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The 'Spectacular' Spiderman, From Page to Cel: The Process of Motion Projection in the Adaptation of Spider-Man and Venom from Comic Book to Animation

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Abstract

The intention of this research paper is to analyse the implicit and perpetuated motion present in Comic Books and Animation as media respectively and to break down the incumbent techniques in the adaptation from a seemingly static medium to one that is articulated. The Marvel Comics characters Spider-Man and his nemesis Venom will be used as the subjects of the analysis due to Spider-Man's deeply ingrained history in comics making him a readily identifiable character. The motion present in both media will be demonstrated by a close, in-depth analysis of the relationship between Venom's first appearance in *Amazing Spider-Man #299* and Episode 13: *Nature vs. Nurture* of the "Spectacular Spider-Man" animated series, with summative conclusions to follow.

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Chapter 1: The comic and the cel – A historical contextualisation

This research paper aims to explore the relationship between, and adaptation of, comic books to animation, with specific focus on the Marvel comics character Spider-Man and his nemesis Venom. There will be a brief comparative study between the various Spider-Man animated series, but this particular report will focus on the most recently developed and critically acclaimed 2-dimensional animated series[1]; *Spectacular Spider-Man* (2008 – 2009), with character designs by comic illustrator Sean 'Cheeks' Galloway and issues 299 to 304 of the *Amazing Spider-Man* (cmc), comic book series (illustrated by Todd MacFarlane), which heralded the creation of the character Venom[i].

However, before this can be conducted, a historical contextualisation of the relationship between comic books and animation, as well as the usage of certain terminology, is required.

Comic books/ strips have a history spanning hundreds of years, with some scholars debating the exact date of origination of this medium.[2] I must state though that this debate falls outside the scope of this paper, as the intention is to discuss the relationship between, and adaptation of, comic books and animation. This offers a far more contemporary platform, if not necessarily more recent (as the time-period I will be working with spans from the late 1800s through to the present year, hence not all examples will be recent in nature).

It must be noted that the term "comic book" has also become quite contentious and difficult to establish and, thus far, comic scholar Scott

[1] 2-Dimensional animation will hence-forth be referred to by the industry moniker *cel animation*, which is the shorthand version of celluloid animation.
[2] For example, Mario Saraceni, author of *The Language of Comics* (2003), speculates that the comic lineage can be traced back as far as Egyptian Hieroglyphics, but this is a rather obfuscated belief. Saraceni does admit though that comics as we identify them first appeared in England in 1884 and featured the first comic hero Ally Sloper.

McCloud seems have provided the most suitable definition in the context of this paper. In his influential book *Understanding Comics*, McCloud defines the idiomatic usage of the term comic books as: "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/ or produce an aesthetic response in the reader." (1993: 9) However, McCloud does admit that this definition, whilst being as broad as possible, does not cover the single panel cartoon (such as Gary Larson's *The Far Side*) as it is merely a single image and hence does not form part of a sequence. I find, however, that even single panel cartoons such as *The Far Side* can actually still conform to the definition of a comic semiotically as single panel cartoons still possess the ability to convey a series of events or motions within the boundaries of a single panel (please see Chapter 2 for more information on space in comics).

For the purpose of this paper, the term Graphic Novel will also be included under the moniker of Comics. It must be noted though that graphic novels differ from traditional comics in that there is a more 'hard-edged' or serious connotation behind them ; the term Graphic Novel was initially coined by Art Spiegelman in order to differentiate his seminal graphic tome *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (Volume 1 was completed in 1986 an the second in 1991) from the mainstay of pulp comics The term graphic novel is also used to refer to long form, stand -alone works as well as collections of trade paperbacks that follow a single story arc.

It must also be noted that this paper will only cover the 19th, 20th and 21st Century incarnations of what are commonly known as comics. This will serve to prevent any debate or contention over the exact origination of comics in order to allow for complete focus on the subject matter of the animated adaptations of comics from the advent of film-based animation through to its contemporary incarnation.

This paper will also only focus on the Marvel Comics title *Spider-Man* and the Marvel Studios' *Spectacular Spider-Man*(ani) animated series in order to ensure consistency of scope and content, as there are thousands of titles

spread amongst several publishing houses. To be more precise, I will be particularly focussing on the *Amazing*(cmc) series of comics as there are several *Spider-Man* incarnations, ranging from the afore-mentioned through to *Ultimate*(cmc) *Spider-Man* and even the comic form of *Spectacular Spider-Man*(cmc) (which the animated series is based on).

A Brief History of Animation

When asked to name a comic or comic book character, many people (at least those that have even a base knowledge of comics) will cite titles such as *Superman, Batman* and *Spider-Man*. It is interesting that these characters have a certain iconic impact on people through simple exposure from popular culture. In South Africa, many people identify Spider-Man as *Rabobi* due to 1980's *Spider-Man* animated series, which was aired dubbed into Xhosa for broadcast on the original SABC channels. An unusual audience was generated by this unique adaptation of the already internationally established character, as Spider-Man made his comic debut in the 1960s. For a South African audience, however, this was an entirely new phenomenon as access to the original comics was very limited and television proved to be a far more accessible medium for a larger audience.[ii] Hence in a South African context, television and subsequently animation played a pivotal role in exposing the South African audience to this sub-culture.

This is both a localised and contemporary example of the link between comics and animation, the relationship of which steps back to the initial development of live-action film in the late 19th Century. One of the first recorded live-action films *Billy Edwards and the Unknown* (starring boxer Billy Edwards) was screened in the year1895 to mass excitement from the general public (IMDB, 2010). A new and exciting form of entertainment had been developed and offered an interesting new alternative to theatre, musical performances and Vaudeville. Where Vaudeville was generally met with a sense of distaste by the upper-class due to its 'everyman' content of shows, cinemas provided a platform of entertainment that encompassed and invited every class and income bracket.

North America was an immigrant society, combining a plethora of languages and cultures, but at the same time isolating non-English speaking foreigners which caused them to cluster together. The foreigners were also more often than not found in the low income bracket and could not afford more traditional forms of entertainment and this quickly spurred the development of Vaudevillian Theatre: essentially a populist and affordable form of entertainment that was accessible to people from all walks of life, but as mentioned previously, quickly gained notoriety and scathing for drawing in audience members of a lower caste. John Kenrick, a musical theatre scholar, states: "In a world where phonographs, film, radio and television did not yet exist, something new was needed to fill the gap" (1996). The show bills would more often than not feature acts of physical humour, humour being the most transcendent and easily understood of all genres, regardless of language or culture. Kenrick references the following quote on the social barrier that was encountered in the United States (1996):

> After the Astor Place Riot of 1849 entertainment in New York City was divided along class lines: opera was chiefly for the upper middle and upper classes, minstrel shows and melodramas for the middle class, variety shows in concert saloons for men of the working class and the slumming middle class. Vaudeville was developed by entrepreneurs seeking higher profits from a wider audience.
> - Robert W. Snyder in *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (1995, 1226)

Humorous newspaper cartoons were another form of popular entertainment and equally frowned upon as vulgar fare for the culturally inferior. However, both newspaper cartoons and Vaudeville were crucial to the development of animation as they served as the starting points of the careers of all of the "Primitive Animators".[3]

One of the most popular acts featured in Vaudeville were the so-called 'Lightening Sketches' which saw an illustrator stand before the audience and rapidly draw and modify a series of pictures, mainly of

[3] Please note that the term 'Primitive Animators' is not a disdainful term in any way, but merely a term of reference to the original inventors of the then primitive incarnation of animation.

humorous content, whilst verbally engaging with the audience. Two of these lightening sketch artists were J. Stuart Blackton and Winsor McCay, each with their own unique contributions to film and animation, and more importantly, both have cartooning backgrounds.

J. Stuart Blackton was arguably the father of animation after creating the first recorded example of animation in the year 1900 with his piece *Enchanted Drawings*. After meeting Thomas Edison, who at the time was selling his newly developed *Vitagraph* film projector (Price, 2002), Blackton began experimenting with photographing chalk drawings in a sequence, altering the images a little at a time and then projecting them. According to author Charles Price, whilst being something utterly new and different, Blackton's animations failed to attain much success and were more of a novelty than anything else. Blackton soon disappeared into obscurity.

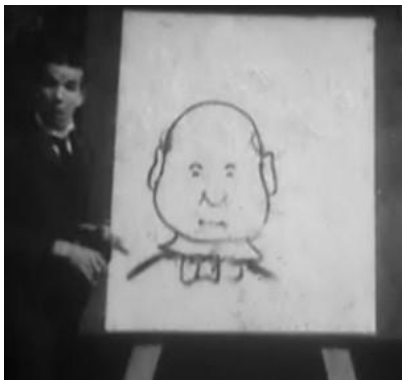




Fig. 1 (Left) J. Stuart Blackton, still from a 'lightning sketch' (photographer unknown). 1906. Fig. 2 (Right) J. Stuart Blackton, still from *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906).

Pictured above in Fig. 1 is Blackton with one of his 'lightening sketches' from a Vaudeville performance (the photographer is unknown) and on the right (Fig. 2) is a still from his pioneering animation *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* which was created in 1906.

The Cartoonist as Animator – Winsor McCay.

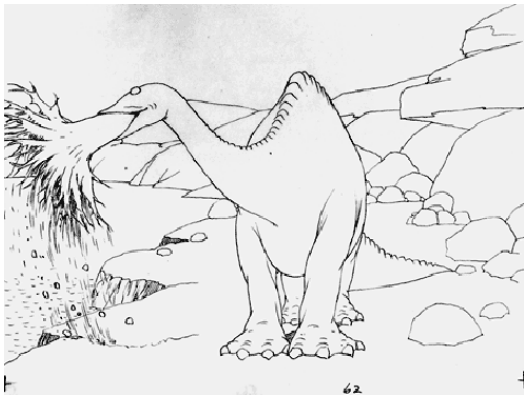
Winsor McCay, however, managed to work off of Blackton's precedent and in the year 1914, created what is widely considered the world's first animated star: *Gertie the Dinosaur*.[4] Charles Price very lithely describes the scene that a typical Vaudevillian audience would have encountered:

> McCay, standing next to the screen, splendidly attired in puttees and pith helmet, cracks his whip. Far off in the distance, Gertie's head pops up from behind some rocks. He cracks his whip again and Gertie lumbers to the front of the screen. On the way she swallows an entire rock. Then she defoliates the top of a palm tree and munches off the fronds. The live McCay manages to get the animated Gertie to do a few tricks, but her mind wanders. McCay prods her on. Finally Gertie gets angry with McCay and snaps at him. McCay jumps back just in time. When he scolds her, Gertie begins to cry. In the grand finale, McCay walks onto the screen and appears to join the animation himself, riding into the distance on Gertie's back. (2002)



Fig. 3 Dir. Winsor McCay, introductory still from *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914).

[4] Note that while I refer to *Gertie* becoming the first animated star, the animation itself was not McCay's first ever contribution to the medium, which was in fact an animated adaptation of his *Little Nemo* series of comics in the year 1911.



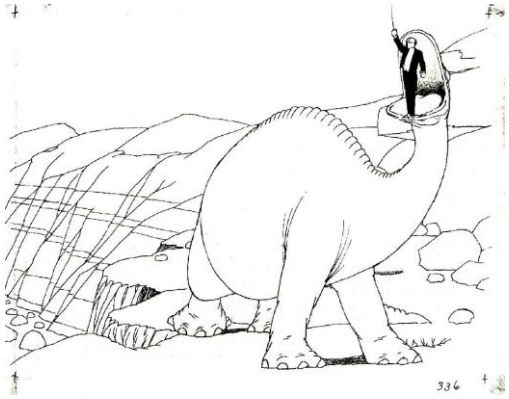


Fig. 4 and Fig. 5 Dir. Winsor McCay, frames 62 and 336 (the finale) of *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914)

This self-insertion and seeming interaction with Gertie, a fabricated and animated character, was an instant success and numerous audiences clamoured to see Gertie – the phenomenon of the animation had begun.

McCay's greatest achievement was his wartime propaganda animated epic *The Sinking of the Lusitania* in 1918, with the 25000 drawing animation becoming the longest animated film of the time. It took a leap forward in terms of producing realism and drama in the still very new medium and McCay took great pride in his work.



Fig. 6 Dir. Winsor McCay, Still from *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918).

McCay's pride soon manifested scathing criticism as he grew older and according to Richard Williams, author of the renowned textbook *The Animator's Survival Kit*:

> McCay lashed out at [humour cartoon animators], saying that he had developed and given them a great new art from which they had cheapened and turned into a crude money-making business done by hack artists. (2001: 17)

Humour cartoons soon became rampantly populist as they had the greatest overall appeal to audiences of any culture. McCay, much like his fellow pioneering animators of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, approached animation from an artist's perspective, but success was limited. Ironically as McCay dismissed this insurgence of 'funny cartoons' (like *Felix the Cat*), cartoons[5] were eventually debased and reduced to children's fare in later years, again because children became the best source of income for studios with the advent of televised animated serials and merchandising.

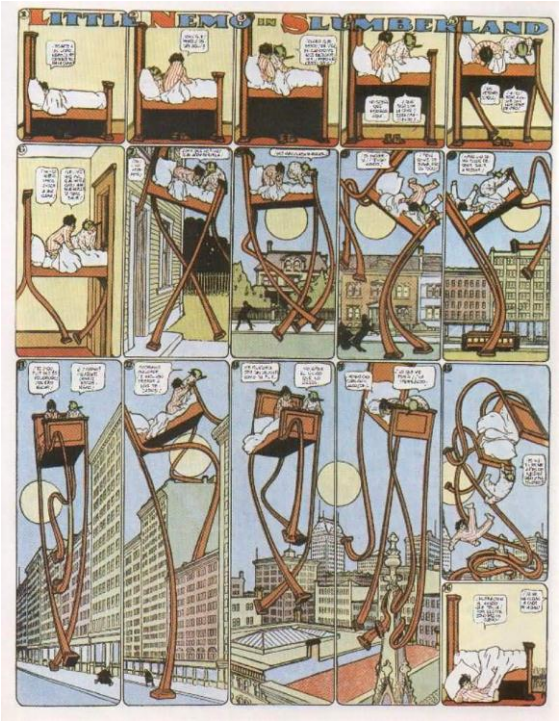


Fig. 7 Winsor McCay (w, a), *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1908), Public Domain.[iii]

[5] The word 'cartoon' is as equally loaded as 'comics', so for clarification, any mention of cartoons in this paper makes reference to the colloquial term for humorous animation and not newspaper comic strips (unless stated otherwise).

McCay's success also stemmed from the various single-panel cartoons and comic strips that he illustrated for newspapers, with *Little Nemo in Slumberland* being his most popular and a resource for more animated material. The comic strip appeared on a weekly basis in the *New York Herald* and *New York American* newspapers from the year 1905 to 1914, when McCay decided to pursue a career in animation and to stop illustrating his comic strip.

The comic itself was often surreal and perhaps even macabre in nature, with McCay's strange visions depicted with some skill in the single-page cartoons. The protagonist and comic namesake Little Nemo offers an oddly calm reaction to the bizarre situations that he encounters in his sleep. McCay masterfully conquered the limitations of the single page format by succinctly pacing his comic through the utilisation of minimal text and elaborately constructed scenery. Scholar Jeet Heer compares McCay's skill in depicting dreamscapes as a visual author to that of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* or Jonathon Swift's *Gulliver* as written authors, but with possibly more skill (according to Heer), as an image that is constructed purely of a textual basis is still limited by the reader's imagination, whereas McCay's illustrations would be difficult to transcribe without using several pages worth of text.[6] Heer emphasises this comparison by stating:

> Gulliver and Alice gained a foothold in our imaginations thanks primarily to the writerly skills of their authors (assisted in Carroll's case by some charming John Tenniel illustrations). Nemo, by contrast, was a comic strip character whose newsprint universe was constructed by the pen of a cartoonist, Winsor McCay (2006).

McCay's, much like Swift's or Carroll's, stories were often dystopian parodies or satire: observations on society, with Little Nemo facing Demagogue Tyrants that ruled over Mars and owned the rights to not only the land, but also the air on the planet; or cigar-toting clowns that offered uncharacteristically sardonic and pessimistic views on the world. Ironically,

[6] Heer's analysis posits an interesting discussion of the nature of the reception of texts of a written nature and those of a visual nature by their respective audiences. This will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter of this report.

Little Nemo's adventures, regardless of the underlying horror or strangeness of *Slumberland*, were made to seem almost more acceptable than Nemo's waking life in common middle-class white America.

McCay's visions were very easily adapted for animation, with the strips serving as both storyboards and platforms for the content. A draw-card for potential audiences was that they immediately recognised the characters of Little Nemo and Flip (Nemo's sardonic clown accomplice), being widely exposed to them due to the weekly comic strip. Audiences flocked to see their favourite comic in motion, and whilst still very basic in terms of animation, it was extremely successful.[7]

Little Nemo became the first of many comic strips to be transcribed into an animated format, as the animators and animation studios that succeeded McCay soon realised that using such populist and immediately identifiable characters was far simpler than trying to introduce entirely new characters and situations to an audience. Comic strip characters that followed in Little Nemo's footsteps include *Felix the Cat* (and the Felix parody *Fritz the Cat*), *Tom and Jerry, Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, The X-men, Garfield, Peanuts* and many others, all to varying degrees of success.

Thus comics became a logical and vital platform for animation and with the inception of DC comics in the early 1930s and Marvel Comics in the 1960s, an entirely new genre of animation was introduced: The Superhero Cartoon.

