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Adapting Manga to Live Action

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Johannesburg. **July, 2016.**

A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Film and Television.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own unaided work, save insofar as indicated in the acknowledgments and references. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in Film and Television, in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Shubham Rajesh Mehta
28th day of July, 2016

Acknowledgments

It is with great sincerity that I thank the following people:

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All those who contributed to the making of *Jabu Isiqalo*. You are all a rather talented and kind bunch.

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To my crazy friends who keep me just the right amount of sane.

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Abstract

For this research project, I search for an approach to adaptation theory that may be better suited to adapting Manga (Japanese comics) to film. The American comic book adaptations in the last eight years have met with resounding success, and their increased number has also prompted a shift in what audiences and producers qualify as a successful adaptation. For example, 19 films that have been made by Marvel, Sony and Fox since 2008, were adapted from Marvel comics, but followed plot lines that varied greatly from that of the comics (IMDB.com, n.d). However, Manga adaptations have not met with the same level of success, and as such, I propose that a different approach might be necessary when it comes to adapting them.

To do so, I discuss how Japanese Manga has been adapted by Hollywood in the past, and why those attempts have been considered a failure, the key example being that of 'Dragonball Evolution' (James Wong, 2008), which was based on the famous series, 'Dragon Ball', created by Akira Toriyama in 1984. To conclude, I propose my approach to adapting Manga and support it with a short film adaptation.

Introduction

The Hollywood tradition of adapting literary texts to the big screen is an old and well-known one. In the early years this was marked by film pioneer, D.W. Griffith's film 'Ramona' (1910), an adaptation of Helen Hunt Jackson's 1884 novel of the same name (Gallen, 2015), and in more recent times, one may consider Peter Jackson's adaptation of J.R.R Tolkien's 'Lord of The Rings' series (2001;03) (Ebert, 2001) as a fine example of this age-old Hollywood practice. It therefore seems that adaptations have been, and still are, a prominent part of the Hollywood film-making tradition.

Moreover, in the last eight years, this Hollywood film practice of adaptations has shown a marked increase in the number of superhero comic book adaptations. For example, comic book publishing giant, *Marvel Worldwide Inc*. (commonly known as Marvel Comics) has produced 16 film adaptations that were based on their comic books[1]. *DC Comics Inc*. (simply known as DC Comics), Marvel's chief competitor, has maintained the competition by releasing 11 film adaptations of their own (IMDB.com, n.d).

The films have received widespread public approval, with Marvel's films earning an average domestic gross of $200,443,160 (boxofficemojo.com, n.d.). However, while Hollywood's attempts at adapting American superhero comics have been largely successful, their adaptations of Japanese comics, more commonly known as Manga, have been a failure. There have been only two Manga adaptations in the last eight years, and neither of them has performed well at the box office. 'Old Boy' (Spike Lee, 2014) grossed a total of $2,193,658, while 'Dragonball Evolution' (James Wong, 2009) did slightly better at $9,362,785 (boxofficemojo.com, n.d). Their critical reception was equally poor, with Rotten Tomatoes giving 'Old Boy' a 41% mark and 'Dragonball Evolution' a 14% mark. Even the Mangaka

[1] Between 2000 and 2008, only nine films based on Marvel comics were made, as opposed to the years between 2008 and 2015, which saw 16 adaptations. (http://www.imdb.com/company/co0051941/?ref_=fn_co_co_1)

(Manga writer) of ‘Dragon Ball’, Akira Toriyama, in an interview with Asahi Shimbun, stated, “What came out in the end was a movie I couldn’t really call a ‘Dragon Ball’ that lived up to my expectations” (Shimbun, 2013). It should be noted that the focus of this report shall be Hollywood adaptations as considering anime and Japanese adaptations is beyond of the scope of the research.

I propose the films did so poorly because the approach that the directors took when adapting these texts was unsuitable. Manga has been an important part of the Japanese culture for many years; originating from their earlier art forms, Manga’s development was independent and yet intertwined with that of American comics (McCloud, 1993; Koyama-Richard, 2010). Therefore, Manga has its own technical and narrative conventions that are different and yet similar to that of the West. I would argue that since Manga is so unique in its ‘content’, successfully adapting it requires an alternative approach to adaptation – one that I will propose through my research and the short film that accompanies it.

Chapter 1 – Analysing Sequential Art

To analyse comics, also known as sequential art, such as Manga and American Superhero comics, I rely on the works of Hans Christian Christiansen (2000), Scott McCloud (1993) and Fredrick L. Schodt (2012). Christiansen, in his essay, 'Comics and Film: A Narrative Perspective', presents four categories, namely "Norms, Conventions, Deep Structure, and Cross Cultural Universals". The various characteristics of film and comics can be divided into the aforementioned categories. I use these categories to list and discuss the characteristics that McCloud and Schodt present in their respective works, 'Understanding Comics' (1993), and 'Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics' (2012). Lastly, while Christiansen's categories are useful in separating the various characteristics of a text, these characteristics are not mutually exclusive, and therefore they can and often do affect each other.

Manga

Before beginning the analysis of Manga, it should be noted that, depending on the targeted audience, elements such as stylistic conventions, recurring themes, and even narrative types change across the Manga sub-genres (MacWilliams, 2008). The manner in which Shōnen (Manga aimed at males under the age of 15) is drawn, is quite different from the illustration style used in Shojo (Manga aimed at females under the age of 18). In the same vein, the themes of Seinen (Manga aimed at men between the ages of 15 and 24) seldom cross over with the themes of Shōnen Manga (MacWilliams, 2008). As this research considers how the Manga that is most similar to Western comics, such as 'Superman' and 'The Avengers', may be adapted for the Western audience, it focuses only on Shōnen Manga. To discuss the attributes of Shojo or Seinen Manga would then be outside the parameters of this research report.

Norms of Shōnen Manga

To begin my analysis of Manga, I discuss "Norms", the first of the four categories as presented by Christiansen. These are, according to him, devices and techniques that are brought about through cultural codes (2000. Pg. 108). As Manga can, at its most elementary level, be defined as a comic or cartoon that is predominantly Japanese, the 'Norms' I discuss below are those that originate from Japanese culture.

The first of these 'Norms' is the use of two–tone colouring. Manga in the 21st century is devoid of colour, except on the front cover. The art style usually works with black ink strokes and white negative spaces (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 13).

The second 'Norm', which is common across all Manga themes, is that it opens and reads from right to left. Roger Sabin confirms this, stating that this is because all Japanese texts read from top to bottom (the characters of a word are placed vertically) and then right to left, as shown in the scan below. The image is taken from a special edition of Akira Toriyama's *Dragonball*. (1996. Pg. 228).

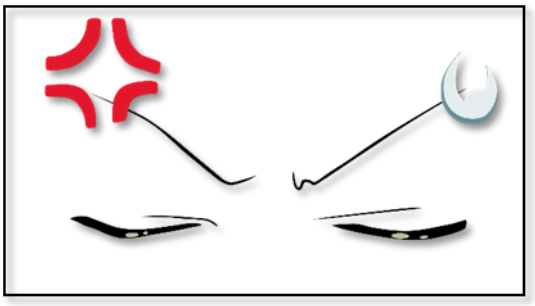


1. Toriyama 1996, p.228

It should also be noted that the individual chapters of various Manga are often published together in large, 350 page, magazines on a weekly basis. As these magazines serve as the primary form of entertainment in Japan, the readers read many different Manga daily (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 22). This allows the Mangakas to tell lengthy stories, as their readers are kept occupied with various other Manga while they write. This is different from America, where a single chapter for each comic is released individually every month.

