knives’ emanating love. Only audiences who can read English are able to ‘get’ the subtlety of meaning embedded in this visual metaphor which requires “sophisticated thinking” [34] to unpack its allusions to innocence and transience.

There are several other spotlightings of such one-liner English *captioning* as in the frame below for example, where the picturization of text re-confirms for audiences the intellectual ineptitude and lack of awareness of a rival ‘pretty-boy’ lover who we are told doesn’t know the meaning of the word “incorrigible.”
We see other subtextual detailings via the use of “censor blocks” to edit the dysphemia [35] spurting from a character’s mouth who we’ve already have been forewarned “has issues.” This strategy is verbally spotlighted via Scott’s exasperated interrogative: “How do you do that with your mouth?” Of course, native speakers know better! No more convincing proof of the power of visual English exits than in this subversive use of a simultaneously present yet absent picturization of taboo terms - a trait attributed to girls Scott doesn’t seem to like (see below). Here, we see the use of a deceptively simple textual strategy in bid to render a thematically complex idea which native speakers are indeed likely to grasp - inspired from comic-book writing but semiotically embellished in Scott Pilgrim for maximal filmic effect. [36]

Other subtle shades of meaning are proffered via the workings of Backgrounded English - again, far from accidental filmic inclusions. Consider for instance, the use of T-shirt English [37] in the film where we witness a ‘branding’ of messages which even the director concedes in the DVD commentary concedes, for some of the shirts required clearance [38].

The blatant use of one of the most overt markers of literacy - quotation marks - in the form of seemingly innocuous T-shirt English which Scott covertly sports at the very same time as this symbol overtly asserts the primacy of reading in this film - an essential requirement for viewing this film, and a filmic fact which cannot be missed.

5. **Contradiction:** Nothing is more fulfilling in the ‘reading’ experience of Scott Pilgrim however, than in our encounters with the strategy of contradiction. In this creative use of visual Englishing
in the film, the words and pictures flatly contradict each other. Three innovative strategies which the director employs are: **Signage English** where the irony of the unfolding action is evident only to readers who share the same sociolinguistic scripts [39] as in the following scene - where the server downright violates the posted prohibition against cell-phone usage (see, the out-of-focus sign).

We see yet another example in a contrived library scene where Scott violates another rule - loudly declaring to Knives that: “Libraries remind me of grade school” - even after audiences have been shown the following sign urging peace. This is yet another instance of how subtextual detailing prods teen viewers to ‘infer causality, consequences and relationships” [40] in the visually rendered material.

A similar subtlety of meaning occurs in Scott’s violation of yet another rule - an irony evident only to ‘readers’ of the posted sign. Taken together, these readings permit a vicarious and ‘safe’ catharsis and affirmation of teen rebellion in younger viewing audiences.

A second clever strategy employed is the use of **Pop-Up Englishing** in which we ‘read’ contradictory forefronted information pertinent to the unfolding action. Consider for example, the following contradictory message proffered to readers regarding whether the band can get out of playing where we are told the opposite. Here, visual English is both literally and figuratively filmed as taking center stage - a focus not on the image, but “the proper word.” [41]

Via a third strategy of **“Fun-fact English”**, we are proffered contradictory information about a music venue - all instances of how the overlays is such frames permit for an ‘interactive’ component to the entertainment experience - a staple of most recent, teen-oriented merchandising. [42]
6. **Peritexting:** In this use of visual Englishing in *Scott Pilgrim*, there exists a sole spotlighting of visual English - a filmic strategy which often provides ancillary textual information in the form of untranslated, untransliterated, and non-scaffolded ‘Englishing.’ We see several uses of *Foregrounded visual English* text in the following filmic renditions:

(a). Picturized **transitions** or **Narrative English.** In such audience-oriented uses of graphic English, audience members read along, and gain ancillary plot and cohesion details. In such examples of **Read-along English** we get a forefronting of sequentially picturized English - synchronized to a staccato soundtrack- which both draws attention to the appearing text as well as permits for a **read-along.** Soon, words clutter the entire screen space. Again, ancillary details are proffered which while fleeting offer a nuance of new cinematic meaning to native-speakers’ viewership-experience. For teen audiences, the “pee-o-meter” which visually empties as Scott drains his bladder is just one of the innumerous ways in which the technical design in *Scott Pilgrim* has audiences hooked.