[7] A point to note is that during the early period of animation (from 1914 to the late 1940s), animation was never regarded as children's fare; and instead was an integral part of the cinema-going experience - often to the extent of being the main attraction.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Influences

"Animation and comic books share a common field in that both are composed of images sequenced in time: one is driven mechanically and electronically in projection, and the other by the peripatetic and wilful actions of the reader." – Paul Atkinson (2009: 265).

The overall aim and intention of this paper is to explore the interpretation and representation of motion in both comic panels and animation, how and why they differ and how each functions within their specific formats, taking into account the limitations that are incurred in both media. Comics and animation use differing forms of popular mass-media (i.e. comic print distribution and television respectively) to reach their specific audiences, each with very well-established audiences. Both media encounter a very unfortunate stigma of being children's fare or inane, easily-dismissed popular culture icons. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, both comics and animation in their earlier incarnations were always intended for older, mass audiences. It was in part due to the proliferation of merchandising by toy manufacturers through a medium with apparent appeal to younger audiences that both media were eventually seen as children's fare.[8]

The dynamism, content and pacing of the more contemporary Superhero comics and graphic novels[9] have provided both inspiration, and more often than not, direct source material for a plethora of animated series featuring famed characters including: Superman, Batman, Iron Man and Spiderman; each often spawning several subsequent animated series under their particular banners.

As discussed in the previous chapter, these characters are by no means a new source of content for animation (or live action films for that

[8] This has obviously changed in the past 20 years with the introduction of DC's *Vertigo* and the *Marvel Knights* adult-themed comics and graphic novels, as well as with the mass exposure of the far more mature audience oriented Japanese Anime phenomenon.
[9] Contemporary refers to "Super Hero" comics from 1938 to the present.

matter) and this research will emphasise a notion put forth by Comic Scholar Scott McCloud in his book *Understanding Comics* about how we, as human beings, have tendency to sympathise with characters through a process of identification.

An interesting point to note is that *Understanding Comics*, in its entirety, is actually a fully illustrated comic, featuring a caricature of McCloud himself as the protagonist. His theories pan out in sequential panels, which not only provides direct visual examples of his discussions, but also a unique insight into the world of comics through the pencils of a scholar ensconced in duality: An illustrator and a theorist.

McCloud clarifies his notion of identification by discussing the abstraction of images through stylisation and how the more abstracted/ simplified an image or character is, the easier it is to identify with them as they become a generic 'place-holder' for our own imaginations. To quote McCloud: "The cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled… [W]e don't just observe the cartoon, we become it!"

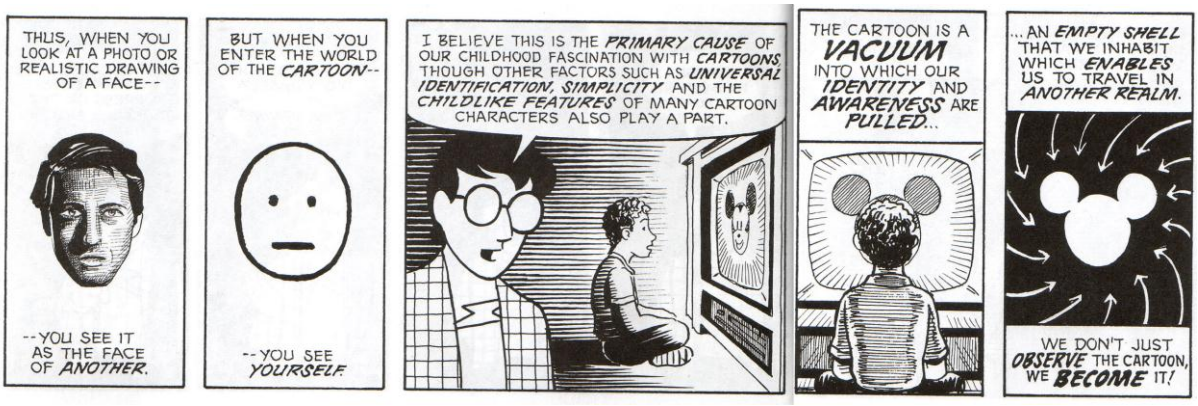


Fig. 8 Scott McCloud (a, w), an excerpt from the "Placeholders" chapter in *Understanding Comics* (1993: 36) [Kitchen Sink Press]

This process of character identification then becomes vital to my research as an aspect of the paper will focus on the character designs of both Venom and Spiderman and how they are adapted from comic to screen and what changes are required of or made to them. It also serves as

the basis for my discussion on the translation of the medium of comics into the medium of animation and how both are received and understood differently.

Sean Cubitt, in his discussion of comics and comic panelling in the 2002 essay "Visual and audiovisual: from image to moving image", argues that there is no notion of the 'moving image', but rather a connection between adjacent images in a sequence, as well as there being an inherent stillness to all images. This, however, is debatable, as 'still' images can be created to implicitly convey motion – in the case of this particular paper, the comic panel, which becomes a signifier of motion even in its apparent stillness. However, the motion is still, in itself, implicit and requires the reader to interpret it and it hence resides in the minds of its viewer. This mental projection will be discussed further in Chapter 4, but ideally in the world of comics, the reader's engagement is hinged on their interpretation of the content, so each reader in themselves can have an individual and entirely unique experience when reading a comic.

Paul Atkinson offers a differing view to Cubitt's statement that there is no notion of the moving image. Atkinson states that it is ultimately in the nature of the comic panel itself, or more importantly, the gutters between the comic panels, that movement is communicated through the process of reading a comic from panel to panel. It is in this that he argues that the reader's mind interpolates the missing points of action and builds a mental image of the action, and even applies sound (through onomatopoeias and speech bubbles). Atkinson then elaborates on the relationship of this implicit motion on the page of a comic and the simulated motion of animation by stating:

> The most obvious candidate for comparison between animation and comic books is the frame/cel in animation and the panel in comic books because both describe a spatial field and are, when treated separately, static structures that have to be combined to simulate movement. (2009: 266)

Pascal LeFèvre, in his essay *Incompatible Visual Ontologies?,* makes mention of what he terms "the problem of primacy" (2007: 2), which

essentially details the fact that people usually prefer the first version of text, whether that text is a novel, a television series, video game or comic. When one reads a novel, they, through their own imaginings create a unique and specific mental projection of the contents that they have read; whilst a reader of a comic immediately receives, what LeFèvre terms, a form of kinetic visual projection.[10]

The idea of space in comics, whether in the gutters between panels, or the page of a comic itself; as well as the inherent motion the space provides the reader can also be linked to time, or at least the expression of the concept of time. A single frame of an animation cannot function in time, as on its own, it merely becomes a static image, with no context or situation. However, when this single frame is placed within a sequence of other slightly different frames, it produces the illusion of motion and hence simulates, as well as occupies time. It can be argued that regardless of the state of a frame (or cel) of animation, it is still inherently representative of a moment of time, or perhaps even a unit of time (as an animated frame is equated to 1/25th or 1/12th of a second, dependant on frame rate). The frame, though, is only necessitated by the frames the both precede as well as supersede it. Thus, for a frame of animation to function, it requires information for both its preceding and its succeeding frames in order for it to be contextualised. Hence, an animated frame requires various states of time to function within its own space.

McCloud also discusses the unique temporal state of a comic panel and how it can diffuse several moments in time, in succession, in a single static panel. The example below poignantly demonstrates McCloud's discussion and was illustrated by the author.

[10] Or a mentally interpolated version of the sequence of images that a reader sees.

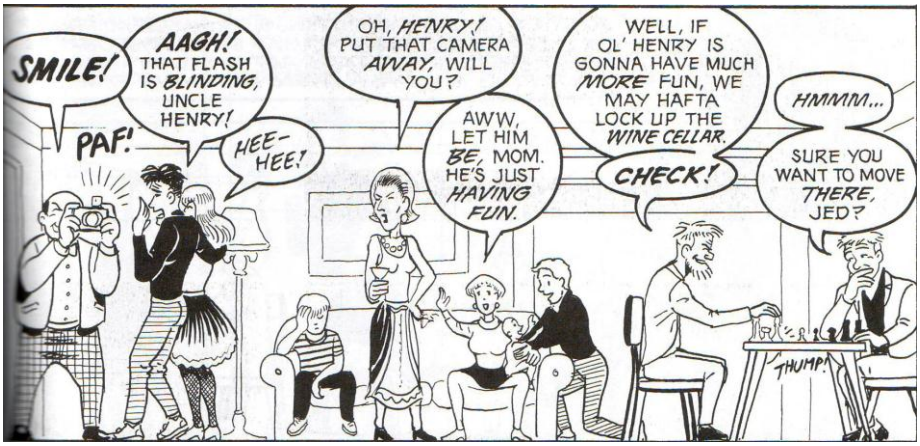


Fig. 9 Scott McCloud (a, w), panel excerpt from "Time Frames", *Understanding Comics* (1993: 95) [Kitchen Sink Press]

As you read this panel (in the typical Western method of left to right[iv]) you, as a reader, are experiencing several moments in time in a singular image, starting with Henry taking a photograph and ending with the two chess players executing a move (as emphasised by the "thump" onomatopoeia). It is not only in the images present in this example, but also the speech bubbles and sound indicators that further assist a reader in processing instances. The speech bubbles drive the reader's eyes from left to right (at least in the Western style of reading and writing), between which there are characters interacting with each other pictorially as well as the occurrences of sounds such as "PAF!" and 'THUMP!". By reading the sound indicators, we know that the camera's flash went off and that one of the chess pieces was slammed down on the board in a moment of perceived triumph by the character Jed. The mere presence of these sounds and the mental interpolation that occurs within the reader's mind's eye means that we immediately project these events without the reader ever needing to see the motion, thus limiting the amount of repetition illustrated on a page.

This process is seemingly subjective, or at least widely open to interpretation, and it can be speculated that the reader understands and acknowledges such actions without an expansive series of juxtaposed panels to illustrate the same process. However, could one that is not familiar with the methodology of reading (such as younger audiences) or even the realm of comics itself still be able to understand a comic if they read it differently?

Illustrator Paul Duffield (as cited by Warren Ellis, 2010) furthers this sentiment by stating that:

> …a page exists all at once but is read bit by bit. It's a unique storytelling property, and it leads to the wonderful fact that comics are a different work of art on the level of the story, the page and the panel… and the equally frustrating fact that it's often hard to herd the reader into appreciating that during a casual read.

The panel in the example again provides a good basis for this, as the reader can start with the chess players, or with Henry's wife, or anywhere in-between and still experience that moment in time at their own discretion. This obviously doesn't work for all comics or panels, but the possibility is there.

McCloud expands his theory even further by showing the same scene, with identical characters and dialogue, broken down into five separate panels, which then provide a more regimented and directed path of reading:

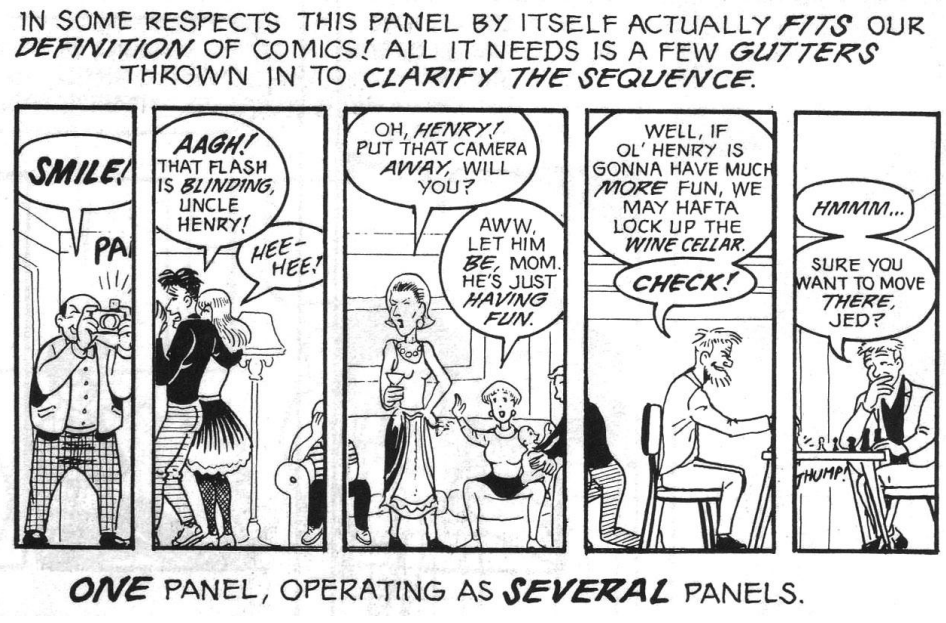


Fig. 10 Scott McCloud (a, w), One Panel Operating as Several Panels from "Time Frames", *Understanding Comics* (1993: 95) [Kitchen Sink Press]

As mentioned in the upper caption of the image, the newly broken up panel now conforms to McCloud's proposed definition of comics (see

Chapter 1) by breaking the singular panel into a sequential series of images. However, was it necessary to do so? By definition, this is now a comic, but was it not before it was broken up? The images are still tied in sequentially, but do not require the presence of gutters to differentiate time. It could even be argued that the single panel format was easier to read and understand than the multiple panels.[11] However, as discussed previously, the sequence of events in the separated panels is far more directed, with the gutters providing slight gaps in time.

McCloud's discussions demonstrate a comic's prowess in story-telling and the conveyance of moments, but only when the writer and artists involved work together to effectively do so, much like animation and animators. Time exists in many differing forms and its representation and projection in a still medium like comics is difficult to attain. Single panels can contain minutes worth of action, but a single animated frame is a mere 25th of a second in time, regardless of its content. Where a reader is essentially guided through the progression of time, it is still up to them as to how long it takes to experience that moment. An animated sequence though, can only be experienced for a finite amount of time before the next shot or scene is encountered. It is thus, by contrast, that animation is a far more holistic expression of time, albeit a simulated one and it is through this simulation of movement that one can compare the two media in terms of their translations of moments in time.

Animation has the obvious advantage of working in the space of time, with each animated frame representing a fraction of a second in total. The animated frames also exist in the same place, simply to be replaced by its succeeding frame, and are juxtaposed in time, not in space like a comic panel. If, for example, we read a comic panel that would by projection represent a second in time, such as a character sneezing, that same second in animation would require over 25 illustrated frames (if the animation is

[11] This provides contextualisation for my discussion on single-panel cartoons (such as *The Far Side*) as discussed in the previous chapter.

running on the industry-standard 12fps time rate[12]). Each of those 25 frames work in conjunction to form the representation of movement when rendered and projected on a screen. So where comics imply motion, animation creates it, ironically still requiring a degree of mental interpolation to fill in the gaps and slight changes in form that each animated frame represents.

Animation[13] would seemingly have the advantage, with the viewer pre-supplied with movement, sound and dialogue; however, animation, from start to finish, is a wholly subjective experience. What the viewer sees has been coordinated by a director with a very specific vision, compiled by editors with very specific instructions and rendered by scores of animators, all controlled by the director and producers. Hence an animation is the vision of a group of people, carefully controlled, designed and distributed to very specific target audiences. Directed as the creation of animation may be, it is still up to the subjective interpretation of its viewers to decide whether it is successful or not. Audiences do not always fall in the targeted age category and often, especially when faced with more niche subject matter (such as comic adaptations), are more ardent in their support or scathing of cartoons or animated films. If the ratings are good, televised animation will receive new seasons and cinematic animation will receive accolades, otherwise it, in either incarnation, will be cancelled or fall by the wayside.

Adaptations or translations of comics into either animation or cinematic incarnations begin to pose problems in execution because of their very need to 'adapt' the subject matter. This incurs that in one form or another, sacrifices have to be made, whether in style, story or content and it is in the choices that are made in this regard that the success or failure of an adaptation can be attained. A film/ animation director's vision of the contents is as unique as they are, and therefore certain demographics of the viewers of that particular adaptation will feel alienated or even cheated, merely because they have a differing vision to the director. Film-based, more

[12] Animation, just like film, works on frames per second as a time standard (or FPS for short), with the default film frame rate being 25fps. Televised animation often uses 12fps, which means that each frame is doubled, thus economising workload for animators.
[13] Note that the term 'animation' in this paper specifically refers to televised animated series (or cartoons for short).

often than adaptations of various other media, ostensibly appeal to a larger group for various reasons, regardless of losing out on a small number of viewers. The adaptations even occasionally surpass their source texts in terms of success, despite any criticism from fans of the original material.[14]

The reason for emphasising the more guided nature of animation is that it begins to show the differences between animation and comics. Granted that the reader's experience of comics is also controlled to a degree as they are again created by people with very specific visions; however, comics can still be interpreted in any way the reader sees fit. Readers can imagine how a character sounds when they speak, or what the word "**SPLOOF!**" would sound like in real circumstances. Essentially, the reader mentally creates the world depicted in comics only using visual queues, whereas a viewer of an animation is provided with everything and is merely tasked with watching the animation. It is in this difference that the case study of the adaptation of Spiderman from comic panel to animation cel will come to the fore, with discussions on the differences, as well as similarities in the respective adaptations.

A panel in a comic functions differently to an animation frame in that it can communicate a period of time both through its content (via the juxtaposition of image and written word) and in the imagined space found in the gutters between panels in which the reader interpolates the details omitted between panels in their mind's eye. Comic panels also function sequentially in time, just like animation frames, but they require a very specific spatial arrangement in order to successfully communicate a story in sequence. Therefore comic panels both occupy and emulate space *and* time. This will be discussed in more detail in the fourth chapter.

