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INCOMPATIBLE VISUAL ONTOLOGIES?

THE PROBLEMATIC ADAPTATION OF DRAWN IMAGES

— PASCAL LEFÈVRE

"Till today I haven't seen a cinematographic adaptation of a comic, which seems to add something to the original work, they have always been rehashes."[1]

The prominent French director Alain Resnais (Thomas 247) uttered this quite negative view on filmic adaptations of comics in 1990. Adaptations from comics seldom gain canonical recognition and they rarely figure in lists of best films of all times.[2] Not only do these adaptations seldom please the critics,[3] they seem to have little automatic appeal for comics readers.[4] Cinema critics and comics fans seem to agree that it is hard to make a good movie of a comic. The movie-going audience is less severe. Moreover, some adaptations from comics were real blockbusters including Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978), Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989), Barry Sonnenfeld's *Men in Black* (1997) and Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* (2002).[5] That the comics the movies were based on were already a success does not explain completely the success of the filmic adaptations; the movies must have attracted viewers that rarely read comics. Moreover all these adaptations generated an offspring of sequels.

Adaptations of comics seem to be popular as well as controversial. While some analysts (Peeters[6]) recognize creative aspects of some adaptations, other critics (Fremion 166) state bluntly that adaptation is preferred by mediocre talents. Some comic artists are even opposed to the idea of a filmic adaptation. For instance, Art Spiegelman does not want to see his

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Maus adapted as a live action movie, because he considers the metaphoric style of his storytelling essential and impossible to adapt outside the comics medium.[7]

Nevertheless it has been pointed out various times that there is a closer link between cinema and comics than between cinema and other visual arts (Christiansen 107, Costa 24). Films and comics are both media which tell stories by series of images: the spectator sees people act—while in a novel the actions must be verbally told. Showing is already narrating in cinema and comics, but while classical cinematic narratives situate the spectator at the centre of the diegetic space, comics on the other hand are rooted in a parodic tradition (Christiansen 118). Since the nineteenth century a majority of comics have used deformation, often caricatured, to various degrees as a major characteristic. Also the confrontation of texts and pictures and the fact that pictures are drawn reminds the reader of their artificial status. Moreover film and comics differ significantly not only in the way they are experienced and received by the public, but also in their material shape. This poses many problems for an adaptation from a comic to a live-action movie. In particular the visual ontology of a drawing seems to be a central issue, as will be developed in this essay. But in addition there is the problem of primacy: usually people prefer the first version of a story they encounter. When you read first a novel, you form a personal mental image of the fictive world and when you first read a comic, you have a kinetic visual idea as well. Any filmic adaptation has to deal with these first personal interpretations and images: it is extremely hard to exorcise those first impressions.[8]

In this article the term "adaptation" is used in a broad sense, including also films directly inspired by a certain comic or comic series.[9] Adaptations in animation format are not discussed. Animated adaptations deserve a proper analysis of their own, but most problems of live action adaptations will haunt animated version as well.

In contrast to the single and original artworks of painting and sculpture, only copies of films and comics are distributed and consumed.[10] Art philosopher Walter Benjamin argued that the aura of the work of art withered in the age of mechanical reproduction, because the reproduced object is detached from the domain of tradition.[11] Though they share a fundamental similarity (mass consumption) movies and comics still have some differences regarding their reception or consuming mode. The two main differences are the material shape of the images and the social aspects of reception. The difference in reception or consuming mode is individual activity (comic) versus group experience (cinema). While reading a comic is a solitary action, viewing a film in a theatre is largely a group experience: people gather in film theaters at precise moments to watch a film together.[12] A lot of moviegoers share emotions at the same time: they laugh and cry together. Reactions of other viewers may facilitate such emotional responses during a showing. Reading a comic, on the contrary, involves no direct emotional sharing with others. Only when the reading is completed, a comic reader can exchange his emotions with others. A film showing demands attention from the viewer, since the place is dark with only the screen light and often music plays loudly to lend aural atmosphere and to keep viewers attuned to the screen action. Reading a comic book, on the other hand, does not necessarily take place in such an undisturbed environment. Nevertheless a reader can seclude himself physically and mentally.

Not only does the reception of a comic and a film differ, but also their production. By necessity the production of a film implies a bigger organization and budget than the production of a comic. The creative part in film is done by a group of people (writer, photographer, director, actor, editor and the like), whereas drawing and writing a comic can be done by a small team or just one person. This essay, though, focuses on the visual differences of the two media. Despite their seeming concordance—at least when comparing films to novels—juxtapositioning their inherent visual ontologies highlights reasons why comics fans may literally "see" film adaptations as often unfaithful and even disrespectful.

There are four main problems in the adaptation of comics into film and three of them are related to the characteristics of the comics medium itself: panels are arranged on a page, panels are static drawings and a comic does not make noise or sound. Film is quite different. First, there is a screen frame, second, the film images are moving and photographic, third, film has a soundtrack. These characteristic differences of the two media become enacted as the four adaptation problems of (1) the deletion/addition

process that occurs with rewriting primary comics 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. Given these problems, perhaps the central question about filmic adaptation of comics is not, "how faithful/respectful to the comic the film will be," but rather, "how least dissimilar to the comic can the film be?"