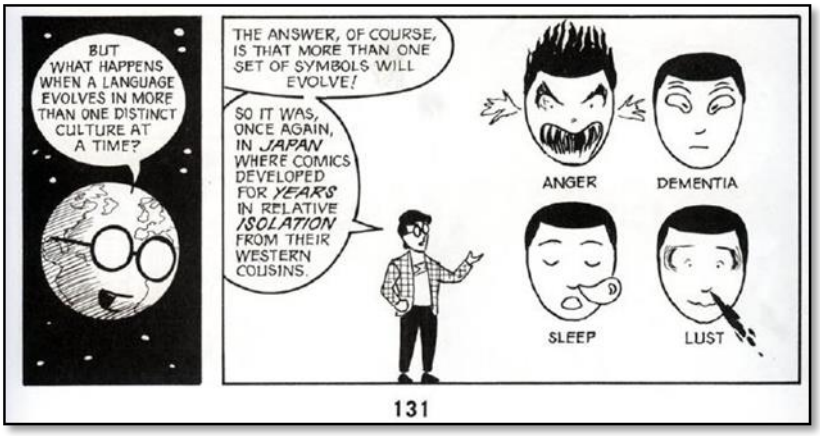
Due to this high rate of publication, there is also a marked increase in the amount consumed by the average Manga reader. As such, new Manga specific 'Norms' are born. One of these 'Norms', is that the 'use of dialogue' is often minimal and usually expository. As Manga is published so regularly, artists don't have to rush the plot forward to key beats, in the hopes of keeping their audiences interested. This is unlike American superhero comic artists who are only published once a month and as such have to make sure that each issues ends on a dramatic beat that will convince the reader to return the next month. (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 18).

The fourth 'Norm' that originates from Manga being consumed so quickly, is that Manga often over exaggerates expressions, tones, and emotions. This exaggeration also allows the authors to communicate the tone and mood of the scene more efficiently (Ito, 2008. Pg. 28). The manner in which these emotions are illustrated is also unique, as they are informed by traditional Japanese art. For instance, Manga symbolises frustration through the use of four red lines, as shown in the image below (Brenner, 2007. Pg. 52).



2. Brighster 2007

The symbolism used in Manga is not common in the West, and often when Western consumers read a Manga for the first time, they struggle to understand these new symbols (McCloud, 1993. Pg. 131; Schodt, 2012. Pg. 23). Consider the image presented below where McCloud points out how various emotions, common amongst all cultures, are depicted differently in different cultures. It should be noted that as a result of globalisation, access to the different iconographies has increased and in many cases comics artists across the world are using techniques (approaches) from other cultures. However, I would argue that the majority of the mainstream comics, as published by DC and Marvel, continue to use the symbols dominant within American culture.



3. McCloud 1993, p. 131

The fifth and last 'Norm' is that Manga is also noted for its 'cartoony' nature. The art form leans towards caricature and cartooning in its style (McCloud, 1993. Pg. 31). This is because artists find it unnecessary to draw great amounts of detail when the average reader is unlikely to spend time analysing each panel (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 22). Instead, artists choose to add in detail only when emphasizing a point or changing the mood.

The implications of this art style are far-reaching. They open the text up to interpretation and investment in a manner that Western Comics, with their use of colour and detailed drawing, are positioned for a far stricter reading, can't. Thus, Manga readers often have a very

personalised understanding of the narrative. How this might affect adaptation is discussed later, in chapter three.

Conventions of Shōnen Manga

"Conventions", the second of the four categories presented by Christiansen (2000), refers to actions that are unique to a particular culture or context (2000. Pg. 108). In the case of Manga, these would be actions such as bowing to each other as a sign of respect, or the removing of footwear before entering a household. Such actions form a part of the Japanese culture and as such have found their way into Japanese art. They are used in Manga to establish the Japanese setting and origin, and will be considered when discussing adaptation. However, as there are many such actions they shall not be listed here, especially because they are not present in all Manga.

The reason for their absence is arguable. Some critics, including MacWilliams, point out that Manga is a form of 'soft power', and as such is more marketable when it is culturally ambivalent (2008. Pg. 16). Others, such as Ito, argue that this is because Japanese artists use 'ambivalence' as a form of 'soft nationalization', whereby they create an identity that is deliberately open to 'transnational consumption' (2008. Pg. 16). I personally believe that it is the latter, and will argue for this in chapter three, wherein I consider the difficulties in adapting Manga.

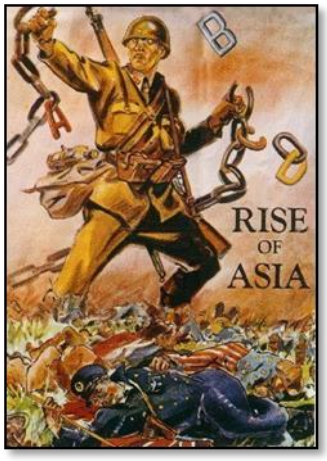
Deep Structure

Christiansen defines 'Deep Structure' as techniques that are independent of style and are often common across all storytelling models (2000. Pg. 109). Therefore, what follows are techniques and themes that are not unique to the Shōnen Manga sub-genre, but can be found in all comic books, including American Superhero comics. Nevertheless, they are predominant in Shōnen Manga. The reason these themes, story genres, and visual aesthetics are more common to Shōnen Manga lies in the history and culture that Manga is born out of (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 80; Ito, 2008. Pg. 38).

It is important, in my opinion, to understand these reasons as they inform us about the creation of Manga and, therefore, should also inform filmic adaptations. How differences in ideologies affect the story is best understood by the idea of myth-making. “History and culture inform myth, but equally serve as a way by which history and culture are ‘explained’ as a natural process” (Hayward, 2006. Pg. 282). Drawing on Hayward’s views, I argue that the stories and themes that populate Manga are informed by Japan’s understanding of its own history and culture, whereas the myths that populate American comics reflect their understanding of American history. To argue this further, I consider the three ‘Deep Structure’ aspects, which are listed below, and relate them to the historical context that they are born out of.

The first of these aspects pertains to the themes and narratives common in Shōnen Manga. Schodt states that Shōnen Manga often, “consists of dramatic stories of sports, adventures, science fiction, and school life” (2012. Pg. 15). Furthermore, the themes contained in these stories tend to teach us about the Japanese values of “Tenacity, manliness…and guts” (2012. Pg. 80). However, these themes and narratives have not always been popular. The reason for this lies in the shift that occurred in the Japanese ideology at the end of the Second World War.

Prior to the Second World War, Japan had very militaristic ideals, and as a leading ‘Axis’ power in Asia, its propaganda was informed by these ideals. Manga then served as a medium for Japanese propaganda; it motivated the Japanese youth to fight for their country by depicting Japanese characters as superhuman beings who could dominate the weak Westerners. Consider, for example, the propaganda pamphlet shown below.



4. Rise of Asia Poster, 2011.

These propagandist materials (such as the poster shown above) preached the old samurai way of 'Bushido' (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 69). Ideals such as sacrifice for one's 'lord', and complete obedience and honour in death were strong guiding principles in Japan at the time. However, the scenario changed when Japan was defeated by America. Japan's unconditional surrender to America in 1945 meant that the nation had to come to terms with the massive loss of lives that a lost cause had brought about (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 73).

Thus, post-World War Two, there was a movement in Japan against the ideals of 'Bushido'. This was aided in part by the policies of Douglas McArthur, who was in charge of American interests in Japan; he wanted to remove all the teachings of 'old Japan' (Ito, 2008. Pg. 35). However, while the country was willing to abandon the militaristic aspects of Bushido, it was not willing to abandon the heroic and superhuman manner in which it depicted its heroes, nor were all the themes present in propaganda Manga, such as those of 'Tenacity' and 'Manliness', eschewed. Instead, Schodt points out how the void left by the banning of war stories was filled by sports stories (2012. Pg. 81; 131). The themes of 'Tenacity' and 'Manliness', amongst others, were channelled into these stories and the style in which they were drawn mimicked the superhuman nature of the war heroes. Consider, for example, the image below. The style is loud, exaggerated and jarring and thus creates a sense of something

'beyond natural' in the nature of the punch. The love for these new Manga was such that Schodt (2012) claims that Japanese Mangaka have since then written a Manga about every sport, except cricket.