The comic narrative is another point of discussion, as the central thematic device has always been focussed on the polemic battle of good

[14] As mentioned before, television and film tend to be far more accessible than comics. Pascal LeFevre notes that it is in this niche that fans of the medium feel that their opinions are more valid, because they have knowledge of the original, 'untainted' text, whereas the general consumer often to a much lesser extent, if any (2007: 4).

and evil, or at least the representations thereof. For every Super or Costumed Hero, there will always be several enemies, some to the point of becoming nemeses. The nemeses will always present a hero's most dangerous foe – a combination of their fears, weaknesses and morally diametric to them. The nemesis is also more often than not superior to the hero in order to ensure a degree of satisfaction for the reader/ viewer of the content when the foe is eventually bested. Roger Rollin, author of *Beowulf to Batman: The Epic Hero and Pop Culture*, speaks of the engendered presence of security that is paradoxically encountered in such escapist fare as: "…we know, [that] deep down in our hearts, that Batman will never be turned into a human shish kabob by 'The Joker'…" (1970: 432). Rollin's discussion is resonant with all audiences, because he is essentially stating that our perceived notion of heroes and the escapism they afford will be lost if they die. This is possibly one of the reasons that various comic characters, including Superman, have died and subsequently been resurrected at one point in their histories. The 'deaths' allow for changes in character, or introductions of new characters and situations and also use the device of tension to draw in greater readership.

Rollin also discusses the difficulty that Super or Costumed Heroes face when battling their enemies and raises an interesting point when he states (on the conditions of victory): "…for an easy victory not only lacks dramatic force but paradoxically cheapens the value system the victory is to affirm by making it almost irrelevant." (1970: 432). This quote becomes highly pertinent in Chapter 4, which argues that the final climax of the comic-based battle between Spider-Man and Venom is diminished, leaving a very dissatisfying end in its wake. The battles cannot be simple, for simplicity removes any grounding for identification with the turmoil faced by a character. However, if a character's vast superiority needs to be emphasised, then a rapid victory on their part sets the base for his of her foe to grow stronger. Thus, context is highly important when setting the scene for a battle.

Chapter 3: Spider-Man in Duality

Part 1: The Rise of the Superhero

"Although it had published characters like Captain America, the Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the company that would become Marvel Comics had given up on Super Heroes when the 1960s began, and was only publishing monster comics, westerns and teenage romances… [When] publisher Martin Goodman heard that [DC comics] had launched a team of Super Heroes that was selling well, he asked his editor, Stan Lee, to come up with a new super-team. Stan developed the Fantastic Four…" (Alastair Dougal: 2006, 48)

The history of so-called Super Heroes is as diverse and interesting as the characters themselves and the development of this comic phenomenon is steeped in near-disaster and rampant success.

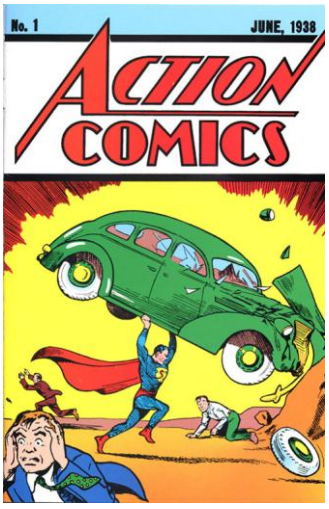


Fig. 11 [Siegel, Jerry (w) and Shuster, Joe (a)] *Action Comics No. 1* (June 1938), National Comics Publications [DC Comics]: Cover.

The first superhero to appear in comics ,one of the true great successes of comic history, Superman, debuted in *Action Comics #1* in 1938 (published by DC Comics)[v], only preceded by the first costumed hero[15] *The Phantom* in the previous year.

[15] There is a distinct difference between the terms Super Hero and costumed hero, as a Super Hero implicitly has some form of supernatural powers (like superman's ability to fly), whereas a costumed hero is purely a savant in a costume, with no super powers (like Batman).

This began what was entitled "The Golden Age of Comics" (Jurgens, 1994) which saw the rapid rise and development of many recognisable Super and costumed Heroes such as Batman, Captain America and The Flash; the fantastic situations and abilities of these characters providing a refreshing escape from the more typical archetypes of comic content at the time. This success, however, was relatively short-lived as Super Hero comics suffered a slump in the late 1940s after readers grew tired of the repeated themes and increased their demand for comics that fell in the genres of Western, romance and science fiction, which were becoming more popular fare in cinemas. The emergence of costumed heroes also assisted DC in generally avoiding crime and horror comics, which most competitor publishers were producing during the early 1950s, resulting in a major backlash against comics in those genres (Moshier, 2008.).

During the same period, DC managed to re-ignite interest in super heroes with their re-launch and modernisation of characters like The Flash, Hawkman and The Green Lantern, offering a new direction in writing and a more science-fiction orientation, as well as reinvigorating the ideal of the Super Hero team by introducing the highly successful *JLA* (Justice League of America) comics series. The concept was not new to DC, as the publisher had previously produced the *JSA* (Justice Society of America) comics, but JLA's success derived from featuring some of DC's most popular characters: Superman, Batman and the Flash together in a single comic. This heralded what was termed the Silver Age of the Super Hero Comic and lasted until the late 1960s.

The 1960s also saw another important development: the unprecedented and meteoric rise of the previously unknown Marvel Comics due to the combined team work of Steve Ditko, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, arguably some of the most revered names in the comic industry. The introduction of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's *Fantastic Four* in November 1961

was a response to DC's highly successful *JLA* and generated vast interest due to, what Christopher Moshier, a DC chronologist, terms its "…far more complex characters and tighter continuity." (2008). Marvel's progressive and forward-thinking attitude soon surpassed DC, which was gaining a reputation for having old-fashioned and simple stories and relying more on the success of the televised live-action adaptations of both Superman and Batman[16] than on its comic production.



Fig. 12 [Stan Lee (w) and Jack Kirby (a)], *The Fantastic Four* #1 (November 1961) [Marvel Comics]: Cover.

The Marvel 'boom' had begun, with the team of Lee and Kirby producing a slew of some of the most popular characters in contemporary times, including The Hulk, X-Men, Iron Man; and by far their most successful and popular character of all time (as stipulated in the 2006 *Marvel Encyclopedia*, pg. 49): Spider-Man.

[16] Recently, Warner Bros. animation has produced a somewhat 'tongue-in-cheek' animated remake of the 1960s Batman television series entitled *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* (2010). The show is a somewhat satirical and overtly-camp nod at its predecessor, featuring the blue-cowled Batman and original vehicle designs, purposely contrived dialogue and hyperbolised soundtrack.

Part 2: "With great power there must also come great responsibility."

– Ben Parker in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (1962)

Spider-Man premiered in issue 15 of the Marvel anthology *Amazing Fantasy* in the year 1962, riding on the wave of success that both *The Fantastic Four* and *The Hulk* had generated previously. Marvel's new generation of characters offered a new dimension in personality and depth, and most of the heroes' alter-egos were extremely normal and identifiable to their readers. In the case of Spider-Man, Peter Parker provided readers with and archetype that almost all could recognise: an average, if somewhat meek young man with rather high intelligence that was facing the every day plights of being a teenager, from school bullies to homework and even awkwardness around girls, a decidedly unspectacular person. To quote the Marvel Encyclopedia's entry on Spider-Man: "[On Peter Parker] although his teachers praised him, the other students had little use for a know-it-all like puny Parker. The girls thought him too quiet, and the boys considered him a wimp." (2006: 280)



Fig. 13 [Stan Lee (a) and Jack Kirby (w)], *Amazing Fantasy #15* (August 1962) [Marvel Comics]: Cover.

What makes Parker even more appealing was that he was an orphan that lived with his Aunt May and Uncle Ben, two kind and compassionate individuals that did not possess much in terms of material wealth and live in a small house in a lower-income suburb; but they do provide Peter with love and guidance. Spider-Man gained his powers through an accidental encounter with an irradiated house spider that bites him, conveying into him the ability to climb walls as well as other arachnid-like powers. At first Parker selfishly uses his powers to win money in a wrestling show under the guise of the Amazing Spider-Man and becomes rather successful at doing so, but also gains a massive ego and sense of self-entitlement.

Eventually through a tragic encounter with a mugger that turned out to be a man that Parker failed to stop when asked to by a security guard in a moment of arrogance, Ben Parker is murdered. Bereft with grief, Parker vows to never again allow an innocent person to be harmed because Spider-Man had failed to act, thus learning to use his powers in a responsible manner.

Spider-Man presented something that was different to what readers expected from Super Heroes: he was young, over confident and his powers made him negligent and irresponsible and he had to pay the ultimate price to learn the importance of humility. Whilst this could be compared to the origins of DC's Batman as a character (with his alter-ego Bruce Wayne witnessing the murder of both of his parents), Spider-Man accepted his responsibility in the death of his uncle and grew as a person, whereas Batman regressed and became sardonic and bitter, equating the violence that he witnessed to the violent methods that he employs to defeat criminals. The sensitivity that Stan Lee employed in the creation of the characters of both Spider-Man and Parker as a singular character living in duality provided a new platform for identification with readers: Spider-Man is confident, witty and famous for his 'one-liners' and verbal repartee, whereas Parker is shy, unsure and cautious. Neither character can live without the other, for each is diametrically juxtaposed in poise and purpose. Parker's physical strength is gained from his super powers, but his true strength results from his sense of duty and righteousness. The mask that he dons merely bestows upon him the

confidence that he lacks in every day life, so one could posit the question of which of the two characters are truly representational of Parker? Spider-Man removes his inhibitions and fears, but at the same time caused the death of his uncle, tainting him with guilt, albeit guilt that provides him a reason to never stray from his path. Parker, or the unmasked Spider-Man, is representative of what Spider-Man fears at first, but craves later: an ordinary life, safety and peace; but also everything that is hidden when Parker dons the costume of Spider-Man.

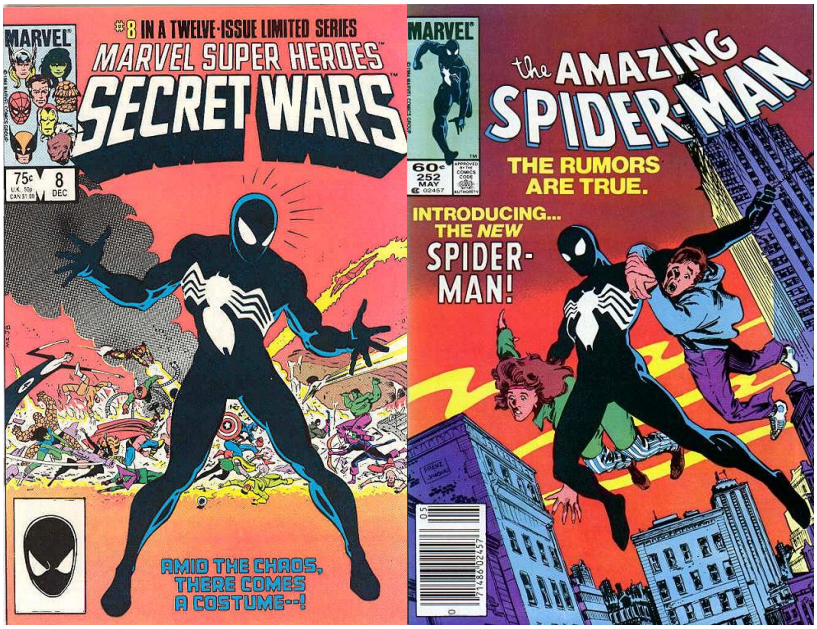
Part 3: Venom, the Birth of a Nemesis

Venom is known as one of Spider-Man's great rivals, if not his arch-rival, and represents an almost inverted version of Spider-Man. From his morals to his appearance, Venom embodies the quintessential polemic incarnation of evil to Spider-Man's morality. He shares identical powers with Spider-Man, but is also fuelled by immense anger and hatred for Spider-Man due to Spider-Man's rejection of the symbiote after the realisation that it was corrupting his mind and conscience. Venom's history does require more contextualisation though, and it is as complex and convoluted as Spider-Man's.

Dependent on the comic variation (in this case *Amazing Spider-Man*(cmc) and *Ultimate Spider-Man*(cmc)), Venom has two differing origins, one being rooted in the Marvel cross-title story arc "The Secret Wars", which saw Spider-Man being forced to fight on a planet called "Battleworld" (Marvel Encyclopedia, 2006: 316), and the other as an alternate reality in which Parker is a long-time school friend of Venom's host Eddie Brock.

In the instance of *Amazing*(cmc) (1984, as illustrated by Ron Frenz , replaced by Todd McFarlane in 1988), Spider-Man returns from the "Secret Wars" clad in a black costume after an encounter with a strange, alien machine that seemingly generated the costume, which is later revealed to be the alien symbiote. Whilst wearing this costume, Spider-Man's strength was drastically increased and he possessed the ability to generate an organic web, instead

of the web which was previously artificially created (and provided him with his very distinctive form of locomotion) via Parker's own 'web-shooter' design.



Figs. 14(Left) and 15(Right) [Jim Shooter (w); Michael Zeck (p) and Bob Layton (i)] , *Secret Wars #8* (December 1984) [Marvel Comics]: Cover. [Tom DeFalco (w) and Ron Frenz (p)], *Amazing Spider-Man #252* (May 1984) [Marvel Comics]: Cover.

Parker eventually discovers that the costume is actually an alien entity that is symbiotically attached to his body and promptly attempts to remove it, only to discover that the creature will not leave its host. Parker tries several methods, including being bombarded by a sonic rifle that Mr Fantastic of the Fantastic Four develops to contain the creature, but it soon escapes and seeks out Parker again. In issue 1 of *The Web of Spider-Man* (a 1984 standalone comic series, illustrated by Greg LoRocque and written by Louise Simonson), the vengeful alien hides amongst Parker's clothing and re-bonds with him upon Parker reaching distractedly for his Spider Suit and the alien rapidly gains control of Parker's motor functions. An inadvertent battle against a henchman of Spider-Man's enemy The Vulture ensues, during which the alien attempts to kill Spider-Man's winged opponent for endangering it. Parker soon realises that the only way to beat the suit is to use its one true weakness –ultra sonic sound (as discovered by Mr Fantastic) after noticing a

ringing church bell. He forces the terrified henchman to crash into the bell and in a moment of selflessness manages to throw his pain-wracked enemy from the immense noise and in doing so collapses. In a definitive moment of the Venom story, the alien suit, having bonded with someone of such pure moral intention, saves the dying Parker and seemingly disappears. The comic ends with a monologue about the alien's moment of 'conscience':

> On its home world, the symbiote is an emotionless being who preys on emotionless others! However, fate has paired it with an emotional being who feels intensely… Fear, greed, excitement, responsibility, love! But symbiosis is a two-way street! The alien costume is intelligent, it has learned to feel. (2007: 223)

The alien had taken on some of its host's virtues, just as Spider-Man had taken on its power and rage and in this pivotal moment, protected its former host, regardless of Spider-Man's attempt to destroy it. This duality of morality conflicts at the very core of the being's nature, but its emotional awakening and almost altruistic change in intention does not last long and it soon seeks out a host that it knows will provide it with the advantage over its new enemy. Thinking that the alien was killed however, Parker eventually leaves the scene. Unbeknownst to the injured hero though, the oozing alien quickly finds another host crouched at the alter in the church below and claims the beleaguered Eddie Brock as its new host.

In this version of Venom's origin, Brock worked as a journalist until he disgraced himself by identifying the wrong man as the murderer "Sin-Eater", which is revealed by Spider-Man (Marvel Encyclopedia, 2006: 316). The unfortunate Brock was also suffering from cancer and resolved to kill himself, hence his presence at the church to atone for his actions. Brock was saved from his cancer upon binding with the alien symbiote and the symbiote found a physically superior and hate-filled host, the perfect type to assist it in killing Spider-Man.

Even Venom faced inner-conflict though, as Brock still sought to right his wrongs and saw himself as a protector of the innocent, but in his corrupted mental state took to killing criminals instead of simply detaining them. This

lead to a violent battle with Spider-Man and Brock's eventual defeat at the hands of the person he blames for ruining his life.

The *Ultimate*(cmc) (as written by Brian Michael Bendis, 2001) story arc offers a very different account in which Parker and Brock are close high school friends, a relationship echoed in the 2008-2009 animated series *Spectacular Spider-Man*. In this universe, Brock becomes somewhat of a savant for Parker, protecting his smaller friend from school bullies and even attaining Parker a job under Doctor Curtiss Conners (the scientist responsible for the mutated spider that bit Peter and his eventually enemy The Lizard). Through a series of misunderstandings and mishaps, Parker alienates and eventually loses Brock's friendship, which leads to Brock's discovery of Parker's secret identity. The enraged Brock confronts Parker (who has now been bound to the symbiote) and eventually is bound to the symbiote himself after Parker removes it. Brock immediately swears vengeance and attacks Parker as Venom, aiming to reveal his identity to the world, but Venom wants to destroy Parker completely and is only beaten out by Brock's undying sense of friendship to Parker.



Fig. 16 Brian Michael Bendis (w), Promotional Poster for *Ultimate Spider-Man #123* (2008) [Marvel Comics]

Whilst the two origins are distinctly different, a central theme of inner-conflict and accountability is present in both. The symbiote for Parker is almost akin to a drug, freeing him of his inhibitions and granting him immense power and freedom, but at the cost of his own integrity. Where Parker's will is strong enough to fend off and defeat the evil influence, Brock is wholly engulfed, being weak in mind from his immense hatred, but physically superior to Parker, enabling Venom's complete control. In *Amazing*(cmc), Brock does not directly suffer the consequences of his actions and after the resurgence of his cancer; he merely sells the symbiote to a willing buyer and eventually dies from his illness. *Ultimate*(cmc) deals with a much younger Brock and Parker, and the drug-like consequences are far more profound. The destruction of his friendship and elevated aggression that he experiences forces Parker to engage with his inner-monster, both metaphorically and literally, whereas Brock is nearly destroyed by his own need for revenge.