Consider the spotlighting of transitional devices which while simulating the graphic novel reading encounter also permit hypertext-oriented, native-speaker, youth-audiences an added ability to ‘interact’ with the emerging text. Consider for instance, the overt spotlighting of the passage of time on Scott’s first date with Ramona - a meticulous visual indexing signaling the passage of time in 15-minute intervals. For the viewing teen, this filmic strategy adds suspense, drama, and cultural commentary to the unfolding scene (a prominent preoccupation of many a teen mind) - one which starts with Tea and as every hopeful teen knows ends we know where!

Once again, the filmic genius of *Scott Pilgrim* rests on its ability to create valid reading encounters for viewing teens - cinematic frames which provide “engaging material” and “reward meaningful analysis on their part by providing content that has important connections to their lives.” [43] Such a strategy also moves viewers away from the passive realm of merely ‘watching’ to the active realm of ‘interacting’ with the film.

Such a literacy encounter has to feel good particularly for a generation of teens tiresomely (from their point of view) labeled as averse to reading. This astute transformation of the drudgery of ‘reading” into an “enjoyable” and “engaging” experience is particularly innovative in the film. [44] The marketability of *Scott Pilgrim* thus lies in its incisive awareness of the workings of the teen-mind. Research demonstrates that when teens are allowed opportunities to be “makers of meaning” the psychic reward is “empowerment” [45] - further prompting an advertisement of
the film to peers by word-of-mouth reviews which only add to a prized Hollywood ideal-increased audience awareness. [46]

(b). Forefronted English: There is subtle and poetic use of such subtexting as in the following sequence of forefronted visual English. Here, Scott’s intentional blockage of a single word effectively adds a double entendre - a new nuance of meaning to the unfolding scene as captured below:

Again, for native speakers, these ‘read-alongs’ add a hyperbolic twist to the unfolding action resulting in the feeling that audience members are each discovering new meaning on their own - in a sense, interacting with the unfolding text, and consequently engaging in their own independent “panel analysis” [47] of mise-en-scène, comic-book inspired frames. This ‘discovery’ of a new layer of meaning via a solitary act of on-screen ‘reading’ of picturized text spotlighted on film is one of the most powerful of cinematic strategies employed in the film. This feature of Scott Pilgrim would be interesting only on an aesthetic level if we didn’t also know that with the huge market currently available in DVD sales, films have to increasingly offer competitively designed “interactive experiences” [48] if they intend on out-competing other rival sources of interactive ‘rentertainment.’

(c). Captioning: Via the strategy of captioning, we see several frames which picturize either the mood of the moment or Scott’s interior monologue.

7. Subtexting: In this use of visual English, there is a double-encoding of subtextual meaning. Consider the following example of a teen anathema “the Glare” - a classic exemplar of picturized English signifying a
“meaning which does not happen in the words, or the pictures, but somewhere in-between.” [49]

Other subtextual details are rendered in the form of millisecond glimpses into Scott’s mental processing of events - which in the binary logic of most teens is visualized in the form of a scale. Again, since “thematic subtext” [50] is a staple of comic-book genres, we see how the filmic adaptation of this graphic novel is unlikely to disappoint its teen viewers.

English picturization also occurs in the form of verbal and visual acronyming [51] either as visually rendered Text-speak, IM English, or as Overtypes as in the scene below where a lexical item is carefully overlaid on to the emerging frame in a manner insinuating an impromptu bodily urge:

Other examples of such foregrounding and backgrounding occur via a picturization of interior monologuing as in the following example where character worry is both verbalized and visualized for audiences to follow along in the form of Scott’s self-guessing of band talent in a competition: “How are we going to follow this? We’re not going to win?”

In all these uses of visual Englishing, it can safely be concluded that in addition to spotlighting visual English, readers of English are provided with extra meanings which require “an active, though largely subconscious participation on the part of the reader of literary closure - of
observing the parts but perceiving the whole.” [52] We see other concretizations of visual metaphors as for example the sarcastic picturization of “shoot me” as rendered below, and set to the soundtrack of a ricocheting gun:

A similar strategy occurs via the strategy of **Annotating** as in this scene below where there is a clever use of a ‘graphic-organizer’ orientation to annotate and simultaneously comment on salient paraphernalia photographed in the frame. Audiences are offered a perfect ‘reading’ position - a privileged vantage point so to speak, and strategically placed behind the ‘reading’ roommate in the stills below. With DVD sales, being the most lucrative item in current Hollywood, [53] such labelings permit for a “re-viewing” of the film. Why? After all, it is only in later viewings that one really gets the humor embedded in this scene. Via the annotative, parenthetical picturizations of text, audiences soon figure out who the apartment **really** belongs to. Additionally, this instance of filmic annotating while successfully mimicking the “high angle long shot perspective” [54] typically found in comics also cleverly simulates the ‘densely packed” [55] web-based reading encounters most teens are increasingly privy to - a reading encounter which prompts readers to “move their eyes diagonally and up and down in addition to side to side” [56] in a sense forcing a focus on the words. Such a filmic layout only “multiplies the effect of the visual and textual information” [57] in the embedded scene.