5. Hajime no Ippo. George Morikawa 1990, p. 27

Shōnen Manga also depicts explicit amounts of violence and nudity, especially when compared to American Superhero comics – this is the second, 'Deep Structure' aspect common to all Shōnen Manga. In the 'Dragon Ball' series, for example, characters die often, usually by being incinerated from 'energy blasts'. Though not every detail is illustrated, the amount of blood present and the clear depiction of violence qualify the visuals as 'explicit'. Consider, for example, the images below. The first is from the 'Dragon Ball' Manga, while the other is from the famous Superman story, 'The Death of Superman' (Dan Jurgen, 1992)[2].

[2] Although there have always been American comics which portray violence and sexual decadence, the comics that I am focusing on - the American superhero narratives - have only recently shown an increase in their portrayal of violence. Nevertheless, I would argue that the majority of the American Superhero comics published by DC and Marvel have skirted the depiction of violence in their publications.



6. Dragonball Z. Toriyama 1989, p. 146



7. The death of Superman. Jurgen 1992, p. 27

As seen here, the Manga depicts gore in explicit detail, whereas the American comic restricts itself to a more conservative illustration. The answer to why Manga predominantly depicts explicit violence, and why American comics do not, lies in the shared history that Japan and America have post-World War Two (Schodt, 2012).

The end of the Second World War was marked by the beginning of the Cold War, a time when there was a great focus on protecting the 'American' way. This meant that anything that tarnished America's reputation was criticised. As such, there was a strong movement in America against various issues, including juvenile delinquency. A by-product of this was that media that depicted violence, crime or nudity was criticised and protested against. The movement argued that depictions of such acts were the cause for juvenile delinquency. The movement had a significant impact on the comics' industry, which responded by forming the Comics Code Authority (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 127). This body served as a self-censoring system that regulated what a comic was and was not allowed to depict (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 127). The

documentary, ‘Secret Origin: The Story of DC Comics’ (Mac Carter, 2010), discusses the negative impact this level of censorship and regulation had on the comic’s industry. The regulation meant that a lot of the stories had lost their appeal, and that the social relevance they had was replaced with a façade of innocence. To take an example, the documentary discusses how Wonder Woman, a voluptuous crime-fighting Amazonian, was re-written as a conservative housewife who practiced martial arts.

Over time, the Comics Code Authority changed its criteria for comics before finally being replaced by a Hollywood style parental guidance rating format. This shift can be seen with the publishing of comics such as Frank Miller’s ‘The Dark Knight Returns’ (1986), which marked the beginning of a new era in American superhero comics where explicit details were more ‘acceptable’. Unfortunately, the damage had already been done. The Comics Code had shrunk the industry to a shell of its former self (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 129), and while explicit detail did become more acceptable, comics came to be considered as a medium for ‘children’s entertainment’ that, for the most part, could not contain socially relevant material, in the fear that it might encourage violent behaviour in young people. (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 131). A few exceptions such as works by Art Spiegelman (*Maus*) do exist, however they are niche when compared to titles such as ‘Superman’ and ‘Batman’ which are still being published.

Meanwhile in Japan, where America was exerting a lot of influence, similar regulations were attempted but to no avail. The Japanese public did not share the same sentiment as the American public and as such, the government’s attempts at regulating what Manga was allowed to depict were met with great resistance (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 131). This is why there is a gap between how American superhero comics and Shōnen Manga depict violence; while

the Americans fear that children will be encouraged by the violence, the Japanese believe no such thing (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 131).

Furthermore, it should be noted that Manga depicts, but does not romanticise, war or violence. This is apparent by how Manga often portrays violence in gruesome detail, but American superhero comics (and Hollywood) depict the same violence in a glamourous but non-explicit manner. For example, in a Hollywood action film, it is a notable trope to walk away from an explosion with your back to it, the idea being that explosions and acts of violence are simply superficial and cannot harm anyone that matters. Manga often takes an alternate route whereby there are consequences for acts of violence. Superhuman characters may partake in massive conflicts, but the consecutive panels will often reveal the damage they are doing to the civilians and the city.

The young age of the lead characters in Shōnen Manga is the third 'Deep Structure' aspect that is common to the sub-genre (Jappleng, 2014). This is worth noting because American superhero comics predominantly have male adults as the lead characters of their stories. Consider that Goku, the lead character in the 'Dragon Ball' Manga, is 14 at the beginning of the story (Toriyama, 1984. Pg. 43), whereas Superman, whose age isn't revealed in the first run of the series, was shown to be old enough to work as a full-time journalist (Siegel and Shuster, 1938).

Young protagonists are common in Shōnen Manga because their creators are aware of their target audience. As stated before, Manga is aimed at males under the age of 15, thus, I would argue that while Shōnen Manga can be read and enjoyed by anyone, it is essentially constructed to be relevant to young boys.

Cross-Cultural Universals

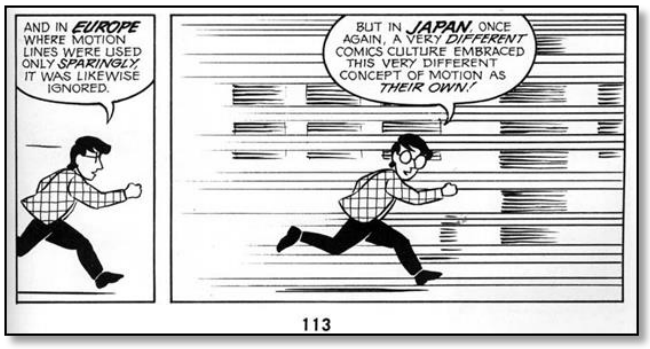
The fourth and final category that Christiansen defines is ‘Cross-Cultural universals’. These are items and actions that are independent of cultures (2000. Pg. 108). Therefore, the various techniques and practices listed below are not affected by the culture that employs them. As such, the technique that I discuss below is chosen because it applies particularly to the discussion around adapting sequential art to film.

The ‘Cross-Cultural universal’ in question is ‘subjective motion’. McCloud points out how motion can be depicted in various ways. He states that Western artists prefer to use ‘action lines’ to depict the direction and nature of an action; an example can be seen in the frame below:



8. Swan 1965, p. 5

While this style is no longer a rule, it is more prominent in the West than in Japan, where artists prefer to use ‘subjective motion’. With this technique, the drawing mimics the qualities of an image taken by a camera moving at the same speed as the subject. This has interesting implications, as the reader then is no longer witnessing the action from a stationary position, but rather from the point of view of the subject. McCloud argues that this allows the reader to be a ‘participant’ in the action, as opposed to American comics, where the use of action lines creates a sense of ‘witnessing’ the action (McCloud, 1992. Pg. 131).



9. McCloud 1993, p. 131

The implications of this on a film adaptation are worth considering, and shall be discussed in chapter three.

Chapter 2 – Adaptation Theory

Definition and Theoretical Framework

Petrie and Boggs state that, "An adaptation is a film based on another work" (2012. Pg. 371) and while there are critics who propose different definitions, for the purpose of this research, where the focus lies on films such as 'Dragonball Evolution' (2009), I propose that this definition will suffice. However, there are many facets to the discourse around adaptations. While Thomas Leitch (2007) in his book, 'Film Adaptation and its Discontents', discusses the various types of adaptations, Pascal Lefevre (2007), in his essay, 'Incompatible Visual Ontologies' is more concerned with the challenges in adapting sequential art. The discussion is further complicated by the discourses around what qualifies a film as a 'successful adaptation'. Therefore, it is necessary for the purpose of this research that a framework is presented.