Part 4: Spider-Man and Venom, the Comics and Television.

As mentioned in part 1, Spider-Man's success was almost instant when the first issue of *Amazing*(cmc) appeared in 1963, followed by several titles including *Spectacular Spider-Man*(cmc), *Sensational Spider-Man*(cmc), the simply titled *Spider-Man*(cmc) and most recently, *Ultimate Spider-Man*(cmc), as well as appearances in several of the *Avengers* titles[vi]. *Spider-Man* heralded a new era in Spider-Man's history, partly due to artist Todd McFarlane's (famed for his own creation *Spawn* and later becoming one of the founders of Image Comics) change in the direction of style and art, but also for the addition of one of Spider-Man's greatest foes: Venom. According to the *Marvel Encyclopedia* (2006: 238), the first issue sold over a million and a half copies on its debut and released the 5-part *Torment* saga that this paper is focussing on.

Spider-Man's first appearance on television was in the 1967 animated series *Spider-Man*(ani) that first appeared on the ABC network and ran until 1970. According to Wikipedia[17] (2010), the original animated studio went

[17] As an academic writer, I acknowledge that Wikipedia is by no means an accurate source of information; however, it does offer a populist and open account on the subject matter that is

bankrupt and in 1968 and animation was taken over by animator Ralph Bakshi. Due to a very restricted budget, Bakshi was forced to heavily stylise the appearance of the animation in order to decrease the production time and featured "…dark, ominous settings and pervasive background music." (Wikipedia, 2010). The show's greatest claim to fame would be its iconic theme song, one that many people still know to this very day.

In the following years, up until 1980, several live action series featured Spider-Man, ranging from the children's educational series *The Electric Company – Super Spidey Stories*(tv) in 1970 to the more serious and well-received *Amazing Spider-Man*(tv) in 1977, which saw good ratings, but suffered several complaints due to its low budget and poor writing, as well as a sporadic broadcast schedule (Wikipedia, 2010). The CBS Network (as alleged by Wikipedia), cancelled both *Amazing Spiderman*(tv) and competitor show *Wonder Woman* in order to avoid being called "the super hero network". Spider-Man even made an appearance on Japanese television in the 1978 tokusatsu[18] series *Spider-Man*(tv), which bizarrely pioneered live-action Mecha battles (i.e. Spider-Man controlling a colossal robot to battle evil) and eventually lead to the creation of the famed children's Live-Action series *Power Rangers* in the 1990s.

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encountered by the viewers, hence offering a good insight into what is inherently populist in its very nature.

[18] The Japanese term tokusatsu refers to any live-action series that predominantly featured superheroes.



Fig. 17 Shinji Todo (perf.) and Bandai Entertainment, "Spider-Man" and Mecha Suit (1978). Television Series.

Spider-Man's next appearance in an animated form occurred in a series of cameos in the short-lived 1980 *Spider-Woman*, but it was in the 1981 series *Spider-Man*(ani) that networks began to pay attention to Spider-Man due to the newly-formed Marvel Productions Ltd. Animation studio. Marvel endeavoured to translate more of their comic properties to animation and based the 1981 *Spider-Man* animated series partially on its 1967 precursor, with success in the form of the NBC picking up the series for broadcast (Wikipedia, 2010). This series was also lauded for its faithfulness to the comic and soon gave reason enough for Marvel Productions to create *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*(ani) in the same year. The new series featured Spider-Man along with guest appearances from several other popular marvel characters, as well as sharing character designs and styles with its predecessor.



Fig 18. Dennis Marks (prod.) and Marvel Productions Ltd., "Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends" (1981). Animated Series.



Fig 19. Stan Lee (prod.) and Marvel Productions Ltd., "Spider-Man" (1994). Animated Series.

It is my opinion though, that the 1994 *Spider-Man*(ani) series was the most important and influential of all the series produced up to this date. Not only did it show a new direction in production values and animation, but also removed the stigmatic campiness that was previously associated with super hero cartoons and animations.

Spider-Man(ani) (1994) featured deep, long-running story arcs that spanned the entire length of the season, starting with season two, a concept introduced by writer John Stamper (Wikipedia, 2010), and were broken down into chapters. *Spider-Man*(ani) also enjoyed a larger budget and the longest-running time of any Spider-Man animated series to date with 65 episodes

spread over three seasons. The series was the closest adaptation of the comic to date and featured far darker overtones in the stories, with Parker constantly in contention with his own fears and inner torments. Venom made its first animated appearance in this series and quickly became a favoured character amongst fans and well as providing an archetypal arch-villain for Spider-Man.



Fig. 20 Stan Lee (prod.) and Marvel Productions Ltd., Spider-Man and Venom from "Spider-Man" (1994). Animated Series.

Two less-successful series followed 1994's *Spider-Man*(ani), including Fox's dystopian and futuristic *Spider-Man Unlimited*(ani) (or *Spider-Man 2099*) in 1999, which was cancelled after a single season due to low viewership and the 13-episode CGI (computer animated) *Spider-Man: The New Animated Series*(ani) which screened on MTV as an offshoot to the 2002 live-action *Spider-Man* film directed by Sam Raimi.

The most contemporary (and central focus of this paper) Spider-Man themed animated series is 2008-2009 critically-acclaimed *Spectacular Spider-Man*(ani), which was created by Stan Lee and featured the character designs of up and coming illustrator Sean 'Cheeks' Galloway, famed for his highly stylised and charismatic style. Galloway was nominated for an Annie Award (which is a prestigious Animation Award) for his character designs in January of 2009 and the series was nominated in the Storyboarding in a Television Production category. *Spectacular*(ani) won the award for Best Animated Series

from the IGN awards, as well as receiving an overall rating of 8.1 of 10 from fans on the IMDB[19] website. IGN responded to the show's award by stating:

> It was another excellent year for this wonderful show. Season 2 built on the strong foundation from the first season, as *Spectacular* continued to be completely fun and accessible for kids, but also delivered a fully formed, dramatic story arc, with terrific action scenes. (2009)

As IGN mentioned, the show's success mainly derives from its universal appeal to both younger audiences and established readers of the comic because of its faithful adaptation and translation of comics, as well as Galloway's distinct and unique character designs. The 2008-2009 animated incarnation of *Spectacular Spider-Man* does not follow the story arc of its comic namesake, but rather that of *Ultimate Spider-Man*(cmc) (2000). As mentioned previously, the comic (*Ultimate Spider-Man*) portrays an alternate universe in which Parker is still in high school when he receives his powers.

Spectacular(ani) features a very vulnerable and despondent Parker who is still coming to terms with the death of his uncle and is severely victimised by school bullies until the arrival of Eddie Brock, a long-time friend of Parkers, who quickly steps up to protect Parker, as well as providing him with his first job as a lab assistant to Doctor Curtiss Conners (who eventually transforms in The Lizard after exposing himself to Lizard DNA in an attempt to grow back his amputated left-arm). The series re-visits many of the themes that have constantly prevailed in the Spider-Man Universe, from his battles with arch nemesis Green Goblin, to his relationships and eventually the destruction of his friendship with Eddie Brock (and the subsequent arrival of Venom).

The series' popularity grew rapidly amongst both new and established fans and the cancellation of production during the 3rd season came as a shock to its audience. The decision was made after Disney's procurement of

[19]IMDB stands for the Internet Movie Database and features a catalogue of everything produced for cinema and television since the respective platforms' origins. The IMBD also offers users the ability to rate the shows/ films on the database and collectively aggregates the scores.

Marvel in 2009 due to a proposed 'reboot' of all of Marvel's enterprises, beginning with film releases. This will be discussed in further detail in the final chapter of this paper.

It is due to the acclaim of this series that I selected it for the case-study as, being a fan of comics myself; I too feel that the adaptation of the content of such a rich and established universe was done with accuracy and minimal forfeit of content or central themes. Galloway's adaptation of the structural forms of Spider-Man and the other characters, as well as his unique treatment of line provides an interesting debarking from what has been experienced before in the previous animated incarnations of Spider-Man. While his style is highly simplistic, his characters seem to flow as one form of singularity, yet also have weight and distinction. It is perhaps due, in part, to Galloway's downplaying of the lines (Galloway uses very subtle outlines in the creation of his characters) that gives the characters this unique flow, but this will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.[20]



Fig 21. Sean Galloway, character designs from *Spectacular Spider-Man* (2008). Animated Series.

[20] Traditionally, at least from a graphic standpoint, comic characters are constructed with heavy, dark outlines in order to distinguish them from the various other elements contained within panels. Animation has an advantage though as the inherently moving nature of the characters and static, stillness of backgrounds assists the viewer in distinguishing characters from backgrounds.

Chapter 4: Case Study Analysis

This chapter will provide a discussion on, and comparative case-study of, the nature of adaptation from three Spider-Man comic titles to its contemporary animated translation *Spectacular Spider-Man*(ani), with particular focus on the arrival of Venom as common story-arc for both the comics and the animated series. The core of the case-study will use a battle scene between Spider-Man and Venom to provide a basis for the comparison showing how similar scenes are depicted in two very different media, as well as the theory involved with it. This particular choice is hinged on my belief that animation is the most logical platform for adaptation for comic book content, as the medium of animation itself offers limitless (or at least unlimited to the extent of the imaginations and abilities of the animators involved) potential for creative expression, whereas live-action film is grounded in reality. Comics and animation share many common traits; and as explained previously, even partially share in each other's heritage. The two media's respective styles also borrow from and influence one another and the intrinsic perpetuation of motion present in comics and animation will be discussed and related as well as differentiated to provide context for my research.

Stylistic Adaptation

Spider-Man's history in animation is highly developed; and as the character matured and changed, so did the content of the animation. The first great change in direction of content arose from 1994's *Spider-Man* animated series, which offered far deeper and long-running plots, complex characters and superior animation quality than its predecessors. The most important aspect of this particular series though, is in its near identical following of the plot and events of the *Amazing*(cmc) comics, clearly defining it as a fan favourite at the time. The series reached both existing fans of the comic, as well as newer audiences, such as those with limited access to the comics themselves (please see endnote [i]), endearing Spider-Man as a character to many different viewers.

The debut of the *Spectacular*(ani) series in 2008 attained equal acclaim and even surpassed it, winning awards and garnering nominations for various categories in animation awards, partly due to the somewhat revolutionary character designs of Sean Galloway. Galloway's style offered a unique, and more importantly, contrasting take on the identities of the characters in the Spider-Man universe, especially in comparison to the various series that preceded *Spectacular*(ani), which were all still heavily tied to their comic heritage.

To elaborate, I will place a panel from the *Amazing*(cmc) comic series (of the duration between 1984 and 1994) and a still shot from 1994's *Spider-Man* animated series. The two images will be used to provide a contextual discourse of the congenital similarities that are found in comics and animation, with particular focus on the character traits and design aesthetics of Venom as a character.

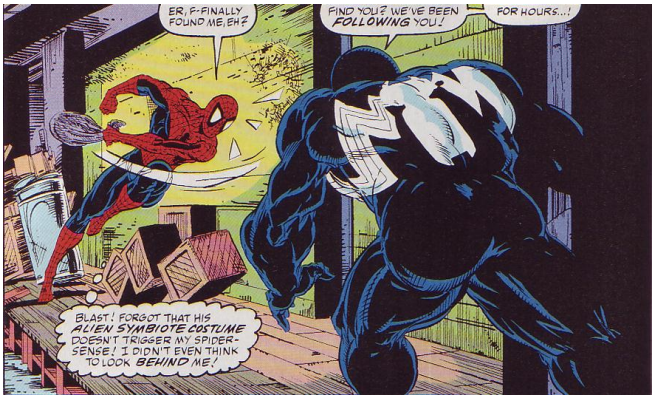



Fig. 22 (Left) Todd McFarlane (p), panel Excerpt from "Dead Meat", *Amazing Spider-Man* #316, as collected in *Spider-Man: Birth of Venom* (2007: 322) [Marvel Entertainment]. Fig. 23 (Right) Stan Lee (prod.) and Marvel Productions Ltd., Excerpt from "Spider-Man" (1994) episode 27 "Venom Returns". Animated Series.

In the above images, the influence of the comic on the animation is prevalent, from character design through to composition and staging. Venom's bulky figure and ominous black costume are very closely tied, whilst

the backgrounds and even the placement of Venom in relation to Spider-Man are very closely matched in the two images.

A difference that is immediately discernable, however, is in the creation of form of the two Venom iterations. The comic depiction of Venom is far more detailed, with McFarlane's art giving a somewhat grotesque-edge to the character through sheer pictographic hyperbole. Each muscle is over-defined, but only through the blue highlights used to break up the otherwise black form of Venom. The colour palette in itself is hyperbolic, but again almost in a practical sense - whilst the colours are bold and expressive, they are also limited for the utilitarian purpose of printing. The limitations in printing technology during the early 1990s, as well as the cost factor involved in printing so many thousands of full-colour comic books resulted in a limitation of colours, with flat planes of single colours rather than tonal gradations and the heavy usage of black. Forms are distinguished through line and highlights, hence Venom's near black appearance, whereas he is coloured in a more blue hue in modern versions of the comic. I personally feel that the black was far more distinguishing of Venom's dark nature; the more contemporary blue hues almost reduce his level of malevolence. No longer is he a bold, darkly ominous character that lurks in the shadows, but rather he becomes a garish parody of himself. The proliferation of modern technology and colouring techniques seems to have dulled Venom's character, rather than developed it and even in the *Spectacular* animated series; the greyish tint to Venom's appearance also dulls his threatening, violent nature.

Venom's masculinity is constantly emphasised by his construction – his actions are bold and purposeful, his bulk and musculature far surpassing even herculean stature to the point that his appearance divulges from perfection into a grotesque perversion of the idea of what is manly. Venom is too strong, too large and too enraged to be likened to a human in any way and rather becomes bestial. Spider-Man's wiry, slight physique contrasts, but simultaneously compliments Venom's appearance, although irony appears in the fact that Spider-Man too is immensely strong, despite his more slender physique. Spider-Man's true strength lies in his quick-witted and analytical

methods of thinking out situations before confronting them. Which is a better portrayal of masculine? The mass of muscles, bent on destruction, or the warrior that relies on mentally besting his foes? Both characters are equal, but diametrically different and their sizes provide enhanced emphasis on the polemic nature of their conflict.

The Venom pictured on the left is from the 1994 *Spider-Man*(ani) animated series, his colours and form are far more simplistic and flat and his physique has more of a suggestion of muscularity rather than a clear definition. This simplification of form, possibly even reduction in some instances, is an integral part of the animation process forming a very unique part of its aesthetic, but is in itself is also entirely practical (once again for utilitarian purpose). Animators simplify characters as much as possible in order to reduce the amount of time taken to illustrate each frame present. Muscles appear spherical and bulbous (in the instance of *Spider-Man*(ani) at least) and become stylised representations of form. The stylised forms of comics become further stylised for practicality and aesthetic. Yet, as an audience, we can still identify the characters and understand the actions. Do adapted animated characters become iconic of themselves? Or are they entirely separate entities, playing out in their own (fabricated) reality, independent from their originators?

Both comics and animation inhabit their own unique universes, each with their own particular purposes and aesthetics. Both media have certain practical limitations though: printed comics do not move, but can feature as much detail as the artist deems necessary; animation allows for the motion of characters, but has to sacrifice detail through stylisation in order to allow for faster production times. The production methods of both are therefore innately similar: simplified, easily replicated colours and forms for maximum output over very limited periods of time. The iconic appearances of animated characters are present, but are rooted in the very aesthetic of animation; as comic characters are equally iconic and representative in their construction and portrayal.

The answer to my posited questions are therefore yes and no, for animated characters, whilst being iconic and independent, are still merely representations of an idea, which in itself is a representation of what we, as human beings, deem as reality. Comics provide an avenue for readers to transcend their sense of reality and animated adaptations of comics simply further this by providing motion and sound.



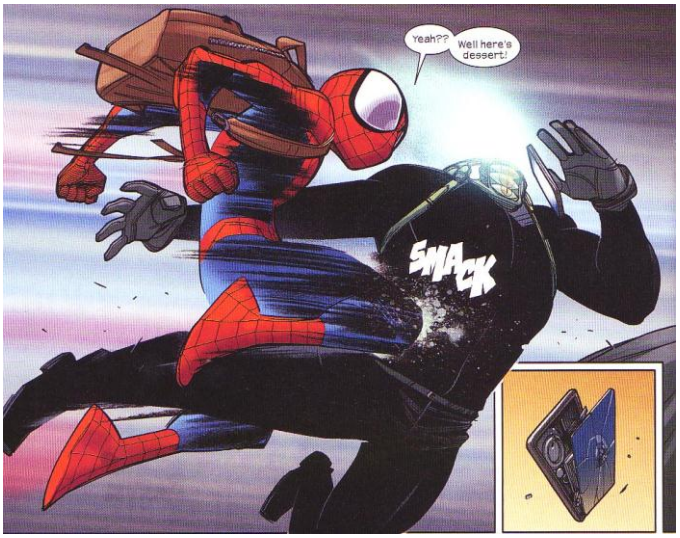

Fig. 24 (Left) [Brian Michael Bendis (w) and Mark Bagely (p)], excerpt from "Suspended", *Ultimate Spider-Man #48* (December 2003) [Marvel Entertainment]. Fig. 25 (Right) [Brian Michael Bendis (w) and David Lafuente (p)], excerpt from "The New World According to Peter Parker", *Ultimate Spider-Man #3* (December 2009) [Marvel Entertainment].