We see a similar annotating of other feelings - the sudden urge to urinate for example - an unpredictable picturization of text simulating the impromptu nature of this mundane of physiological acts for example.

A similar “arrowing” or annotating of other mundane phenomena (but of interest to teen minds) adds other places for laughter in the unfolding film:

Scott’s extended bad-hair day makes for further semiotic comment. Perhaps the most complex of such strategies occurs in scenes in which there is a merging of several strategies of visual
Englishing as in the following scene where audience members are offered the following causal analysis regarding the ‘touchy’ issue of Scott’s hair - the raison d’être for his bad haircut.

The visual rendering of subtext re-occurs in the form of a rash of thoughts running through Scott’s head, and picturized in the following graphic-organizer rendition. Here, like all teens with a propensity towards fabrication especially when it comes to old, love interests, we see a reliance on subtextual meaning - an extended “gestalt whereby the mind works continually to complete the picture” [58] with the net effect being one of “an intimacy between creator and audience” [59] - a creative synergizing of customized entertainment particularly for a generation of teens reared on choice.

Even seemingly peripherized inclusions of English as in the following frames require a ‘noticing’ and ‘reading’ as the following two static shots of flip-chart English - each of which embeds its own subtextual intent.

There are also several frames of static - flip-chart English used to offer ancillary detail in teen-speak terms. For example, we are proffered a fleeting comparative analysis of the differences between villain identical twins - an effective rendering of a comparative trait analyses delivered in Venn-diagram-terms - a staple graphic-organizer form fed to most teens schooled in our current era of multiple-intelligences/differentiated instruction.
Verbalizing English

But it is not just the picturization of English that is unpredictably, incessantly and interruptively inserted into the filmic tapestry of *Scott Pilgrim*, but additionally, a verbalization of the workings of English structure which also fills its dialogic space. Taken together then, these seemingly isolated scenes on, and about English once again give a special place to English in this film. Consider the forefronting of the following unsolicited story about Pacman’s origins which Scott recounts to Ramona (with its own subtextual meaning).

Scott: Well, Pacman was originally called Puckman. They changed it not because Pacman looks like a Hockey player...they were worried that people would scratch out the “P” and turn it into an “F.”

Audiences are only too likely to be able to fill in the unstated. The DVD extras reveal that this dialog was a cinematic request added into the plot on the part of studio executives. [60] There are other examples of attention drawn to features of English. Consider for instance the error correction that Scott uses to humiliate an Ex-boyfriend in the following exchange:

    Todd: Hey Lovebirds! We have unfinished business *I* and *He*
    Scott: [correcting him] “*He* and *Me*”
    Todd: Don’t you talk to me about grammar!

Via the strategy of spell-alouds, emerging and fluent readers of English are proffered even more details about the workings of English. We can’t help but notice the on-screen spelling of “S-l-i-c-k” proffered in one frame in which demon goddesses spell-out the word. Consider also the following dialog which occurs between Scott and Wallace which verbalizes at the very same time as it affords an opportunity to engage in an on-screen spell-aloud:

    Wallace: The L-word. No?
    Scott: Lesbian?
    Wallace: No
Scott: Love

There is even a high-octane scene in which Scott writes in accelerated English with the camera carefully recording the entirety of output via a close-up shot. The litany of such examples could go on but in the interests of space has to end here.

We see a similar verbalization of a text-messaging encounters which while serving as a fill-in for crucial plot twists, also serve as an exemplar of Hollywood’s “below the line” [61] profit motives as these pertain to the nebulous but presciently present subject of product placement in current film. One can’t but help but notice all the acronyming - even the re-invented, hyperbolized spelling of “hot” in the message below. In the DVD commentary, the Director concedes that this was indeed a strategy of product placement saying: “Thank you Blackberry” [62] - a confirmation that in the end, every second of cinematic action on a movie canvas is both market driven and market-driving.