The first consideration for the framework draws from Leitch's (2011) essay, 'Adaptation, the Genre'. Leitch notes four signifiers that aid in the identification of a film as an adaptation. I consider how these signifiers may be used to affect the analysis of a film and their presence in comic book adaptations. The four signifiers are as follows; 'period setting', 'period music', 'fetishizing of history', and 'stylized inter-titles' (2008. Pg. 112-113).

The first of these, ‘period setting’, refers to specific locations in time and space. These locations are unambiguous, stylised and often unique in their description. For example, in the book, ‘Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets’ (JK Rowling, 1998), the Chamber of Secrets is described as:

> "*… a long, dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars entwined with more serpents, rose to a ceiling lost in darkness, casting long, black shadows through the odd, greenish gloom that filled the place.*" (1998. Pg. 226)

The film adaptation’s depiction of the Chamber (shown below) is different, yet still stylistically similar enough for it to form a correlation with the original in the minds of the viewers who have read the book.



10. Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, 2005

I propose that this is also the case for comic books. Viewers identify a comic book as an adaptation, in part, when it shares the same period setting as that of the source text. Furthermore, the correlation is easier to form as comics and Manga do not need to be visualised, since they already illustrate what the creator of the text intended. For example, consider the two versions of the Kingdom of ‘Asgard’ shown below – the first is from the ‘Thor’ Marvel comics and the second is from the Marvel film adaptation of the same name. As a visual representation has already been created by the author for the location at hand, the artist adapting it, has a clear guide to what they might need actualise in the film. Nevertheless, a different set of problems arise from comics and Manga providing clear

depictions, and these will be discussed in the following section on defining successful adaptations.



11. Asgard, n.d.

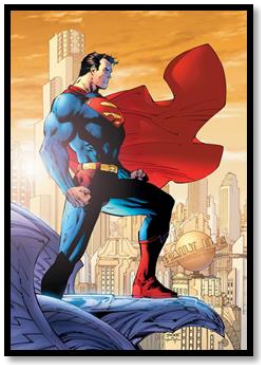


12. Thor, 2011

Costumes are also important for establishing a period setting, and consideration should be given to their use in films, especially comic book adaptations. This is because comics use costumes as, amongst other things, icons. This allows them to contain the identity of characters within these icons (McCloud, 1993). For example, shown below are images from the TV show, 'Superman: The Animated Series'; a cover from the 'Superman' comics; and a still from Zac Snyder's 2013 filmic adaptation, 'Man of Steel'. The iconic 'S' shield on the character's chest, and the use of a red and blue coloured costume signifies that the three characters are the same person (Phaidon press, 1996. Pg. 61). The costumes remain almost identical because it represents the character more effectively than any other feature.



13. Superman: The Animated Series, 2000



14. All Star Superman Cover. Jim Lee, 2004

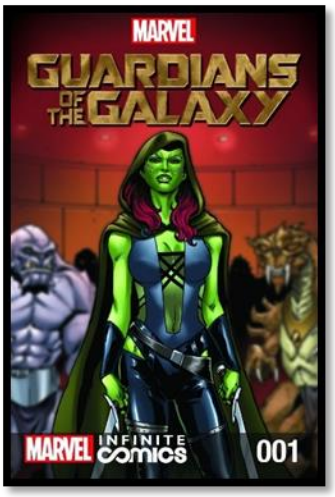


15. Man of Steel, 2013

Stylised titles are the second signifiers that is discussed by Leitch. For example, compare the two titles for ‘Guardians of the Galaxy’ shown below.



*16.*Guardians of the Galaxy 2, 2016



*17.*Guardians of the Galaxy Issue 1 cover, 2014

The one from the film (left) clearly reflects the sci-fi, post-modern tone of the film. However, it is also similar to the second image, which is taken from the comics that the film is based on. The titles are similar in style and content, thus again, in the minds of a viewer who has read the comics, a relationship is formed between the adaptation and the source text. The little variations that exist between the titles then inform the viewer about the manner in which the adaptation differs. For example, the child-like chalk drawing on the film title, works to establish the ‘cheeky’ self-aware humour of the film.

Leitch states ‘period music’ as the third marker. He argues that music from a non-contemporary period is used to establish the historical or fantastical nature of the story, even if the music in question is not from the time period that the text is set in. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945), for

example, uses Chopin's D-minor Prelude, as a recurring theme for the haunting protagonist of the story (Leitch, 2008. Pg. 112). As the music is frantic in its styling, it lends itself to the tension that character embodies. Therefore, this signifier works in congruence with the conventional purpose of music, which is to inform the mood and tone of the scene. The use of music in comic book adaptations is similar. For example, in 'The Avengers' (2012), the character Iron Man is first introduced to the tune of rock 'n' roll band, AC/DC's 'Back in Black'. The song breaks the tension of the scene, and also establishes the rebellious nature of Iron Man.

The fourth signifier, according to Leitch, is about adaptations frequently 'fetishizing history' (Leitch, 2008. Pg. 113). They do so by reminding the audience who the author of the original text is – the Marvel films fetishize history in an obvious way by having Stan Lee, the creator of many Marvel superheroes, do a cameo in all their films.

The implication of using these distinct signifiers is twofold. As mentioned earlier, they help identify the film as attempting to adapt the source material, but they also inform the viewers that the film will be attempting to stay true to said source. In the case of 'Bride and Prejudice' (Gurinder Chadha, 2004) or 'Romeo + Juliet' (Luhrmann, 1996), these signifiers aren't present but are replaced by new signifiers that establish the filmmaker's intent to break away from the source material, and yet utilise it. A blatant example of this in 'Romeo + Juliet' (1996) is the use of the informal '+' symbol, instead of the word 'and' in the title. The film re-interprets the original play in a modern setting and it announces its intentions to do so through the title.

Using signifiers to one's advantage is only part of the puzzle that is adaptation. There are many types of adaptations and to discuss them, I rely on the works of McFarlane (2008) and Leitch (2007). However, the ones discussed below are but a few of the many types that exist; they have been selected because they are directly relevant to the argument that follows. The types of adaptations considered are, 'Celebration, Colonisation, and Adjustmen't. Acts of 'Compression' and 'Updating' are discussed briefly.

The first type of adaptation is 'Celebration'. This type of adaptation, Leitch argues, 'favours the novel [source text] over the film' (2007. Pg. 96). In the case of celebratory adaptations, the film medium works to accurately visualise the words of the text, or as Leitch puts it, "words are made flesh" (Leitch, 2007. Pg. 98). An example of this can be found in 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy, which has been noted for staying true to the books (Leitch, 2008). Aspects of this type of adaptation can be seen in films that are based on comic books. For example, films based on superhero comic books will often use the costumes, setting, and titles found in the source text. These type of adaptations are most preferred by those who value the source text. After all, a person who has never read the 'Superman' comics is not going to know or care whether the film managed to get Superman's costume or origin story accurate. By the same logic, Leitch (2007) argues that filmmakers who do not revere the source text, often take liberties with it. Depending on the scope of liberties taken, the film can become one of many types of adaptation.

For example, a film that heavily alters the original story to re-tell it in the modern setting can be considered as an 'Adjustment' that is 'Updating' the text (Leitch, 2007. Pg. 100). In this case, the filmmaker believes that it is more important for the film to be 'contemporary' than for it to be

faithful to the original text. ‘Romeo + Juliet’ (1996) is a good example of this practice. Baz Luhrmann retells Shakespeare’s ‘Romeo and Juliet’, a tragic romance set in the 1400s, to have an MTV/punk feel (Ebert, 1996). Therefore, Luhrmann’s version ‘adjusts’ and ‘updates’ the text to a modern setting so as to make it socially significant, while retaining the themes and narrative of the original play.