The two examples above are of a more contemporary nature, being the two versions of *Ultimate Spider-Man*(cmc). The illustrations both depict scenes of movement, or at least implied movement. The left image depicts a young Spider-Man swinging from a web and the right image shows Spider-Man attacking enemy Mysterio. The obvious contrast between the two illustrations is the difference in art style, especially when compared to Todd McFarlane's in the previous illustrated example, particularly because the art has interestingly taken on a much more animation-esque aesthetic in character construction. The respective forms of the contemporary iterations

show a younger Spider-Man – his frame is much smaller, muscles are less developed and his head is much larger than the 1994 *Amazing*(cmc) character designs.

Bagely's art (left) has diverted from the dark, edgier direction of McFarlane's and taken on a simpler, more refined approach, coupled with richer, more emotive colours and tonal gradation. Even the implied movement is more fluid and dynamic when compared to the slight awkwardness of posture in McFarlane's art. Lafuente (right) pushes style even further, to the point of near embellishment– Spider-Man is smaller and even more youthful in appearance (aided by the larger eye-pieces on his mask, as well as the previously mentioned change in proportions[21]) and his form is reduced to more angular, iconic shapes, yet he still communicates weight and momentum in his actions, the collision with Mysterio being palpable. The impact is further heightened by the use of 'speed-lines' and the blurring of the background, the former being an illustrative technique used to emphasise movement in static images and the latter adopted from cinematic motion blurs and the simulation of camera movements within panels.

The film-inspired content is a far more contemporary technique that has become quite prevalent in modern comics, with each panel emulating an individual camera or shot, introducing the notion of what has been termed 'widescreen' comics. Marvel's *Ultimates 2* illustrator and 'widescreen' pioneer Brian Hitch (as quoted in *Computer Arts* Magazine) states: "Widescreen is just how you use panel shapes… It allows a film-like approach. Each page has an establishing shot, and that means there is no flexibility to do something claustrophobic." (2006: 48). Hitch successfully creates comic panels akin to high action blockbuster movies and shifted the paradigm of layout design in contemporary comics. What does become interesting though is that Hitch's art remains distinctly contained within each panel, governed by its shape and dimensions, whereas McFarlane, Bagely and Lafuente all allow transcendent spill-over. This spill-over occurs when

[21] Younger characters are often illustrated with certain proportions in exaggeration, such as large eyes and heads, but smaller bodies, indicating that they are still growing into their bodies.

characters go beyond the parametric constraints of the comic panel's borders and move across into subsequent panels in any direction, which in turn assists a reader in understanding the kinetic projection present in the gutters between the panels.

This 'spill-over' also serves to slightly further remove the characters from reality, as they appear in and out of time simultaneously. The time in a panel, whilst transgressive, is still tangible to a degree, but the presence of time in the gutter is infinite, at least to the extent that a reader interpolates the sequences between panels. The combination of widescreen and the more liberal 'panel-breaking' provides in interesting hybrid method of narrative construction. The Spider-Man artists mentioned previously are not constrained by the panels, but rather use them as narrative springboards to instil greater emphasis on movement. This also creates a puzzling temporal dilemma, as the characters can be present in multiple panels at once via overlap.

The character overlap results in some questions: does the overlap provide a form of continuity tie-in? Or is it mere aesthetic? It is clear that live-action cinema cannot replicate this, as it is constrained to the screens it is projected on, regardless of how it attempts to simulate panel crossovers with multiple shots occurring at once. Even those frames are still constrained to the screen. It can be argued that comics are constrained to the pages that they are printed on, but a person can read a comic and accept that a character can move over a defined border whereas the same occurrence in film and animation is technically not possible, unless the entire frame is shifted down. Characters cannot transcend the borders of a frame, but through the persistence of vision, continually move within a generated space (as each frame of film is a still photograph and the illusion of movement is only generated when the film is played rapidly). It can be partly due to the fantastical nature of comics, but animation is equally fabricated and provides an exception in that it too can transcend the boundaries ascribed by live-action cinema, albeit in a forcibly simulated version. Characters can step out of 'shots', converse directly with audiences in conspiratorial monologues and even attack writers or artists (as was highly prevalent with the 1990s Warner

Bros. stable of cartoons, especially the Emmy Award-winning *Freakazoid* and *Animaniacs*, both created by Steven Spielberg)[vii]. These situations can also occur within live-action film, but are more reliant on special effects. Animation differs in that it is already ascribed with an ingrained believability because the viewers already acknowledge that animation is a constructed representation of reality. I will acquiesce that live-action film itself is also essentially an ersatz delineation of reality, but because of the presence of 'real' actors, viewers are not as easily predisposed to believe the situations depicted on screen. In this particular paper, it is the behaviour of comic characters in relation to panels that will be discussed and compared to the confined realm of screen in terms of animation.

Comic to animation adaptation is possibly one of the most logical of all forms of adaptation in terms of print to screen translations. Where live-action cinema tends to suffer difficulties in the translation/adaptation from page to screen due to implausible situations, bombastic dialogue and even the sound, (particularly emphasised by LeFèvre, 2007: 4) often prove to be difficult for filmmakers. Many of these issues are not the same in animation, as the medium is limited only to the talent and imagination of the animator. For example: characters can fly, shoot energy beams and wear completely impossible costumes in a believable manner, because the medium of animation itself is one that allows such freedoms to be expressed. Essentially, an animated cel is far more readily believable than a frame of film because brightly coloured, stylised characters are more than capable of flight or heat vision purely because an artist can tweak that character to make it completely plausible. A human actor, however, is still very much human and this makes depicting "inhuman" acts far more difficult for filmmakers. This is attainable to varying degrees of success through the utilisation of special effects in live-action cinema, but as previously discussed, animation is invariably representative and not reflective of reality, which immediately separates film and animation as media. Reality in animation is entirely made-up, allowing for endless possibilities – the animated universe is a self-contained and expansive one, transgressing all known laws of what we, as viewers know as 'real'. Gravity can cease to exist at a whim, characters can

suffer grievous harm to themselves, yet bounce back a second later and these situations are readily accepted because of the unreality of the animated 'reality'. Animation is then arguably the perfect platform to represent comics in an articulated (simulated) motion-medium as it does not suffer the constraints that live-action cinema does.

To return to my stylistic discussions on Spider-Man's various character designs animation has very specific requirements in terms of character visualisation. *Spectacular*(ani) character designer Sean Galloway offers a different approach to his comic-based peers Bagely and Lafuente in his stylistic interpretations. Where Lafuente in particular demonstrates an animation-inspired aesthetic, Galloway already works within the realm of animation, understanding its requirements and limitations and uses this knowledge to create simple, yet charismatic versions of very well-established and identifiable characters.



Fig. 26 Sean Galloway, Character Designs from *Spectacular Spider-Man* (2008). Animated Series.

The above illustration shows a distinct divergence from the more naturalistic forms evident in McFarlane's art and more stylisation than Bagely's and Lafuente's simplification of forms. What is most interesting about Galloway's designs is in his treatment of outlines which are 'punched out' (i.e. coloured to match the tone of the character) rather than the traditional black, which softens the characters visually and gives them a more grounded, natural appearance. The colours themselves are also drastically simplified, with singular levels of planar tones, rather than gradations, again to

limit the time needed to illustrate characters. The tones are representational of shadow and understood as such, yet are highly simplified, flat areas. The absence of inked tonal lines also opens up the characters a lot more in terms of audience reception, providing the colourful, free-flowing forms of the characters with a more youthful exuberance, rather than darker overtones.



Fig. 27 Stan Lee (script and prod.) and Marvel Productions Ltd., Still from *Nature versus Nurture,* "Spectacular Spider-Man" (2008). Animated Series.

As pictured above, the backgrounds are as colourful and simplified as the characters themselves, yet are ironically more detailed than the characters, even though they are sometimes only seen for mere seconds. It is due to the presence of this detail that the characters can be differentiated from the backgrounds. In animation, one of the most fundamental purposes of outlines is to assist in separating characters from backgrounds. In general, the backgrounds that appear in an animated series are often more detailed than the characters (with some exceptions) as they only appear once in a shot and do not need to be animated. The areas that do require animation are often easy to identify because of their simpler, more flat appearance when compared to other background imagery. This is not always the case though, as *Spectacular*$^{(ani)}$ is a very new series and hence has the benefit of modern technology. The backgrounds and characters are seamlessly

integrated digitally and thus the presence of the 'line' is removed, at least physically[22].

The absence of the physical line may also carry a metaphorical significance. The characters are still differentiated from the background, but also from each other, through various methods such as colours, posture and even voice. Thus, whilst the lines are more repressed, they are still tangible. The characters (and backgrounds) are still line-based constructs, so essentially they are forms simply made up by a series of lines.

This differs in live-action cinema, as everything is integrated (and hence anchored) by reality itself -- humans, regardless of the situations that occur on screen, are still inherently real, living, mortal entities and it is understood by the audiences that the scenarios depicted are fabricated. Vivian Sobchack's (2008: 252) view, in an article on a series of animated hotel advertisements, that the line: "…is one of the 'sufficient conditions of animation' because it distinguishes animation from 'live-action' cinema where no lines can be found." (Qtd. In Atkinson, 275). It is easier to accept events in animation because audiences know that everything in animation is constructed or fabricated and hence it is possible to suspend disbelief when watching Spider-Man swing from webs in *Spectacular Spider-Man*(ani), but more difficult when watching actor Toby McGuire perform the same stunt in the live-action *Spider-Man* films. A human does not possess the ability to fly, but conversely, a human possess the imagination to fabricate the effect *of* flying. However, the audience will always know that an actor has to be aided in simulating acts that are not normally possible (or real) and hence that inherent sense of the anchoring reality that guides an audience's perceptions will always be present in film. Therefore no matter how well executed the effect is, the filmmakers still have to rely on their audience believing in the 'reality' of what they see on the screen for the effect to actually function.

[22] The notion of the line plays a pivotal role in both comics and animation, as both require lines for the construction of their respective elements, from characters to backgrounds. Also, please note that when I refer to lines, the reference is made toward line-work, as well as implied lines created by colour and composition.

In continuation of the discussion on the presence of line, Scott McCloud states that (in regard to the presence of lines): "The idea that a picture can evoke an emotional or sensual response in the viewer is vital to the art of comics." (1993: 121).

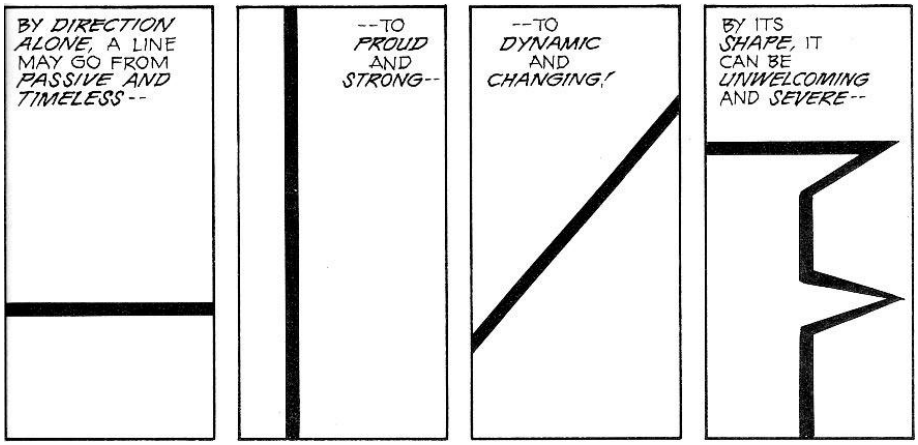

Fig. 28 Scott McCloud (w, a), Emotive lines from "Living in Line", *Understanding Comics* (1993: 125). [Kitchen Sink Press]

McCloud's illustrated example depicts possible metaphoric indicators in a purely abstract placement of lines. I do agree with McCloud's theory in regard to this, but it is not just applicable to lines. Upon titling the axis of a panel, an illusion of haste and speed is produced. By closely cropping a panel, the reader garners a sense of tension. This is directly akin to camera shots in film, again emphasising my statement on the relative similarity of comics and film (or at least a shared common grounding) mentioned earlier.

On the emotive qualities of lines and character construction, McCloud discusses two prevalent Marvel artists from different periods of time, one being Jack Kirby (the pioneering artist behind *the Fantastic Four, The Hulk* and *Spider-Man*, just to name a few) in the 1960s and Rob Liefield in the 1980s. The two time periods saw popularity from different types of readers. In the 1960s, the majority of comic readers were pre-adolescent and hence much friendlier, but dynamic lines were used, whereas in the 1980s Marvel diverted to far darker, more angst-ridden stories and thus the styles changed and became more hostile and jagged (this obviously pushed even further by McFarlane's involvement with Spider-Man). The earlier work represented a period of hope, adventure, discovery and youthfulness, whilst the newer work

was more anxious, more pubescent and unsure in nature and both appealed to distinctly different targets. This is again comparable to commercial animation[23], but even the more dark content (such as the various *Batman* animated series) still featured a more open, rounded form due to aesthetic and demographic requirements. Thus the darkness becomes more apparent in story-telling rather than in appearance as these animations still inherently need to appeal to a younger demographic.

In comics, lines not only define characters, but also the borders of panels, the tails of speech bubbles and act as indicators of speed and motion, but also directionality. The lines dictate the eye's path across a panel, but do not necessarily have to be explicitly visible. Lines can even be present in the way that a comic is read, as we (in Western culture) are taught to read horizontally from left to right and thus read in lines.



Fig. 29 Scott McCloud (a, w), Comic Panelling in *Making Comics* (2006: 70) [Kitchen Sink Press]

[23] Note that by commercial, I refer to serialised animation intended for younger age groups. This does not apply to direct-to-video animated films or animations with an age-restriction higher than pg-13, as content obviously differs drastically in older audience-oriented animation.

The creators of comics acknowledge this and rely on the fact that comics are read similarly to novels and hence use the left-to-right directionality to guide the reader's progress through both the panel and the page. Where comics differ though is that the panels cause the reader's eyes to 'drag' from panel to panel, constantly being guided by the presence of visual elements. These visual elements are what drives the reader, but also allows them to retrace steps. In the case of 'splash' pages, which entail a single illustration over one or two pages, and dependant on content, speech bubbles or narrative captions are placed to establish the initial positioning of the reader's eye, after which, the reader is free to peruse the page as they see fit.

Animation's usage of lines differs. Due to its very nature, animation does not require an indication or signifier of motion, as animation construes moving images. Animation also does not require the usage of line for emotive purposes, as the respective series voice acting cast and soundtrack provoke emotive responses from viewers, but can still make effective use of lines to indicate directionality or speed. Where the line does have a function is in the construction of characters and scenery and the direction and subsequent framing of shots. A shot can still be influenced by the emotive nature of lines, such as titled planes, sudden cuts and extreme close-ups. By blurring lines in the background the viewer understands that an action is happening at great speed, but the same blurring of characters is a signifier of confusion or tiredness.

To return to the discussion on *Spectacular's*$^{(ani)}$ subduing of its constructive lines by using hues of similar colours, one may posit the question of whether the series loses its emotional connection with the audience or not. The awards and nominations suggest that this is not the case and that the fans of both the comics and the animated series feel that is an adept translation of the comic's legacy. Whilst I agree that this is a very faithful adaptation of the comics, I find that Galloway's style (whilst lending itself to animation) can appear slightly more impersonal. The characters are almost

too softened by their subdued outlines and it takes out the punch from the action sequences. What I do find though is that Galloway's proportional construction of characters is sublime, with each cast member differentiating in appearance dependant on their personalities.



Fig. 30 Stan Lee (script and prod.) and Marvel Productions Ltd., Character examples from "Spectacular Spider-Man" Episode 13 – *Nature vs. Nurture* (2008). Animated Series.

The above illustrations feature Parker, Brock and their respective alter-egos Spider-Man and Venom. At first glance, the difference between the two characters is clear: Parker is slight and sincere, his neutrally-coloured clothes evoke a sense of Parker's average nature socially – he does not stand out from his peers in any way. Brock (Parker's school friend in this incarnation) is clearly physically larger than Parker, but the black shirt and submissive

hanging of his shoulders reveals a dark, tormented soul, angry at Parker, but equally angry with himself for letting his anger dominate and control him. The symbiote suit becomes a metaphoric representative of this emotional turmoil for both Brock and Parker. It is Parker that comes across as the more endearing, empathetic character in this regard, and hence appears stronger, regardless of his lack of physical stature when compared to Brock.

The alter-egos present a differing image altogether though. Venom is the Goliath to Spider-Man's David: he's larger, stronger, faster, knows all of Spider-Man's abilities, as well as Parker's secret identity and does not trigger Spider-Man's "spider-sense" (essentially a precognitive instinct that warns Spider-Man of impending danger), leaving his smaller foe at a distinct disadvantage. Galloway's design of Venom further emphasises his bulk with massive, elongated arms, broad shoulders and chest and short, but sturdy legs. Venom exudes menace, almost like a living shadow – an embodiment of the darkness present in its host's soul, whereas Parker's plain and humble appearance is far more calming; his large eyes become an extension of the innocent, but burdened soul within.

Typical of this situation though, but also in this genre, Parker manages to outwit his foe by using Venom's rage and hatred, but also desperation to be reunited with its most powerful host and manages to remove the alien from Brock through simple coercion. The almost drug-like consequences that the alien suit holds is an interesting direction in story-telling – both Parker and Brock revel in the power afforded to them by the suit, but Parker realises the consequences of controlling such raw strength and witnesses first hand how destructive power can truly be. Brock allows himself to be consumed by the power and becomes completely lost in it and when the alien is stripped away from him, his reformed identity is stripped too, he becomes empty, baseless and disappears.