At a later point in the film, we get an ‘over-verbalization’ of text-speak when one of the girls exclaims: “Your BFF is about to get F-ed in the B.” - a concatenation of alphabet-acronyms only too familiar to native-English speaker teens. Text-speak is both verbally and visually forefronted. Eventually then, visual English, rather than actor talent takes up all of the coveted screen space in Scott Pilgrim.

Concluding Remarks:

In Scott Pilgrim then, picturized English - visual English as opposed to aural English (the staple of most films) takes center stage, and becomes one of the most potent ways to both spotlight and advertise the language. After all, 30% of the cerebral cortex is assigned to processing sight in
comparison to the mere 3% devoted to aural processing. [63] Is it any wonder then that visual images such as the picturization of English as used in Scott Pilgrim are registered in a mere “fraction of a second” [64] and what’s more, like all picturizations are likely to be “indelibly etched and stored in long term memory.” [65]

For learners across the globe able to ‘hear’ the meaning of the superbly scaffolded super-text which is meticulously and digitally overlaid in Scott Pilgrim, the film succeeds in allying frustrations while at the same time offers the perfect tease - or prod, so to speak - for attaining levels of linguistic proficiency in English to permit a real “reading” of the embedded subtextuality which such youth-audiences ‘see’ on the silver screen. In Scott Pilgrim, visual English is semiotically significant. We are witness to a linguistic showcasing seemingly synchronized as an innovative wallpapering of comic-book mise-en-scène, but in fact, a filmic manipulation functioning to privilege visual English in the unfolding filmic action. The strategic incorporation of tokenized, picturized ‘comic-book’ English is but a vehicular means to highlight verbal, and visual English in the film - a linguistic feat accomplished in and through a plethora of potent semiotic strategies.

Screen-space cluttering of visual English in Scott Pilgrim reflects an astute use of language as filmic strategy - as linguistic capital. Consequently, English becomes both a filmic instrument and a filmic product in this instance of global transcultural flows. [66] Scott Pilgrim’s filmic genius therefore rests on its ability to adequately satisfy current studio pressures towards “audience creation” [67] - a costly enterprise which while taking “$30 to 50 million to herd teens to the multiplexes,” [68] in the era of globalization, “has become just as important a creative product as the film itself.” [69] Most would concede that “beyond the movies, the money, and the job creation, Hollywood produces another form of wealth: the pictures in our head by which the world at large defines the phenomenon of American culture” [70] - which in Scott Pilgrim vs. The World successfully as it carefully, conflates proficiency in visual English ‘reading’ as a necessary credential of and for 21st century filmic consumption.

Notes
[5] Ibid. p. 108
[6] Scott-Pilgrim vs. The World. DVD extras: Director Commentary
[7] Ibid.
[8] McTaggart, 2008, p. 34
[17] Ibid.
[18] Epstein, 2009, p. 218
[21] see e.g., Miller et al, 2005 and MacDonald, & Wasko, 2008
[22] Pandey, 2010, p.5
[23] Scott-Pilgrim vs. The World. DVD extras: Director commentary
[26] O'Grady et al 2010
[27] Versaci, 2008, p. 96
[29] Peregoy and Boyle, 2008.
[31] Ibid. p. 115
[32] Versaci, 2008 p. 93
[33] Scott-Pilgrim vs. The World. DVD extras: Director Commentary
[34] Versaci, 2008, p. 116
[37] Pandey, 2010b, pp. 98-100
[38] Scott-Pilgrim vs. The World. DVD extras: Director commentary
[40] Versaci, 2008, p. 116
[41] Ibid. p. 94
[48] Epstein, 2009, p. 192
[50] Ibid. p. 97
[51] Crystal, 2008
[54] Versaci, 2008, p. 98
[55] Ibid. p. 97
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid p. 98
[58] Versaci, 2008, p.102
[59] McCloud, 1994, p. 64
[60] Scott-Pilgrim vs. The World. DVD extras: Director commentary.
[61] Epstein, 2009, p.118
[64] Ibid
[65] Ibid
[66] Pennycook, 2007
[67] Epstein, 2009, p. 54
[68] Ibid
[70] Epstein, 2009, p. 206

Bibliography


*Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*. DVD extras: Director Commentary. Directed by Edgar Wright. (Universal Studios, California: August 2010).