Of course, as Petrie and Boggs (2012) point out, some changes are inevitable. Some textual details have to be altered during adaption to allow for the shift in medium. By this, I refer to what Leitch calls ‘Compression’ (Leitch, 2007. Pg. 98). Compression is a type of ‘adjustment’, wherein some scenes from the text are cut or shrunk to meet the standard film run time (Petrie and Boggs, 2012. Pg. 380). A good example of ‘Compression’ are the “Harry Potter” films (2001; 11), where, even under the supervision of the series author, a number of scenes were deleted or altered (Webster, 2009). The fourth book in the series, ‘Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire’, contains a lengthy chapter detailing a ‘Quidditch’ match that Harry Potter watches with his friends. However, in Mike Newell’s 2005 adaptation of the same title, the scene is cut to show only the beginning of the match, and the rest is then inferred by a shorter scene that follows soon after.

The next type of adaptation that is key to this argument is of the ‘Colonising’ kind. Leitch points out that in ‘colonising’ adaptations, ‘the progenitor texts act as vessels to be filled with new meaning’ (Leitch, 2007. Pg. 109). In this scenario, the adaptation views the narrative of the source text as a medium through which its own themes and ideology may be propagated. Leitch also notes that more often than not, this kind of adaptation is said to have occurred when the

source text is not set in the same country as that of the adaptation. Some examples include 'Bride and Prejudice' (Gurinder Chadha, 2004), which is based on Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' (1813), and 'The Magnificent Seven' (Sturges, 1960), which is an adaptation of Kurosawa's film *The Seven Samurai* (1954) (Leitch, 2007). The term 'colonising' has negative connotations and for good reason; these adaptations often disregard the cultural nuances that the source text carries, so as to make them more accessible to their own audiences. An example of this is 'Dragonball Evolution' (Wong, 2009), which shall be discussed in chapter three.

What Leitch (2007) notes, and what I find interesting, is that there are instances of 'colonising' adaptations that are not seen as insulting to the source text. 'Bride and Prejudice', which adapts Jane Austen's novel, 'Pride and Prejudice', into a humorous Bollywood film while also carrying a social critique, is considered to be a good adaptation even though it significantly deviates from Jane Austen's work. Leitch (2007) theorises that this is perhaps because Gurinder Chadha's work is so stylised that it is not perceived as a threat. I would like to amend this statement to say that the 'stylisation is so distinctively foreign that it is no longer seen as competing with the original, but rather as being inspired by it'. By this, I mean that the style is so far removed from that of 'Pride and Prejudice' that it becomes a text of its own, which isn't in anyway attempting to 'overwrite' Jane Austen's work.

Defining Success in 2015

What seems challenging after this brief discussion of the types of adaptations, is that while the definition of 'adaptation' might be consistent, the manner in which an adaptation will use the text that it is based on, varies. Therefore, the question to answer is, what constitutes a successful adaptation? Historically, critics used to judge an adaptation's success "by its closeness to its

literary source or, even more vaguely, ‘the spirit’ of the book.” (Cartmell, Corrigan, Whelehan, 2008. Pg. 1).

The problem here was threefold. Firstly, these categories could only be judged in a relative sense. One critic’s opinion of what the ‘spirit’ of the book constituted, might not necessarily align with that of another critic. Secondly, this discourse resulted in adaptations being viewed as a form of mimicry, instead of independent artworks with merits of their own (Cartmell, 2008. Pg. 1). For example, Roger Ebert in his review of Baz Luhrmann’s ‘Romeo + Juliet’ (1996) talks about the many ways in which he thinks the film fails to grasp the themes and tone of the Shakespearean play; in doing so, Ebert fails to recognise that Luhrmannn has no intention of replicating the play, but only wishes to use its story as a way of telling a modern tragic romance.

The third problem with judging the fidelity of an adaptation with its source text is that, these requirements are created by critics who were primarily discussing the adaptations of books or plays. This is because film critics who are discussing adaptations often come from a literary background (Cartmell, 2008. Pg. 1), and are thus not concerned with comic books. Thus, it is necessary, in my opinion, that thought be given to what can and cannot be considered as a successful comic book adaptation. Only then can a new approach to adapting Manga be considered.

To argue the case for a successful adaptation, I look at the unsuccessful adaptation: ‘Dragonball Evolution’ (2009). The film is analysed in the context of the challenges it would have faced when adapting Manga, as well as the theory presented in chapters one and two. It is my opinion that the analysis will reveal what an alternative approach to adaptation might need to be.

Chapter 3 - The case study

Dragon Ball, the Manga

'Dragonball Evolution' (2009) is an adaptation of Akira Toriyama's 'Dragon Ball' Manga series, which ran from 1984 to 1995. The series contains many stories, but it begins with 12-year-old Goku, an orphaned alien who has been brought up in the middle of the forest by his adoptive grandfather (Gohan). At the beginning of the story, the grandfather has already passed away and Goku is living on his own. He runs into Bulma, a 16-year-old human who is searching for 'dragon balls' (magical orbs) during her holidays. Bulma sees how inhumanly strong Goku is and asks him to join her in the search for the rest of the dragon balls, which, when united, grants the wielder one wish. Along the way, they fight various creatures and aliens, including an extra-terrestrial named Piccolo.

Dragonball Evolution, the Film

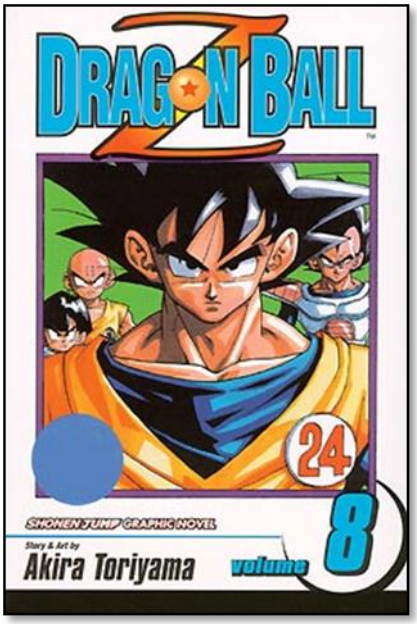
The film's plot is somewhat different. It begins with a 17-year-old Goku, who is living with his adoptive (alive) grandfather. On his 18th birthday, Goku is away with Chi Chi (Goku's classmate and love interest) when his grandfather is attacked by Piccolo, who is looking for the dragon balls. Goku returns in time to hear his grandfather's last warning, that the fate of the world depends on him finding the dragon balls before Piccolo does. Bulma arrives soon after to join him in the search for the dragon balls. The two become natural allies and start their journey to stop Piccolo and retrieve all the dragon balls.

Critical Analysis

To begin the analysis, I consider how the film frames itself through the use of the signifiers as presented by Leitch (2007). The first signifier is ‘stylised titles’.



18. Dragonball Evolution, 2009



19. Dragonball Z Vol. 8 cover. (Toriyama, 2003)

The film title (left) does not use the same font as the Manga title. However, it does include two other icons; the first is the name itself. By using ‘Dragon Ball’ in its title, the film quickly associates itself with the famous Manga. It also does that by including one of the dragon ball orbs in the frame. Its replication is identical and thus is a reason the film is marked as a faithful adaptation by the viewer who is familiar with the Manga.

The second signifier is the use of ‘period setting’. This, as discussed before, can be shown through the use of costumes or locations (Leitch, 2007). The Manga does consist of a few iconic locations – notably, Master Roshi’s island home – but for the most part, it bases its narratives in ambiguous canyons and the general wilderness. Thus, there aren’t many locations for the film to

use in this aspect. Also, Master Roshi's island home does exist in the film but it bears little resemblance to the one in the Manga. However, the Manga does have iconic costumes that the film employs. As seen in the images above, Goku is wearing an orange and blue-coloured costume. This costume is referred to as a 'Gi', and it serves as a uniform for martial artists in the Manga. The film uses the same 'Gi' prominently, thus again signifying a close relationship with the source text.