The design of the other main characters of the series offer equally engaging emotional reflections and personalities, all constructed through the

presence of line. The next section will discuss the nature of development in characters.

Character Design



Fig. 31 Sean Galloway, characters from *Spectacular Spider-Man* (2008). Animated Series.

The above image features the most integral people involved in Parker's life (with the exception of his elderly Aunt May) and each represent an identifiable archetype for audiences, and slightly different archetypes for Parker. Character posture alone immediately asserts a notion of who the character is and what they are about. If we look at Watson for example, upon first inspection, it is clear that she is confident, self-assured and approachable, to Parker; she becomes a love-interest due to her affable nature and looks. Stacy, conversely, is shy, bookish and guarded; she is Parker's closest confidant and secretly harbours a deep love for him. Harry Osborn is typical, if a little unsure in appearance and whilst being wealthy, envies Parker's simpler life and loving family, as well as his own father's seemingly preference to Parker over him (Both Harry and his father become Spider-Man's enemies Hobgoblin and the Green Goblin respectively).

The 2009 *Ultimate*(cmc) comic offers a contrasting vision of Mary-Jane Watson and Gwen Stacy however, and transposes their identities. Watson

becomes the shy, unconfident character whilst Stacy exudes confidence and self-worth.

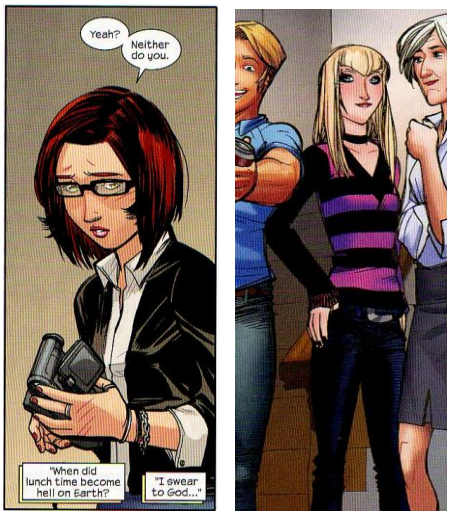

Fig. 32 David Lafuente (a), Mary Jane Watson and Gwen Stacy from "The New World According to Peter Parker", *Ultimate Spider-Man* (November 2009). [Marvel Entertainment]

The direct change in personality is striking, as historically the women featured in the *Spider-Man* comics have usually played the most consistent roles, Watson offering the exciting, enchanting alternative and Stacy being the safe, caring, safety net. The character designs and posture emphasise this heavily, Watson appears defeated and deeply saddened, while Stacy exudes confidence and hope. In their original comic incarnation, the *Amazing*(cmc) Mary-Jane is not only (adult) Parker's love interest, but also his wife, whilst Stacy was murdered by Norman Osborne under the guise of the Green Goblin, which represented a drastic change in Spider-Man's outlook and a long period of massive self-doubt. This diametric change significantly shifts the importance of these characters, but because the *Ultimate*(cmc) Spider-Man story arc is set when Parker is much younger, it also seems to provide more knowledgeable readers with an insightful glance into Parker's past and future.

It is through this the one can surmise that the character designs transcend their superficial appearances and become iconic representations

of emotion and personality. The characters are not just people (or at least illustrated representations of people); each has unique and pivotal emotive symbolism, their colours, their appearances, their idiosyncratic mannerisms evoke individual responses from fellow characters and readers alike. Spider-Man's enemies' designs are themed around animals and mythical creatures, resonating with the constructed mythology of comics themselves and placing myth within myth. This powerful, emotive imagery all derives from some humble source: colour and line.

To conclude, McCloud offers a somewhat sarcastic view on the criticisms that he has received with regard to his idea of the representational qualities of lines:

> I've been criticised for buying into this illusion that anything can ever represent anything else – you know, the futility of representation. To say in any way that these lines on paper represent a light bulb is sheer folly! (Cited by Hillary Chute from *The Believer* website, 2007).

McCloud's sentiment derives from criticism that he received from some (unspecified by the author) Poststructuralist theorists about certain claims that he made in *Understanding Comics* in regards to representation and semiotics; but as I have discussed above, it is still clear that constructed images and lines can carry significant emotional weight and imagery.

Temporality, Motion and Implied Motion.

> "… [T]here is a gestural movement that underpins all aspects of the comic book and that the trace of the artist is reinvigorated in the reading process by an implied movement contained within the line." - Philippe Marion, as cited by Paul Atkinson in his essay "Movements Within Movements" (2009: 266).

We, as people, take motion an movement for granted – it is always present in our lives, whether in the motion of branches blown in the wind, a car driving past us or even our very own breathing, there is never a true moment of stillness in our waking lives. In the realms where motion should not

be present, such as in static images, it is still possible to signify it, and thus create the impression of movement.

The panels in comics present an interesting ontology – they occupy multiple spatial fields simultaneously. While the panel itself, traditionally constructed with four borders, is both a provider of space and an occupant of space simultaneously, it also represents a space (or multiple spaces) in time. While this could rightly appear somewhat anachronistic, comic panels offer a unique platform for expression, particularly for movement.

Essentially, a comic panel encapsulates a moment, or possibly even a collective series of moments. McCloud states that the initial choice of the comic artist is that of which moments to depict in a story and which to omit (2007). Moments can both bolster and hinder a story – excessive action sequences can cause confusion and be off-putting, but too much static dialogue can bore a reader. The choices of moments that are made before the comic is even created are vital to the continuation of the story, and much like film, any panels that would serve to impede the story-telling are removed. These moments then work in conjunction with one another, whether in a series of juxtaposed panels or in singular panels to communicate a sequence of events. These depicted events are as different as comic panels are versatile and can range from simple dialogues to rampant battles; all confined between four borders.

So-called 'borderless' panels (panels where characters or items appear in the gutter-space of comics, usually for specific focus or to evoke a sense of isolation) function within space and beyond space simultaneously and as McCloud states, exudes a sense of timelessness (1993: 102). To a further extent, panels that 'bleed'[24] over the edge of a page open up the existence of time to infinity, as the content of the panel has no defined ending, but rather extends itself into boundless possibility (again limited only by the reader's perception and the amount of time spent viewing the panel.

[24] The term 'bleed' in this instance refers to the printing technique which allows for the overflow of printed graphics on a page.

The panels themselves cannot function in isolation either and require the presence of other panels to inform the progressions involved. McCloud believes that all panels are a reflection of the past, present and future, all simultaneously in time. McCloud provides the following example to contextualise this point: "… if you're reading panel two on page two, then to its left is the past and to its right is the future. And your perception of the present moves across it." (as quoted by Hillary Chute, 2007). This means that it is possible, when reading a comic, to constantly move back and forth in moments of time, with the present contained in the panel that is currently being read.

It is in this transient temporality that comics differ from animation, as televised[25] animation follows a constant, flowing narrative. The animation's narrative is comparable to that of a novel – it has a singular, flowing rhythm from a defined beginning to a defined end. Whilst it is possible to skip ahead and page through novels, the narrative will be misappropriated and broken. Comics too, most certainly have both a beginning and an end, but these in themselves are merely the first and last panel of any given comic. As stated before, the comic can be accessed in any way a reader sees fit, generating what McCloud calls a bimodal experience: the reader of the comic can follow the narrative strictly, or they can read the comic in a random, sporadic order.

The following page features an extract from *Amazing Spider-Man*(cmc) *#315* (1989), as illustrated by Todd McFarlane and will be used to provide a visual example of the function of comic panels in space and time. This particular page was chosen due to its interesting directionality and visual flow, which allows for multiple spatial interpretations. Another factor that features in this particular page is the previously-discussed border transgression, where elements of Spider-Man's body supersede the parametric confines of the panel that he appears in.

[25] In reference to the term 'televised animation', I refer to a broadcasted episode, rather than a recording on a DVD, as scenes of recorded animation can be accessed at the whim of the viewer, whilst live-broadcasted animation does not feature this.

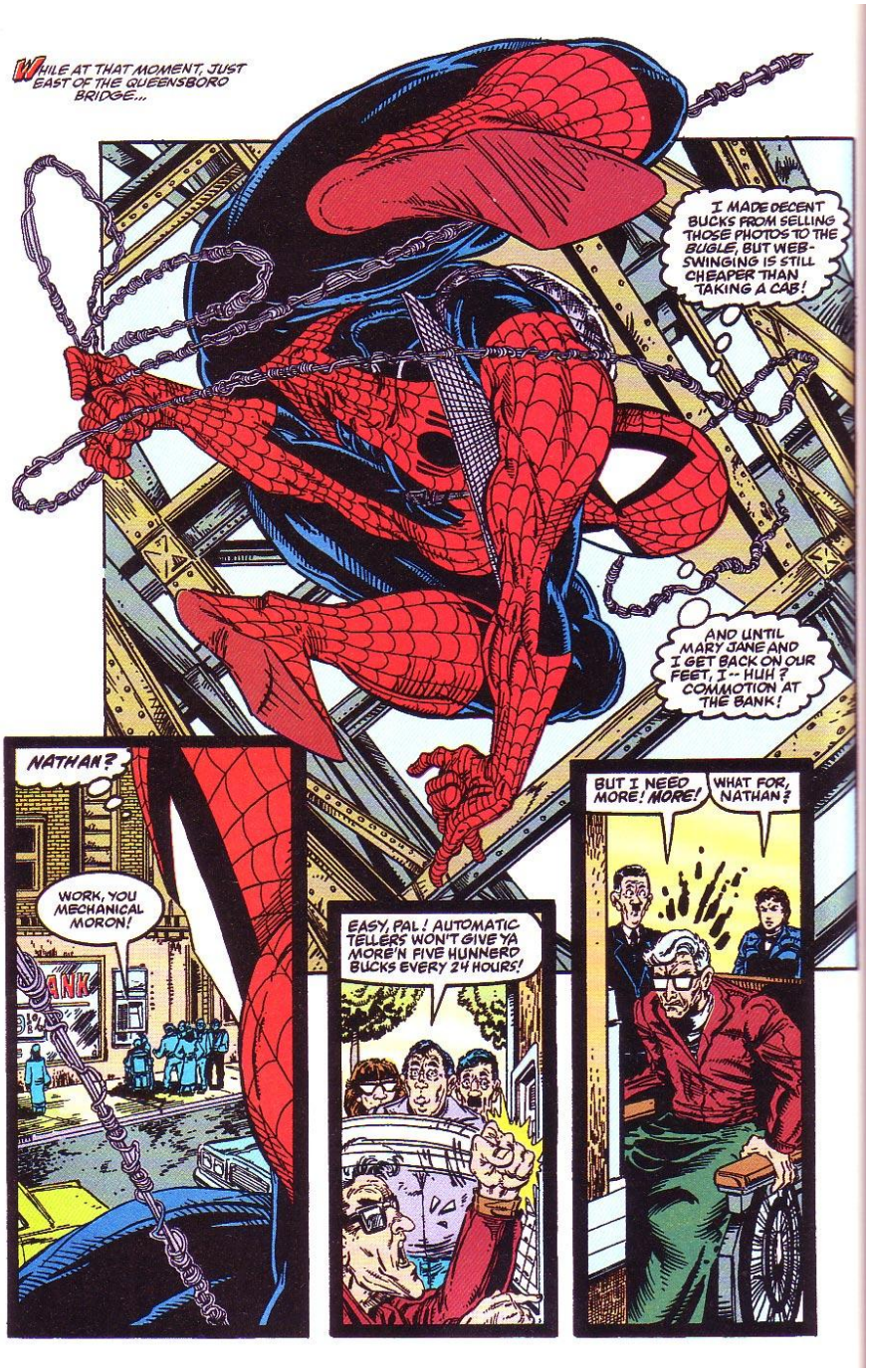

Fig. 33 Todd McFarlane (a), pg. 12 of "A Matter of Life and Debt", *Amazing Spider-Man #315*, as collected in Spider-*Man – The Birth of Venom* (2007: 282). [Marvel Entertainment]

As per typical reading doctrine, a reader would begin with the caption at the upper-left side of the page, moving to the focal image of Spider-Man swinging from a web, down to the three bottom panels. The large panel would assumedly be the starting point of this page, as there is no panel to precede it, however, the caption still provides all of the information required

to establish a moment in time, as well as a situational context by stating: "While at that moment, just east of the Queensboro Bridge."

Comics innately rely on the cohesion of text and image to successfully create a narrative. The two elements do not function separately, as one cannot function without the other. Hence, the text is as iconic as the imagery and essential to once again provide emotional, temporal and even situational context. The caption in this case provides a time and location in the gutter space, which requires mental visual interpolation. Readers fill in the location and time without needing to see evidence of either. It is understood that Spider-Man is presently near a bridge.

The main panel then draws the eye in, with McFarlane's choice of angle providing a visual hook. The implicit motion in the panel is generated simply because Spider-Man is upside-down and his web extends to the end of the page, thus the reader is informed that not only is he moving, but he's moving quickly, by sheer virtue of the anticipation present in Spider-Man's pose. However, there is a much simpler signifier of motion present: in the first thought bubble on the upper-right side of the page, Spider-Man can be seen thinking to himself about how web-swinging is cheaper than catching a taxi. This verbal cue is an immediate signifier that Spider-Man is indeed swinging from a web. What interests me though, is that this particular panel offers the potential for more direct interaction with the page. A more inquisitive reader may be inclined to turn the entire comic around and experience the new perspective, which in turn changes the entire spatial arrangement of the panel.

At the same time, Spider-Man's leg and hand extend past the borders of the panel, and his web extends towards an undistinguished source, alluding even further to his movement through space and time. The background is merely a signifier of location and the direction of Spider-Man's descent. The severe angle of the central panel becomes an indicator as to the possible speed that the hero is travelling at.

The next panel is interesting: its size indicates that it is an important moment (at least more important than its succeeding panel by sheer merit of size), yet it breaks the momentum of the previous panel. The reader is suddenly confronted with a very different, far tighter composition. The apparent tightness directs the readers focus and the implicit diagonals (Spider-Man's gaze, the speech bubbles and the web) present in this panel reels the reader's eye towards the crowd in the middle. The commotion has obviously caught Spider-Man's attention and upon realising that his (Parker's) friend Nathan is the cause, he suddenly appears as his alter-ego in the third and final panel. This indicates that in the space of Spider-Man recognising his friend in the first of the three bottom panels to suddenly appearing as Parker in the final panel, Spider-Man managed to find a location to remove his costume and approach his friend as Parker.

Time is both slowed and sped up drastically over this simple four-panel page in a series of singular, but conjunctive moments. The first panel features a downward-swinging Spider-Man deep in thought, so one can envision the hero arcing through the air on a web whilst simultaneously talking to himself without needing to have several panels of him doing so. The pace is changed though and suddenly a single moment appears over three panels, as the reader needs more contextualisation of what is occurring at the auto-teller. It can be noted though that another time anomaly is present: Parker apparently had enough time to change out of his costume over the space of the three panels. This ideally should've taken far more time than indicated by the three panels, as Parker would've required some time to change, yet apparently did so in the space of Nathan's confrontation. Essentially, this indicates that comic panels function both within and outside of time, with any number of possibilities and situations possible. The time depicted is transient and even nonsensical, yet by the process of simply reading the page, can be understood and accepted, thus panels having a presence in all forms of time simultaneously. What should be highly complex instead becomes a simple method of understood communication.

The next visual example will break this down even further, and the various signifiers will be identified and discussed.

Directionality in Comic Panels



Fig. 34 David Lafuente (a), Car Crash Sequence from "The New World According to Peter Parker", *Ultimate Spider-Man # 1* (October 2009: 7, 8) [Marvel Entertainment]

This sequence of panels forms part a large two-page action panorama in which a gang of robbers ram their vehicle through a shop window in an attempt to loot it. The two panels pictured construe the first and second of the page and the first serves to establish the impending action, as well as location. The first panel features a creative approach to signifying the beginning of the chain of events through its combination of onomatopoeia, location text and tilted image plane. The reader experiences the vehicle's approach first hand and the inverted "store" on the window means that the reader is viewing the events from the inside of a shop. The onomatopoeia's initially-open (on the left side) and then choked kerning is indicative that the vehicle is rapidly approaching from a distance, even though the only visual cue is the illustration of the vehicle right before the point of impact.

The onomatopoeia's textural and visual duality is pivotal in the mental interpolation process as it prevents the breaking up of the speed of the panel. If the growing sound-expression was not present, the artist would need to use several panels to indicate the same sequence.

The second panel is even more interesting, as its depiction of the point after the vehicle plummets through the window provides a somewhat unique temporal state that would require slow-motion to express in film. My reason for finding this sequence interesting is that it details the moment after impact, but before the store clerk has had a chance to realise what has happened – his hair has been swept forward, but he still shows a docile expression on his face. The flying debris and crushed shelves become supplementary motion signifiers and arc out, guiding the reader to both read "SCRASHH" (the artist's/ typographer's interpretation of the sound of breaking glass) and then downward to the store clerk in an almost camera-pan like shot. Suffice it to say, the amount of visual representation present in just two panels is startling, but what should be more surprising is that by the pure nature of the visual meaning of comics, readers simply understand this plethora of iconographic imagery[26].

The image below is an identical copy of the previous illustration, but I have edited it and added various symbols as indicators for directionality and motion. The **black** arrows show the main directional indicators and the direction in which the reader will follow them. The **red** arrows are indicators of supplementary and tertiary motion spill-off, essentially cues that assist the main directionality of the key signifiers. The **blue** arrow is simply present to show the traditional left-to-right Western reading orientation and the flow from the first panel to the second. The "**!**" indicate verbal and image-linkage in sound portrayal.

[26] Admittedly, this is a very generalised statement as not all readers share the shame experience when reading comics, but the majority of iconographic representation is implicitly understood.



The constructed visual indicators show the constant progressive flow of motion from one panel to the other and demonstrate the informed process of LeFèvre's so-called "kinetic visual projection". The reader instinctively reads these two panels from **left to right**. As the eye moves across the panels, they are drawn in by focal images and/or text and then **directed** by the major motion signifiers.

For example, in the first panel, the front of the vehicle is tilted up towards the upper-left side of the border, providing an anchor point for the eye to begin. By following the **downward descending path** of the bumper, the eye is also guided to the "VRRROOMMMM", which as discussed previously, indicates the rapidly increasing speed of the vehicle. The reader is also driven to notice the location indicative "store" on the window, as well as observing that the vehicle is not on the ground, meaning that it achieved sufficient speed to **ramp up** towards the window. All indicators converge at the **mid-point of the right side** of the panel and into the gutter, where the next panel "cuts" to the vehicle careening through the shattered window.

The second panel contains even more visual signifiers, starting with the **path** of the ramping vehicle, which is again at a tilted angle; this time from the mid-point and up towards the onomatopoeia (**!**). The angle of the crushed shelves then drives the eye **downward** and then **across** towards the store clerk in a sharp zigzag, with the clerk becoming a secondary focal point in the panel. The supplementary motion cues highlight the **shattering glass** (which moves in a rightward direction), and is then intonated by the

prominent onomatopoeia present in the panel. The secondary motion splits at this point, **feeding the sound**, but also **curving** towards the store clerk, creating an illusory simulated chaos.

The innate presence of time within these two panels is clearly visible, but equally indefinable, for even the supposedly frozen moments (such as the point just before impact in panel one) are still merely indicators of motion when combined with the surrounding elements and text. The reader knows that at some point, the vehicle impacted with the window, but that particular moment is never shown, rather, it is understood as part of the temporal interpolation that occurs in the slight (yet metaphorically infinite) gutter between the two panels. Paul Atkinson offers thoughtful insight into this matter when he states: "In the comic book, the panel always retains its position as part of an array of panels, and in this array the gutter both separates the panels, rendering them static, and joins them together in movement." (2009: 267). The panel will always have a specific space to occupy, but it also generates its on space in time, a time that can be utterly transcendent of any normal notion of accepted temporality.

It is then evident that the perplexingly transcendent nature of a comic panel's expression of time is reliant on the cohesion between all of the components that work to create it – line, text and (imagined, but informed) sound. Sound does not always need to be indicated to have a presence though, a reader does not know the sound of any character's voice, but fills a character's voice with their own. Sound effects are informed from life, as are the indicated forms of motion and thus, to an extent, comics are animated within the minds of their readers. To elaborate, Atkinson cites Mila Bonco's (2000) argument that: "…readers…are at their most productive in the space between panels where they 'fill in gaps of information'" (2009: 266).

Animation offers a difference here, because each frame is superimposed over the previous one, replacing it as that particular instant in time. The time of a frame is fixed as a representative of a unit of time and cannot change. It also carries with it a very specific moment and while it is

informed by its preceding frame, it will only ever serve to inform its successor. Hence, a frame that appears 1 minute into an animation can never be linked to another frame that appears at the13th minute with the only exception being that the former was a particular point in time that served to inform the latter via progression. Animation is also limited to the screen it appears on; and with the exception of conceptual animation and some cartoons[27], does not experience change of overall size and shape in terms of its aspect.

These are limitations, but they only impede the animation as much as a page limits the amount of panels that appears on it. The presence of line is still tangible, and takes form in both character construction and in cinematic shots. Where lines in comics are used to indicate motion, the lines in animation are used to create motion. Even in its movement, animated characters still require signifiers of motion in the form of anticipation, stretch and squash and arc. Anticipation indicates the intention of action, such as a baseball pitcher twisting his torso, but in animation, the motion has to be exaggerated in order for the subsequent action to appear feasible.



Fig. 35 Stan Lee (scrip and prod.) and Marvel Productions Ltd, Anticipation Sequence from Episode 13: *Nature vs. Nurture* of "Spectacular Spider-Man" (2008). Animated Series.

The above sequence illustrates the process of anticipation, frame-by-frame, of the criminal being hit with, and then pulled off-screen by one of

[27] The term cartoon, in this context, refers to animated series aimed at younger audiences.

Spider-Man's webs. The first instance of anticipation occurs in the first frame, where the criminal looks down at the web with arms open in surprise. By the third frame, the realisation of what is about to happen has dawned on the criminal and his posture has adapted to one of fear. Also note how the web has slackened against him as it spreads and then is suddenly pulled taught as the criminal is yanked forward, quickly pulling him off-screen.

In what equates to a little under a second's worth of frames, it is clearly evident how the criminal expects, and then anticipates being pulled off of his feet and finally disappears with speed at the end of the sequence (note the presence of speed lines in the final frame). The actions vary slightly each time, but the difference between frames is evident. A viewer's brain fills in the missing information which then creates the illusion of motion. However, whilst this example animation is already limited to an extent (being animated over half the amount of frames a live actor is filmed in), if every even frame were removed, it would be very difficult to receive and understand the animation. It would appear jerky and sudden; but in a comic, the four juxtaposed frames would make sense, and the entire action could even occur over three panels or less.

While an animator can reduce an action to a series of frames that are mentally interpolated (by the phenomenon of the 'Persistence of Vision', Atkinson, 2009: 267[viii]), but without the correct key signifiers, the action appears stiff and lifeless. In essence, an animated character tends to have to 'act' more than a live-action actor. Regardless of how well-articulated the character is they will never have all of the nuances of body-language that a living actor would have if they were an exact replica of life, and hence over-act to compensate. Motion lines assist in this matter, as animators employ several methods to indicate motion and action. These lines are referred to as 'lines of action' by *Animator's Survival Kit* author Richard Williams and whilst not being visual in nature, are vital to the proper expression of motion.



Fig. 36 Stan Lee (script and prod.) and Marvel Productions Ltd, Lines of Action from Episode 13: *Nature vs. Nurture* of "Spectacular Spider-Man" (2008). Animated Series.

The above illustrations indicate the importance of lines of action. Both panels provide ample visual information to the viewer that the criminal has been snagged by Spider-Man's web and is now being pulled toward the hero. The difference lies in the two poses though – the first is plausible, but wouldn't provide enough impact to show Spider-Man's strength. The criminal's posture is too upright, and whilst he does display shock, he could still possibly fight back. The second frame indicates an entirely different situation though. As I've illustrated over the image, his spine is arced in a "C" curve, clearly demonstrating the extent of Spider-Man's strength. Instead of simply being pulled, the criminal is essentially yanked forward, so hard that his weapon is thrown from his hand. Without this arcing motion, any sense of impact and weight is lost from the image, but with a simple curvature, the motion is entirely changed. Combined with anticipation, the line in animation becomes an invisible assistant in creating the illusion of motion.

Animations thus become adaptations of life and motion, and whilst based upon reality, offer the ability to simulate what would not typically be possible in that same reality. Thus I reiterate that animation is the most logical platform for the adaptation of comics, as it affords endless possibilities and suffers far less from expectations of realism behind depicted actions.

Comics versus Cartoons – A moment's analysis of *Amazing Spider-Man # 317* and Episode 13 of *Spectacular Spiderman*

Pascal LeFèvre, in his essay "Incompatible Visual Ontologies", states that comic to film adaptations suffer from four major problems, three of which stem from comics as a medium themselves, but also because of the limitations and benefits that both media encompass.

> The four problems are quoted as being:
> (1) the deletion/addition process that occurs with rewriting primary comic texts for film; (2) the unique characteristics of page layout and film screen; and (3) the dilemmas of translating drawings to photography; and (4) the importance of sound in film compared to the "silence" of comics. (2007: 3, 4)

Upon review of LeFèvre's proposed problems, 3 become prevalent, whilst problem 3 is not as relevant, or least not as problematic when translating comics to animation. (1) is the most contentious issue in adaptation, as elements of a comic's story or characters will always need to be change to suit animation, especially in terms of content for episodes. Certain story-arcs need to be summarised or even omitted, character's appearances need to be simplified and adjusted to suit the process of animation and occasionally even dialogue needs to be changed. LeFèvre states that the starting point of most adaptations is reliant on whether the scriptwriters stay true to the original storyline or not, or rather simply use the existing material as a reference point. LeFèvre offers an excellent view on why certain material needs to be changed in the adaptation process:

> A direct adaptation is seldom a good choice; some elements may work wonderfully in a comic, but can not function in the context of a film… The dilemma is, then, that a film that too "faithfully" follows a comic will seldom be a good film. Since it is another medium with other characteristics and rules, the director has to modify the original work. (2007: 4, 5)

This does not necessarily holistically apply to animation as a medium; elements of the source text still require change or sacrifice upon their adaptation. The particular differences in scripting and framing will become evident in the case-study below, with discussion on the possible reasoning/ need behind the changes.

The previous sections provided a contextual discussion on the principles of the adaptation of comics to animation. For the purpose of this case-study, I have sourced the most similar scenarios possible, that being Venom's final defeat after being tricked by Spider-Man, as it appears in both its original comic-based context and in the contemporary animated adaptation. For greater contextual reference, please refer to the appended disk at the end of this document, which contains the short footage extract from *Spectacular Spider-Man's* episode "Nature vs. Nurture"[28].

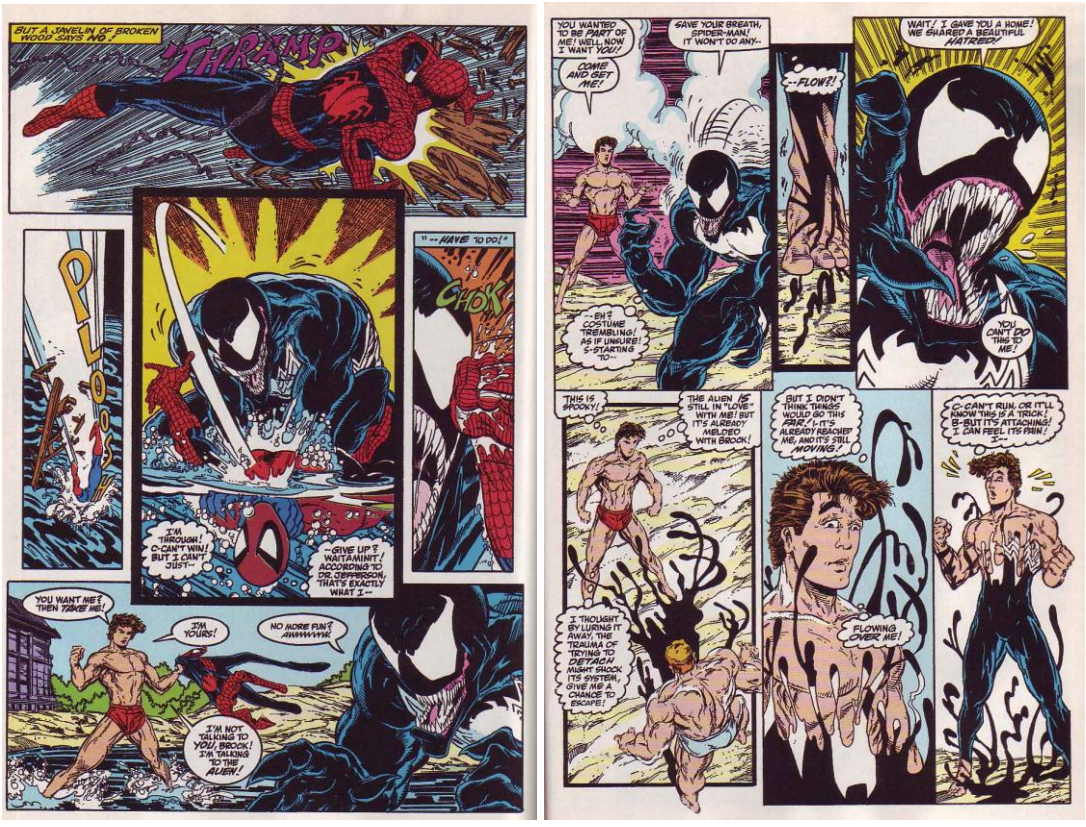

Fig. 37 Todd McFarlane (a), End Sequence of "The Sand and the Fury" *Amazing Spider-Man #317* (2007, Pages 346 – 347, as collected in *Spider-Man - The Birth of Venom*). [Marvel Entertainment]

[28] *Spectacular Spider-Man* Episode 13: "Nature vs. Nurture". Dir. Victor Cook. Produced and Written By Stan Lee. Character Designs by Sean Galloway. Sony Pictures. 2008. Animated Series.



Fig. 38 Stan Lee (script and prod.) and Marvel Productions Ltd, Venom's Defeat Sequence from Episode 13: *Nature vs. Nurture* of "Spectacular Spider-Man" (2008). Animated Series.

Upon first inspection of the two sequences, one can see that the two comic pages rely on far more striking imagery and angles; the intensity of the action and movement is pushed far in order to provide the reader with enough visual signifiers to understand the implied motion. The overall pace of the pages, especially the first one, is rapid, with panels jumping from shot to shot in interspersed quick-fire long-shots and sharp, claustrophobic close-ups.

The animation, however, feels more drawn out – the emotions of the scene are developed far more than in the comic and instead of McFarlane's visual assault, the animation draws the viewer in with far more epic shots, with long wide-angled shots and a particularly up-titled mise-en-scene to provide emphasis on Venom's dominance over Spider-Man. That is, until Spider-Man manages to coerce the alien symbiote away from Brock, and even that shot is drawn out, hammering in the frustration and pain present in the scene when

the symbiote leaves its host. Brock stands agape and then finally passes out, overwhelmed by his emotions.

In terms of time, both sequences equate to roughly one minute. Although the comic's scene may seem to last longer, it is only because it is more dialogue-heavy, so the reader would take a longer time to complete the sequence by sheer virtue of the process of reading the text itself. By virtue of what has been discussed in the previous sections, I have surmised that the scenes would indeed share an almost concurrent time-span- the amount of time required to read the pages, as well as the implicit passing of time as indicated by the various panels present in the comic would roughly equate to the minute-long animated scene. Both detail Spider-Man crashing into a water-source, the comic's being the ocean and the animation's being a water-tower. Where Venom and Spider-Man appear to fight longer in the comic, it is only because the scenes that preceded my chosen scene of animation featured a lengthy confrontation between Venom and Spider-Man in a parade.

The difference is possibly due to the updating and refining of the story-arc in *Spectacular*$^{(ani)}$, but also because the animated series limited the Venom saga to a single episode (the final of the first season) and hence required a lengthy and climactic battle to demonstrate Venom's apparent superiority over Spider-Man. Venom is also far more desperate in his animated incarnation and takes Gwen Stacy hostage in an attempt to force Spider-Man out in public, which becomes a far more psychological confrontation than the more physical altercation depicted in the comic. This is partly due to the animated series' limitation on violent content because of its PG age restriction, but also provides greater tension between the foes as Parker now has something to lose if he does not make the right decision. Whilst this does relate to LeFèvre's first cited problem, *Spectacular's*$^{(ani)}$ changes are merely necessitated through refined storytelling and modernisation. The biggest changes revolve around the choice of setting and the circumstance of the battle, and also the relationship between Brock and Parker. However, this enhances, rather than inhibits the adaptation.

In the instance of these particular scenes, *Spectacular*'s(ani) conflict has already reached its apex, having being built up throughout the episode. Where *Amazing*(cmc) focuses on the violence and depravity of Venom/Brock, *Spectacular* rather draws on the emotions of the final scenes. The comic contextualises the battle as motivation for Spider-Man to conduct his last-minute and desperate plan of coercing the alien from its host, whereas the animated Spider-Man has the same idea in a sudden epiphany. This immediately shows the different levels of experience held by the disparate Spider-Man incarnations; the older *Amazing*(cmc) Spider-Man carefully thinks out his plan after numerous consultations with fellow super-powered allies, whilst the teenaged *Spectacular* Spider-Man spontaneously reacts to his instincts. Again, the adapted Spider-Man seems to suit his character more than the progenitor – he is quick-witted and intelligent and through a quick deduction realises that the easiest way to beat a foe that is physically superior is to outwit him. The adapted character is refined off of the original precedent and the newer story-telling methodology of the series' script-writer (and Spider-Man's creator) Stan Lee reflects Spider-Man's greatest power: his mind.

Galloway's character designs make the difference in physicality between the foes clear, the younger Spider-Man is still merely a child, regardless of his powers and he has to rely on his brains rather than his abilities. His obvious inferiority becomes his advantage: he makes the symbiote think that he is weak and that he needs it to survive, he plays on the creature's new-found ego and seeks an alternative to defeating Venom that will not harm his former friend. The animation's use of angles is key here and the subtle movements of Spider-Man's 'eyes' become signifiers of anticipation in themselves. The audience can see that Spider-Man, even in his supposed defeat, has figured out how to best his foe.



Fig. 39 Stan Lee (script and prod.) and Marvel Productions Ltd., Spider-Man Plotting in "Spectacular Spider-Man" Episode 13: *Nature vs. Nurture* (2008). Animated Series.