The film does not make great use of the other two signifiers that Leitch mentions. The film fetishizes its history to a limited extent by simply crediting the Mangaka, Akira Toriyama, at the end of the film. While this is sufficient to signify the film as an adaptation, it is not the film's grandest gesture in that aspect. The film also uses music to create a fantastical atmosphere which evokes a relationship to the story world. The use of this musical score enhances the film's characterisation as an adaptation. For example, grand orchestral music is played at the beginning of the film when the lore of the world is established, which helps in creating a sense of something 'magical'. The rest of the film is marked by similar music that plays when the fantastical elements are on display.

Nevertheless, with these signifiers in place, 'Dragonball Evolution' sets itself up to seem like a 'celebration' adaptation; it is, however, a 'colonisation'. This then, is the film's first failure, for it signifies itself to be something it is not. The film can be considered a colonisation because it appropriates Japanese culture into an American setting. For example, Goku is played by a white male whereas - Asiatic actors are cast for most of the other roles. While Manga itself doesn't define race clearly, being a Japanese text, its readers decode the signifiers as portraying Japanese persons, unless otherwise indicated (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 23). This is particularly the case for

‘Dragon Ball’, which is one of the most iconic texts to come out of Japan. Furthermore, if we consider MacWilliams’ (2008) argument that Manga is a form of ‘soft nationalisation’, whereby Japan creates a global presence for itself and its culture, this misappropriation of Japanese identity by the filmmakers becomes even more problematic.

The second major act of cultural colonisation is the film's disregard for Japanese mythology through the practice of orientalism, which can be defined as “a strategy whereby whatever is known about the colonized by the colonizer is used to construct an identity of the colonized in a coherent way” (Said, 2010. Pg. 71). In this case, it refers to how the American filmmakers used popular stereotypes around the ‘orient’, such as being ‘zen’, meditation, and Buddhism, as a way to naturalise the narrative into an American context. For example, in the film, Master Roshi goes to a group of Buddhist monks to obtain their help in capturing Piccolo. These Buddhist monks speak Sanskrit, an ancient language indigenous to India, and greet each other by saying Namaste (also a greeting common in India) (CIA, 2016). I would argue, that these actions and languages are not common to Japan nor are they present in the Manga. As such, their presence represents a generalisation of the various Asian cultures.

Furthermore, the scene with the monks does not exist in the Manga. It is but one example of the many changes that the film introduces to fit the narrative into a three-act structure that follows the hero’s journey (Christiansen 2009, Pg.179). This act of ‘compression’ (Letich, 2007) is part of the process of adaptation, which is why I do not criticise the filmmakers for using it in itself, but I do wonder if an alternative narrative structure, one that is not limited by linear storytelling and three-acts as is the convention in Hollywood, may have been better suited to adapting Manga.

For example, This Hollywood convention requires scripts to have a first act which sets up the characters and the settings, a second act which disrupts the equilibrium of the first act and the third act, the resolution in which the equilibrium is restored. Such a narrative structure lends itself to a climatic drive for the film. Manga has lengthy narratives which do not benefit from being shortened and moulded into a three act template. I would argue that an episodic, multi-act structure would be a better structure to accommodate the way in which the journey of the hero unfolds in these lengthy Manga narratives.

To discuss issues born out of adapting Manga specifically, I turn to the work of Pascal Lefevre who, in his essay, 'Incompatible Visual Ontologies?' (2007) discusses how films and comics differ in four distinct ways. Through a discussion on these points, I highlight the pitfalls that filmmakers face when adapting sequential art, and how 'Dragonball Evolution' in particular fell victim to them.

Lefevre (2007) argues that film, as a photographic medium, has an inherent 'realism' whereas comics are an artist's 'interpretation of reality'. (2007, Pg. 6). This is not to say that film is an objective mirror to reality; instead, Lefevre simply argues that viewers perceive film as realistic and comics as inherently fictional. Thus, when a comic is adapted, there is a gap between the imagined image and the real image that must be created and expanded upon by the filmmaker. However, in the case of American comic books, the characters are drawn in great detail, thus, the gap between the imagined character and the real actor is smaller. In the case of Superman, because he has been drawn with identifying features such as race, hair colour, facial hair and even the presence of a cleft chin, an actor who resembles these features can be made to look like

him. As such, an actor playing Superman would essentially need to be a white male, with dark hair, a cleft chin, and a very strong body build. This reading of fidelity would also be aided by the use of other icons, such as the ‘S’ shield on his costume.

This would not be the case for Manga adaptations, for Manga falls at the ‘cartoony’ end of McCloud’s scale of iconography (1993. Pg. 44) and therefore lacks this realism. It is also ambivalent in its depiction of nationality and ethnicity (MacWilliams, 2008). Because of this, not only do viewers have a personalised idea of what the ‘real’ version of the character might be, but they are also informed by drawings that purposefully lack realism. The drawing essentially employs vague signifiers which enables the creator to remove any concrete indicators of an individual identity, thus becoming a symbol for ‘anyone’ opposed to a single ‘someone’.

The ‘Dragonball Evolution’ creators respond to these challenges by approaching the Manga as if it were a superhero comic. By this, I mean that they tone down the ‘cartoony’ nature of Manga for something more grounded in reality. Goku, for example, is shown with ‘normal’ hair (refer to the image below), whereas in the Manga, as shown below, his hair is wild and stretches into the air in 30-centimetre arcs. Furthermore, by being a white male, he quickly loses the cultural ambivalence that his Manga counterpart possesses. Thus, the gap between how the character is read and how it is portrayed in the film is not bridged. The use of icons, such as the blue and orange ‘Gi’, only serve to highlight these differences.



20. Dragonball Evolution, 2009



21. Too Much Power (Toriyama, 1990)

The conversation around realism extends to more than just character casting. Another aspect that is depicted differently in comics and Manga, is that of emotions and senses. For example, Manga has unique ways of depicting frustration. The style used in Manga is not a convention in the West and often when Western readers read a Manga for the first time, they struggle to understand these new iconographies (McCloud, 1993). As such, a person adapting a Manga would have to consider how these alternative signifiers might affect the adaptation. Would it perhaps mean that the film replicates them, hoping that new audiences will be able to understand them? Or would the adaptation use a more realistic depiction of these 'sounds', 'smells' and 'emotions', in the hope that the coherence of the diegetic world will compensate for the lack of fidelity? 'Dragonball Evolution' chooses the latter, although gains little by using this approach. While the suspension of disbelief is not broken as it was with the casting of Goku, the 'realistic' expressions do not seem faithful to the Manga.

Films have sound and dialogue, both of which are imagined by comic and Manga book readers. Lefevre argues that this is another characteristic which complicates adaptations (2007. Pg. 4).

When creating a soundtrack or writing dialogue, for adapted comics and Manga, the creators face a similar challenge to that of casting the actors. The filmmaker is tasked with attempting to create sound and dialogue that resonates with all audience members, but is based entirely on their interpretation of the font style and facial expressions. As is the case with all interpretations, there is a gap between what one reader understands as opposed to the insights of another. Nevertheless, if voices are to be interpreted through the use of font and facial expression in the Manga, then 'Dragonball Evolution', for once, performs satisfactorily. The film lacks the melodramatic energy that Manga's 'cartoony' characters often embody, but does manage to have convincing dialogue in that it is informed to some extent by the diegetic history of the world and is acted in a manner that doesn't break the suspension of disbelief.