In the above sequence, Spider-Man's submissive, defeated pose rapidly changes as he realises how he can defeat Venom. Interestingly, the animator's move the eye-pieces on Spider-Man's mask in the same way that they would his eyes and eyebrows if they were visible. Through simple expansion and compression, the viewer can see Spider-Man's epiphany as it occurs and then by the simple process of squashing the right eye piece, the viewer is provided with enough information to discern that Spider-Man is now thinking, without requiring any audio (which only serves to inform the audience as to what Spider-Man is going to do). Even the usage of tight close-ups on Spider-Man's face and contrasting waist shots of Venom provides visual cues to the viewer. Spider-Man's emotions and intelligence are demonstrated in the way his eyes react to Venom's taunts, the hero's larger head being equated to intelligence and thoughtfulness. The longer shots on Venom rather focus on his physicality, his bulk making his head appear tiny and his sinister, overconfident grin is nascent with the lack of comprehension of Spider-Man's ploy.

The audio, which is categorised under problem 4 of LeFèvre's list, thus becomes a surrogate for what would appear as monologue, captions or

thought balloons in a comic. Audio becomes problematic because of the imagined 'silent' sound of comics being a very personal and unique experience for each reader, whereas the animated adaptation relies on the sound to convey dialogue, music, sound-effects and even to enhance the animation itself (the audio replaces the onomatopoeias during motion and fight scenes). LeFèvre observes the problem by stating: "It seems that at least some readers who imagine a particular sound of the characters voices are shocked by the way an actor speaks when playing that character" (2007: 11).

As the scene plays out and the symbiote leaves Brock, an interesting break and then re-establishment of pace occurs. One would expect the unbinding to be slow and malevolent, but instead the symbiote almost liquefies and sloughs off of Brock rapidly in its desperation to be reunited with its former host, but then the black mass slowly oozes towards Spider-Man before it reunites with him. This could be hesitance, but instead it shows the extent of the symbiote without a host. Its pace is almost pitiable and its liquid state no longer speaks of strength or power, but rather of a loathsome dependency on others stronger than it. This prevalent symbolism is my reason for equating the alien suit to a drug in duality: its hosts crave it for the power it grants them, but the suit needs a host to gain any form of advantage, a co-dependency that eventually results in its downfall.

The comic reveals a different, contrasting take on this end scene. McFarlane's Spider-Man seems to exude a constant superiority: even when he is being forcibly plunged head-first into water, he's still readily able to fight Venom, as well as execute his final strategy. Even Spider-Man's posture exudes power and Venom appears to be the more submissive of the rivals – the suit craves its former host's strength and abilities, more so when it sees the confident Parker calling to it. The far more action-heavy scene is reliant on its rapid transition, but a lack of continuity becomes prevalent, and the action seems to happen too quickly, with too much reliance on the audience's perception to fill in. This results in the pages' more rushed feel, almost as if McFarlane was forced to compress the events due to a lack of remaining pages. The comic's pacing feels confusing, but at the same time, the

briskness of the panels can also lend itself to the chaos prevalent in a battle of such magnitude (an archetypal climactic build-up over a series of pages). The several changes of location over the battle's course also emphasises the colossal strength of the super-powered foes, they are not just knocked to the ground, but rather sent crashing through buildings. Spider-Man even attempts to flee at one point, but is intercepted by what Spider-Man refers to as a javelin of broken wood. This constant scene swapping is almost akin to an action film, so some of the artist's layout decisions make sense in context, but there are some glaring inconsistencies that break up the prevalent high action and thus lessen the overall impact of the battle, furthering the anti-climactic nature of the ending.

The most noticeable inconsistency appears the backgrounds of the two featured pages. In the bottom panel of the first page, Parker and Venom are standing in water, but in the following page, the foes suddenly appear to be standing on the beach. Does this change of background mean that the two characters moved from the water to the beach over the course of one panel? And why would they do so? Parker's pose has not changed and Venom's has only shifted slightly, so there is not enough visual evidence to support the sudden change of location. I have mentioned that the intentional change provides grounding and impact, but this certainly appears to be an oversight and one that would occur more often in comics than in animation.

Continuity is pivotal in animation and consistency is part of continuity. If a character's construction is inconsistent, it will become immediately noticeable as the form of the character will 'swim' (essentially the character's lines appear to ooze), a strange flickering will occur and hence it is vital for the animators to maintain complete perfection. The backgrounds are also fixed and separate from the characters, meaning that they can be used several times over and not have to be reproduced in each shot. There are also separate teams of people working to create the backgrounds, minimising the margin for error. In comics, the responsibility lies solely on the

illustrator and inker to render each panel, usually in a very limited amount of time which creates a possibility to make such errors.



Fig. 40 Todd McFarlane (a), Inconsistent areas in "The Sand and the Fury", *Amazing Spider-Man #317* (2007, Page 347, as collected in *Spider-Man - The Birth of Venom*). [Marvel Entertainment]

For closer inspection, the above image is an enlarged version of the inconsistent panel, with the most obvious inconsistencies (beside the change in location) marked out with the green arrow and question mark. The arrow indicates a lack of colour on Parker's left thigh, leaving just the outlines and background present. This strange melding with the background presents a unique flaw, but reminds the viewer at the same time of the transient nature of illustration. If the outlines do not contain colour, do they no longer communicate volume? Is Parker's 'outline' leg any less of a representation of a leg than the fully-coloured one? Essentially both legs are merely constructs of lines, indicators of an identifiable, recognisable shape familiar to readers. In fact, one can ask how many readers would even register this error.

The uncoloured leg is not as problematic as what is indicated by the question mark. In the panel that precedes the example, Parker is holding his Spider-suit in his left hand, yet it is mysteriously not present in the example.

With such differences between the two panels (the final panel on page 346 and the tope left panel on page 347), is the example still relevant? It becomes redundant and almost alternative in nature but at the same time, the errors only hold impact at that particular moment. The major problem is still the change in location, as the leg and missing costume are simple oversights by the artist. Whilst the location is equally erroneous, it drastically changes the space and time of the panel. The medium is a forgiving one though, as these errors were only discovered through close analysis. Often a reader would simply (subconsciously) interpolate or even dismiss the discontinuities as the content of panels tends to be glanced over, rather than scrutinised. Does this mar the reputation of the medium at all, or add to its aesthetic?

It can be argued that if one reads the dialogue and only uses the images to support the text, the suddenness of the two pages makes more sense. Parker's appeal to the symbiote causes its rather prompt separation, and even Parker comments on the speed that the symbiote commanded in order to re-bind with its former host. The text becomes the visual driver rather than the imagery, which becomes secondary, not because of a weakness of art, but rather in poor planning. The resultant factor leaves a rather dissatisfied feeling, almost as if defeating Venom was a pedestrian task, easily completed and easily forgotten. The final page of *Amazing Spider-Man*(cmc) *#317* reveals that the symbiote is unable to completely unbind with Brock and it overburdens itself, causing all to black out.

Upon waking, Parker discovers that the symbiote simply falls off of him and retracts itself to Brock, but in its weakened state is unable to completely bind itself. The page ends with Parker walking away from the crumpled form of Brock, considering contacting Ben Grimm (the Thing from *The Fantastic Four*) to assist him in detaining and disposing of the symbiote.

This ending provides no resolution, no clear victory and a rather complacent Spider-Man. The open-endedness of the story was clearly to

allow Venom's return in future comics, and as discussed in Chapter 3, Venom takes on several more hosts, as well as creating its offspring Carnage.

Spectacular Spider-Man(ani), whilst remaining faithful to its source, shows a distinct refinement in story-telling and style in comparison to the comic. The animation provides a far more defined ending. The series chooses to focus on the emotions and consequences of the choices made by both Spider-Man and Brock. Parker struggles with the loss of his friend, but gains true strength of character through his rejection of the symbiote. *Amazing*(cmc) shows its age though, and whilst it deals with similar issues, the unresolved ending cheapens the overall impact of the battle's resolution. The ending does, however, offer insight into the possibility of Venom's return, as he is afforded several chances to escape.

Both titles share significance in their own right, the comic served to establish the legend of one of Spider-Man's most powerful nemeses, whilst the animation refined him from a simple brute to a confused, emotional and flawed human being, a victim of his own rage and a tool for another creature's lust for power. The comic and the animation ironically share a near symbiotic relationship with one another, as one has informed the other, but at the same time, the influence of the many animated series can be seen in the art style and in the film-inspired panel layouts.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have discussed the unique and defining adaptive relationship between comics and animation, with the positing that animation is the most logical platform for filmic adaptation of comics. The medium's freedom and perceived unreality allows for the fantastical scenarios and characters of comics an inherently believable and cohesive method of expression. The expression derives from the common, fundamental similarities in production methods that the two media share from the usage of line (as construction and as an emotive device), through to character construction and framing. Comics are still and animation is articulated, but both function within and without time, both appear in shots (a panel in a comic is fairly similar to a shot in an animation by purpose). Most importantly, both media allow for the portrayal of fantastical, impossible situations within a self-contained, believable context.

I mentioned that comics were in part responsible for the development of content for animation and that some of the earliest animation stars were merely adaptations of already-popular comic strips, guaranteeing an audience for the animators at the time. As the medium of animation was refined, so too were comics and soon costumed and super heroes became the mainstay of content and synonymous with the term comics. The refreshed popularity of the medium was enveloped by animation, and with syndication of content, became a profitable and feasible avenue of revenue for both comic publishers and television studios alike.

Spectacular's(ani) adaptation, as mentioned previously, is seen by many as the most successful of its kind – it updated a legendary comic icon and gave Spider-Man grounding to both established and new audiences. Part of the strength of its adaptation results from the series' faithfulness to its content; *Spectacular* did not attempt to change any of the source material, it merely provided contextual relevance and presented problems that any viewer can identify with. This could not have occurred though, had the comic not laid the groundwork for a new type of Super Hero: young, inexperienced

and unconfident. Parker is still attempting to find out who he is while concurrently establishing an entirely different persona for Spider-Man. The overlap of the two personalities builds him as a person and endears him to his audience because of his struggle to find his identity and place in the world.

The animated series requires the existence of the source comic to in order to be extant, and whilst the story and direction demonstrates greater sophistication than the comic, it is only because the progress and development, as well as investment, that animation has encountered over the past two decades. Professionalism is paramount and if the animation is not successful, it will prove severely costly to the network that funded it. The Spider-Man comics will not lose fans or funds because of the failure of an animated adaptation, as comics will always have its own distinctive market base.

Spectacular Spider-Man(ani), despite its success, only lasted for two seasons after being cancelled mid-way through the production of the third. The reason for the cancellation was Disney Enterprises' procurement of Marvel and a decision was made to cancel all animated and filmic ventures currently underway in order to 'reboot' all screened media with a fresh injection of $4 billion worth of funding. *Guardian* journalist Andrew Clark provides insight into this:

> The tie-up unites two companies with similar business models – they both take characters which capture the popular imagination and promote them vigorously around the world on every possible media platform and through third-party licensing deals. (2009)

Whilst this signifies the inherent demise of the *Spectacular Spider-Man* animated series, the animated adaptation of *Ultimate Spider-Man* has nearly completed production and will air over the course of 2011.

Disney's procurement may have been met with trepidation, but I firmly believe that with the company's well developed heritage and substantial financial backing, audiences can expect even more adaptations of comic content. The reception of the adaptations, however, will always be in the

hands of the fans and it is the fans that decide the success or failure of any adaptation.

The purpose of this case-study was to demonstrate the innate similarities in purpose of comics and animation, with specific focus on the perpetuation of motion present in both media and how they affect their respective audience's perceptions. Comics require far more input from their readers, with the majority of their implicit motion occurring via the reader's mental projections. It could be said that it is the gutter space between panels that are the most important aspect of a comic, but without the panels to inform that space, they simply revert back to paper. Comic panels also generate, as well as exist within their own spaces in time, transcending the natural state of temporality in order to communicate a moment (or several moments) within a bordered arena. Through the visual breakdown, it was demonstrated how the images and content of a panel, as well as the text and communication devices work as conjunctive signifiers of motion, providing pace, directionality and even sound. The reader is equipped with all of this information in order to successfully fill in what *is not* depicted in the panels and thus, through the simple process of moving their eyes from one panel to the next, provide the driving source of motion. The experience is unique to each reader and whilst some will appraise each panel lovingly, others simply read the comic quickly to further the narrative.

Animation is different in that its purpose is to articulate and simulate motion, and whilst it is still only a representation of true motion, its intention is to proffer the illusion of motion. Each cel/frame of animation is a static image, reliant on its predecessor as well its successor in order to perpetuate motion. This is actually remarkably similar to comics in a way, as a comic panel, whilst able to exist singularly, still requires information from the panels before and after it in order to drive a narrative. I will acquiesce by noting that a comic panel can contain far more information than an animated frame, but both share the purpose of driving a narrative forward, as well as creating the implication of motion. Animation supplies sound and dialogue and uses it for

emphasis and as a story-telling device and through its articulation drives the narrative forward.

Despite these differences, the intention of both media is essentially the same as both are narrative-driven and visual in nature. Where one is implied, the other is provided, but both tell a story, both are fabricated, representational media and both are equally important.

In closing, animation and comics will always share a fundamentally similar heritage, and I feel that they will continue to feed each other as long as both media exist in one form or another. In contemporary times, we are now seeing the beginning of an amalgamation of animation and comics in the form of so-called *Motion Comics*, with Marvel having already released three separate titles on DVD. Whilst the motion comics aren't animated in a traditional sense, the characters move and speak, camera movements occur and panel borders no longer exist – the comic rather becomes a singular, flowing entity. Does this mean that the motion comic as a medium has transcended itself, or has it moved away from its own aesthetic and is neither animation nor comic, but rather a hybrid of the two? This is not related to my discussion on the relation between standard comics and animation though, as a motion comic is an entirely new and different medium.

Animation, as per my discussions, will always form the most logical platform for comic content as disparate, but intrinsically similar media as one informs the other whilst also allowing for a greater field of expression.

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[i] Due to the large amount of potentially confusing titles present in the Spider-Man universe, I will be using the following system of reference in order to ensure maximum clarity when discussing various titles:

Any Spider-Man comic titles that are discussed, such as *Amazing Spider-Man*, will have the abbreviation (cmc) in superscript to denote its medium.

For example: In *Amazing Spider-Man*$^{(cmc)}$, Parker…

Animated titles will feature the abbreviation $^{(ani)}$ and any television series will be denoted by $^{(tv)}$.

Lengthy comic titles will also be shortened to the first word in their name after the first mention, for example *Ultimate Spider-Man*$^{(cmc)}$ will simply be referred to as *Ultimate*$^{(cmc)}$.

I also wish to note that due to another potential point of confusion, the dates of comic titles will not be referred to. I will rather discuss the artists involved in that particular title.

[ii] Interestingly, Rabobi has become somewhat of an ironic icon in recent years after seeing a memetic revival and rapid exposure on t-shirts, internet videos and even covers of the original Xhosa theme song, which is highly likely to be the reason behind the sudden mass-nostalgia of this previously forgotten part of South Africa's broadcasting history.

Note: the terms meme and subsequently memetics can be defined by the World Dictionary as "an idea or element of social behaviour passed on through generations in a culture, especially by imitation". (Dictionary.com)

[iii] According to Comicsresearch.com scholar Alan Ellis, the following abbreviations can be used for the academic citation of comics and cartoons (1998):

- (a) Denotes artist.
- (p) Denotes penciller.
- (i) Denotes inker.
- (w) Denotes writer.

[iv] McCloud quite clearly emphasises the difference in reading a Western Comic and a Japanese Manga, as both compositionally and aesthetically, the two forms of comics differ quite substantially and the way they are read provides completely unique experiences. Henceforth, Manga will be alluded to, but does not form a part of any critical arguments set forth in this paper.

[v] According to Comics.com, as of the 10th of March 2010 a well-preserved copy of *Action Comics* #1 was sold for USD$1.5 million, making it the most valuable comic to date. The collectability of comics has become a highly profitable business, with the Comic Guaranty LLC (CGC) being the highest authority on preservation and valuing of comics. According to comic auction house ComicConnect.com, the three most valuable comics of all time are *Action Comics* #1, *Detective Comics* #27 (featuring the first appearance of Batman) and *Superman* #1, all titles that fall under the DC brand.

[vi] Each version of the Spider-Man comics features differing story-arcs, events and occasionally even origins of villains and there are often limited runs and so-called "one-shot" comics to bolster the mythos (Spider-Man has even appeared in a Noir-themed comic). The various iterations fall in to what is termed the 'Multiverse' in comic jargon (Jurgens, 1994: 29-30). Essentially all of these titles exist at the exact same time in any given moment and hence occur in parallel or alternate realities. This somewhat confusing existence is chronicled pictographically in a special #0 edition of DC's *Zero Hour*, which consists of a story-arc encompassing all iterations of the DC Super and Costumed Heroes meeting their alternate selves.

[vii] This stylistic trait is referred to by the moniker “Breaking the Fourth Wall” and is not exclusive to animation itself. Robert Cargill, a writer for Film.com, cites the definition of the ‘Fourth Wall’ as:

> [The fourth wall] in film, television, and video games is defined as the screen in front of you -- that line of demarcation between you and the story. Originating in the days of the stage, breaking the fourth wall meant that someone onstage was stepping out of their fictional universe to talk directly to or acknowledge the audience (2009).

In comics, characters such as DC’s Lobo and Marvel’s Deadpool often talk directly to readers, make self-referential or memetic jokes and even destroy panels in order to reach another panel on the page. However, this isn’t exclusively limited to humour, as even-the X-men featured a character destroying the X-men logo.

[viii] Mediacollege.com defines the ‘Persistence of Vision’ as:

> A commonly-accepted although somewhat controversial theory which states that the human eye always retains images for a fraction of a second (around 0.04 second). This means that everything we see is a subtle blend of what is happening now and what happened a fraction of a second ago. (2010)