The next point that Lefevre raises is concerned with reception. The manner in which comics are received is different from that of films. For one, films are screened in public places like cinemas, as opposed to comics, which are usually read in the privacy of one's room (Lefevre, 2007). This change in venue has two key implications. The first is duration and the second pertains to the overall experience. The issues around duration and compression have already been discussed (Leitch, 2007. Pg. 99). To re-iterate, Hollywood films are limited to a certain screen time while books and comics are not. As such, adaptations often need to omit sections of the source material so as to fit the key narrative into an acceptable runtime.

However, the second issue is one that is specific to adapting Manga. Unlike American superhero comics, Manga narratives often spend time depicting fights in great detail (Schodt, 1993), and while filmmakers do need to compress material to fit the story into a given run time, one must

consider that these long, detailed fights are a defining feature of Manga and are thus key to the experience that a faithful adaptation would want to create. Furthermore, as the reader can spend time analysing each panel in a book, there is a difference in the inherent pacing of the narrative. Films cannot create a unique sense of pacing for an individual viewer like Manga can. Therefore, films not only must compress the key narrative down to a standard runtime, but allow the viewer to experience the film in the same way they experienced the Manga.

'Dragonball Evolution' fails to create this experience. The film compresses multiple volumes of work into a one-and-a-half-hour film, but fails to create detailed fights, choosing instead to go for quick and short encounters. It could be argued that the filmmakers chose to do this because it served their idea of Hollywood entertainment. Indeed, if the film was based on an American comic book, these choices would have been fine. But as this was not the case, their choices seem ignorant of the 'Norms' of Manga.

The last challenge that Lefevre mentions is that of 'frame sizes' (2007, Pg.3) Films have a standard screen size, whereas comics have panels with varying sizes and shapes. The point Lefevre makes about frames and panels is one that is common between comics and Manga. The panels function to create a sense of time and space. This is similar to how framing and editing work in films. The rate at which the frames are projected creates a sense of time whereas the size of the frame (referred to as shot size in film) indicates the space

While the two formats of sequential art use different types of frames and panels, their over-arching function, I would argue, remains the same (McCloud, 1993). Thus, I would imagine that a filmmaker adapting either comics or Manga would face the same challenges in this respect. It

should be noted that the panels of a comic book or Manga are very similar to that of a storyboard and can thus be considered as a good visual aid to any filmmaker looking to adapting the text.

Therefore, I conclude this analysis of 'Dragonball Evolution' by listing the key faults of the film: it firstly marked itself as a celebratory adaptation; secondly, it failed to remain faithful, in multiple ways, to the set norms, conventions and characters of the Manga and finally, it disrespects Japanese culture by colonising it.

Alternative approach

I argue that comic book adaptations should be judged on two grounds – whether they function successfully as a film, and whether they 'respect' the original text. As Leitch argues, the case for 'respect' is different from that of 'fidelity'. (2007, Pg. 123) Depending on the type of adaptation, the film may or may not be faithful to the source material. In the case of 'celebration', a film should definitely be faithful. However, in the case of 'colonisation', this is rarely the case. Therefore, the film must be judged on whether it respects the source text. By respect, I mean that the film should clearly signify what kind of adaptation it wishes to be, and then embody the characteristics of said adaptation.

In the case of celebration, a film would signify a strong relationship with the source material and then attempt to remain faithful to it. It would retain the costumes, the setting and the titles from the source text. However, in the case of colonisation, the film should indicate that it is merely using the source text as a 'vessel' and thus will bear no resemblance to it[3].

[3] As discussed in Chapter 2 I reiterate that there are other types of adaptations, however to discuss them all would fall outside the scope of my research. As such I focus on the two that are common when adapting comics and Manga to live action films.

Chapter 4 - Adapting Hajime, no Ippo

Justification

To test my theory, I adapted a part of the ongoing Shōnen Manga, 'Hajime no Ippo' by George Morikawa. It follows the story of a young boy named Ippo on his journey through life as a boxer. It is a classic example of a Shōnen sports Manga, as it deals with issues that often concern teenage boys, such as 'manliness', having 'guts' in the face of adversity, love and standing up to bullies. (Schodt, 2012. Pg. 180).

I chose this Manga based on to two key reasons. The first is that, as a student, I had a limited production budget. As such, I think taking on fantastical stories such as 'Dragon Ball' or 'One Piece' (Eiichiro Oda), both of which are very popular Shōnen series, would be too ambitious. The second reason being that, 'Hajime no Ippo', as a boxing story, offered the themes and visuals typical to a Shōnen Manga. It offered me a chance to evaluate the effectiveness of the arguments I have proposed.

Synopsis

The narrative in the Manga can be divided into three-acts. This refers only to the first volume of the Manga and not the grand narrative in its entirety, which, as mentioned in Chapter 1, pans multiple story arcs.

The first act begins with Ippo being bullied by some high school seniors. He is rescued by a man named Takamura, who then introduces Ippo to boxing and inspires him to get stronger; this marks the end of Act 1. The characters have been introduced, and the goal that the protagonist wishes to accomplish has been stated.

Act 2, the longest act in any film, covers the challenges that Ippo faces when trying to achieve his goal. In this act, Takamura, unsure about whether Ippo has what it takes, sets a test for him.

Ippo trains hard, working late into the night to reach his goal. When the day arrives, Ippo passes the test, impressing Takamura, who then takes Ippo to meet his own coach. The coach, sceptical of Ippo's talents, declares that he must prove his worth by sparring with Miyata. The story follows an intense three-round match, during which Ippo comes to show his worth to the gym. However, it is when the third round begins that Act 2 ends and Act 3 begins.

Act 3 carries the protagonist of the story through the climax and eventually to the conclusion. The stakes are at their highest in Act 3. In this case, Ippo and Miyata are equally matched and no one can tell who will win. With only a few seconds to go, both boxers throw their final punches. The fight ends with Miyata winning but Ippo still being allowed to train at the gym, thus concluding the first volume of the Manga.

Pre-production

The first step should be choosing the kind of adaptation you wish the film to be. Doing so at the beginning prevents cases of false signification, whereby the film seems like a celebration, but is not. To successfully do this, consideration should be given to the challenges that the director will face in terms of budget, locations, actors, and the duration of the film. One also has to study the source text so as to have an extensive grasp of its themes, narratives, plot points, characters and visual aesthetic.

I suggest that this is necessary since it allows the filmmaker to prepare for the challenges that Lefevre highlights. To re-iterate, these are challenges of, 'deletion/addition of content', 'the semiotics of page layouts versus film screens', 'the translation of images to [moving] photographs', and 'the importance of sound in films as opposed to silence in comics'. (2007, Pg 4)

Therefore, at the onset of pre-production, I began to consider these issues. It became obvious that I would need to compress the content as my film could be no longer than 15 minutes. This necessity was complicated by my desire to capture the various aspects of the Manga, such as its detailed and lengthy fight scenes that Schodt states is common to Shōnen Manga (1993. Pg. 21).

The solution, in part, came from Leitch's discussion on 'Romeo + Juliet' (1996). He notes how 'Romeo + Juliet' uses 'compression' but also has aspects of 'celebration', and even 'colonisation' (2007. Pg. 123). This is important to note because it allows us to consider an adaptation that is not restrained by strict guidelines, but is capable of moulding itself to fit the requirements of its source text as well as the challenges faced by the filmmaker. This adaptability is possible when the filmmaker signifies his intentions to take artistic liberty with the source text, which Baz Luhrman did by letting his presence as an auteur dominate Shakespeare's presence as the original creator.

Therefore, with 'Hajime no Ippo', I chose to approach the text on multiple fronts. The first was 'celebration', for I valued 'Hajime no Ippo' as a Japanese text and wished to adapt it into a film form, and the second was 'compression', as I needed to make the narrative serve a 15-minute short film. To do this, I began to re-structure the major plot points into a non-linear format. I adapted moments based on whether or not they motivated the character's growth. These moments, I would argue, are key to the film as they provide the dramatic beats of the story.

After drafting several scripts, I managed to compress the narrative to fit the 15-minute limit set for my research project. As such, many details, such as the events that transpired resulting in Ippo being bullied or the chores Ippo does for his mother were omitted. To briefly explain the revised plot; the film now revolves entirely around the fight between Jabu (Ippo) and Sigz (Miyata). During the course of the three-round match, which ends as the Manga did, the film

flashes back to two instances that occurred earlier in the chronology of the story. The first instance is of Jabu being bullied and Themba (Takamura) rescuing him. This flashback serves to establish two things – the relationship between Themba and Jabu, and Jabu's meek personality. The second flashback is a montage sequence that shows Jabu training to pass the test set by Themba, which serves to show how Jabu came to learn his special move, the 'Jabs'. as well as his tenaciousness, which plays a role later in the film.

The reason the film revolves around the final fight is that it's a major point of conflict, and conflict is the easiest way to establish dramatic tension. (Petrie and Boggs, 2012. Pg.47) By establishing this tension early in the film, I compensate for the lack of story development that a longer film would have allowed for, thus posing a solution to the issue Lefevre (2007) raises around duration.

Signifiers

The next challenge here was to extract these themes and characters, and place them within a South African context. I did not want to re-write the original text, but rather re-interpret it in a manner that reflected my social setting. Thus, to apply my argument, I separated norms within the Manga from their signifiers. For example, in 'Hajime no Ippo', characters often bow to each other as a sign of respect. However, this norm is born out of Japanese culture, and is not commonly practiced by South Africans Its connotation of respect, however, could be emulated in another form, such as the tone used by the characters when speaking to each other.

The script-writing quickly became a process of finding culturally sincere signifiers that might communicate the same connotation as the ones held in the Manga. I began to consider the use of locations, titles, music and language as a way signifying a re-interpretation. By establishing Johannesburg as the setting in the film, and by using music and sound design that had South

African influences and having the characters speak in a mix of English and Zulu (two of the eleven national languages of South Africa), I wished to emulate the same sense of 'foreign' that Gurinder Chadha created in 'Bride and Prejudice' (2004) or Baz Luhrmann in 'Romeo + Juliet' (1996).

Once these decisions were made, I began to consider how to face the next challenge, which, as outlined by Lefevre, was of the film having an 'inherent realism' as opposed to Manga being the 'artist's interpretation of reality' (2007, Pg. 6). If I had chosen to emulate the original text in its entirety, this would have been a greater challenge. However, as I was re-interpreting it for a different culture, and signifying my intention to do so, I was able to cast actors without considering whether they looked similar to the ones in the Manga.

Therefore, Ippo is played by a black actor instead of a Japanese one. That being said, while I was not burdened by the task of finding an 'Ippo look-alike', I did have to give thought to Ippo's other defining characteristics. This is where the challenges of a cross-cultural adaptation really showed, since casting actors for a South African setting meant that I had to begin considering the socio-political setting of South Africa itself. South Africa's history of apartheid inadvertently informs the current South African identity (Saks, 2010. Pg. 21). As such, casting a black or white actor came with its own set of connotations that were not present in the Manga itself. My intention then became to align these connotations closely with that of the Manga.

For example, Ippo comes from a poor single parent household, and his mother struggles to make ends meet. While poverty is not bound to race, in South Africa the majority of the people below the poverty line are black (CIA, 2016). As such, it made sense to cast a black actor for the role. As a strategic choice, I also cast a black actor for the role of Takamura. This signified that skill

or boxing talent were not race-specific as racially diverse characters with varying amounts of boxing skill are depicted.

Production

This then brings us to the third challenge that Lefevre outlines – framing. Manga, as discussed before, uses subjective motion and framing to create a sense of being present at the scene (McCloud, 1993. Pg. 130).

However, as subjective motion is not a norm, but rather a 'Cross-Cultural Universal, as it exists in film and comics (Christiansen, 2000), the film managed to emulate the framing in the Manga, somewhat successfully, through subjective camera work. Subjective motion is created when the camera moves with the subject (McCloud, 1993. Pg. 130). Therefore, cinematographer Katulo Hadebe used a shoulder rig that allowed him to move the camera with the actors and to get the required framing. Furthermore, the shaky nature of the camera movement – born out of moving with the actors – added a sense of 'being present' in the fight (Petrie and Boggs, 2012 Pg. 109). The use of artificial lighting was minimal, since the natural light in the room was enough to add to the sense of 'realism' within the film (Petrie and Boggs, 2012 Pg. 97).

Lastly, before I discuss the editing of this film, I would like to mention the production design and make-up. Hollywood, as discussed before, does not include graphic detail in their films when they're aiming for a PG-13 rating (MPAA, 2010. Pg. 7). I would argue that Manga being as explicit as it is, demands that a film be willing to make the adaptation a PG-16 rating, so as to stay true to the sense of grit present in the stories. In the case of 'Hajime No Ippo', the scenes that I adapted are violent but lack bloodshed. As such, there are only a few instances in the film where bruising and blood are shown.

In terms of production design, the costumes used for the actors are similar to the ones used in the Manga. This was not an issue as ‘Hajime no Ippo’ is not fantastical in its nature and thus does not have iconic costumes that are unique to its narrative. In the film I use generic school uniforms (though the ones in the Manga are Japanese) and generic boxing uniforms (that are used in the Manga too) thus recreating the same wardrobe style.

Post production

The editing of the film strayed far away from the continuity editing that Hollywood employs. For example, Hollywood films strictly adhere to the 180-degree rule as well as the 30-degree rule. (Petrie and Boggs, 2012) These rules are broken in the film, so as to emphasize the action and to force the audience to be its active decoders.

The montage structure of the film is inspired by Eisenstein who once noted that it was the study of pictographs, as used by Japanese artists, which informed his theory of the montage (Schodt. Pg. 25). As such, I took note from this and employed a montage when possible. The intention here is to let the audience decode the narrative details by viewing only aspects of the action. The key example of this is when Jabu tries to pass the test that Themba sets for him. Here, the film editor cuts together images of him being frustrated, him looking for coins and him training, to establish his efforts and uphill struggle. Finally, the I made use of slow-motion when depicting Jabu’s Jabs, which serves to establish the ‘superhuman’ speed of Jabu’s punches. This use of slow motion to create a sense of the superhuman is discussed by Petrie and Boggs. They state that, “human beings photographed in slow motion look serious, poetic, larger than life” (2012. Pg. 180).

Final film

Therefore, in my experience, the film succeeds as it manages to take inspiration and borrow from the source text without attempting to re-write or replace it. It manages to do so because it is coherent in its use of signifiers and its understanding of the context Manga was born out of. I would argue that the adaptation does not simply colonise the original text but also serves as celebratory reinterpretation of the original source.

Conclusion

Adapting Manga presents many challenges. Drawing from the work of McCloud (1993), Schodt (2012) and Lefevre (2007), I found that there the many cultural gaps which make Manga incompatible with Hollywood style filmmaking. For Manga is imbued with cultural nuances, unique iconography and an ideology that is not commonly known to Western audiences. Furthermore, drawing from Leitch (2007 & 2011) and Cartmell (2008), I learnt that the adaptation process is complicated by the contested ways in which critics define a successful adaptation.

As such, I argue that one of the ways to adapt Manga is to transpose it in a 'celebratory' way, while 'colonising' it. This allows the filmmaker to focus on creating a coherent narrative for the film, that is inspired by t'he style, narrative and themes of any given Manga, but not burdened by the need to faithfully recreate the Manga. While this is in no way the only approach and much work still needs to be done in the field of adapting a culturally unique medium such as Manga, I believe that this a step in the right direction.

Word Count: 11 456

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