The starting point for most adaptations is whether or not the scriptwriters will follow the storyline as presented in the comic itself, or will they take the existing material just as an interesting starting point to write a new story with a lot of new additions. Few adaptations respect meticulously the storyline of a particular comic. Every real artisan of cinema knows that this medium has its own laws and rules. A direct adaptation is seldom a good choice: some elements may work wonderfully in a comic, but cannot function in the context of a film. Usually a script writer for a movie has to leave out scenes, has to add others, and has to write out some principal characters or introduce new ones. For instance, the two police officers in the comic *From Hell* (Moore and Campbell) are combined in the film into one character. The necessity of such changes in large part is simply due to the different narrative-length norms of the two media. Since the comic book version of *From Hell* consists of hundreds of pages, not all the drawn sequences were shot. Thus, the original text is inevitably altered. *From Hell*'s creator Alan Moore (Mouchart 30) explains that he does not care too much about adaptations: "I force myself not to have an opinion [on the adaptations]. Those feature films do not resemble my books. If they are good films, it's the merit of the directors. It has nothing to do with me. Likewise if the films are mediocre. It interests me to see them, but since I don't like to work for Hollywood and cinema isn't one of my preferred media, I do not feel very implicated in those projects."[13]

Most comic creators (like Daniel Clowes, Stan Lee, Enki Bilal) understand that a film usually needs changes to the original material. Enki Bilal stresses that *Immortel* is not an adaptation of his *Nikopol* trilogy, but a rewriting ("réécriture"). He explains in an interview that it was important—amongst other things—to include some of the burning issues of today and forget about some other aspects (Bernière 12).

By contrast to the artists themselves, diehard fans of the original work rarely applaud such rewritings. For instance, the changes in costumes and the character motivations in the *X-Men* films dissatisfied some fans (Lee 2000). The organic webshooters of Spider-Man in the Sam Raimi film seem to pose a problem for some fans, because in the original comic book version the webshooters were a technological invention of the young scientist Peter Parker. When Kenneth Plume asked Stan Lee, the creator of *Spider-Man*, about this matter, he said that it worked out: "Maybe some purists who know the comics might feel, 'Oh, they didn't do it the way it was in the comics,' but the average person watching it would have no problem with the webs coming out of his hands that way" (Lee 2000). Some comics fans tend to consecrate the original work and scrutinize a filmic adaptation for so called errors or misinterpretations. Almost every attempt of adaptation becomes in their eyes some kind of betrayal. Moreover such filmic adaptations give superheroes fans a unique opportunity to show off their almost autistic-savant knowledge of a particular superhero comic book series. In the eyes of the large public and in particular of the cultural elite those superheroes fans do not have a high status: reading superheroes comic books is generally associated with childish behavior.

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. Just as in a historical movie, there is no way to render the situations exactly as they were; it is therefore much more important to try to be truthful to the spirit of the original work. Of course, every decision is open to discussion, and not all the decisions of a director are necessarily good decisions.

The second problem relates to the transition from page layout to the image on a single screen. Whilst the images of a comic are mostly printed on paper, the images of a film are projected on a screen, typically wide screen in a film theatre or a television screen at home. The difference is important because the pages of a comic are in a closer range than the projected images of a film. It is the readers who have to leaf through a comic and they can choose their own reading speed. They can linger on a panel, scan the complete plate, and return to panels or whole sequences at free will. A film, though, obliges the viewer to follow the rhythm of the sequences.[14] In film

the shots are put on a linear-time sequence; in comics the panels are not only placed in a linear sequence but also on a larger space, namely the page. In this sense comics are a more spatial medium than film. In cinema, filming and montage are two quite separate phases. In comics, the drawing of the panels and the combination of the panels on a page cannot be that easily separated: choices in one domain have consequences in the other domain (Groensteen, "Du 7ᵉ au 9ᵉ art" 28).[15]

In addition, the interplay of the various panels (their relative dimensions and their location) is a constitutive aspect of the comics medium. Cinema with its moving images and standardized screen formats is not well equipped to imitate the page layouts of comics, although attempts are made. Sometimes film directors use multiple-frame imagery or split-screens imagery; two or more different images, each with its own frame dimensions and shape, appear within the larger frame (Bordwell & Thompson 125). This device is used in various comics adaptations. The *Hulk* DVD contains a bonus feature in which editor Tim Squyres and ILM compositor Mark Casey explain they did not want to imitate a comic book page layout because it would not work in film, but they wanted to come up with some cinematic devices inspired by those dynamic pages. Since using multiple-frame imagery is still quite unusual[16]—especially when the split-screens themselves are moving on the screen as in *Hulk*—it tends to surprise the viewer and to make him or her more aware of the filmic code of framing. It then functions as a self-referential technique. Though multiple-frame imagery is closer to comics, it breaks the usual cinematographic illusion.

A third issue is the difference between drawn forms and photographic forms. Although both film and comics make use of flat images and similar shots (long, medium, and close-up),[17] it is evident that the differences between the two media are more striking. A crucial and striking difference is that film functions with moving images,[18] while comics use static images.[19] This difference between moving and still images is of paramount importance. By and large normal moving images will give a greater impression of realism. A viewer of a still image will always be reminded of the fragmented and frozen time. Nevertheless such an unmoving picture can also look realistic and credible, especially when it is of photographical nature. Cinema is foremost a photographic medium: a camera registers what is in

front of the lense.[20] The photographic material fixates the bundles of light rays. As in daily life the brain of a spectator in a movie theater has to interpret the pattern of light intensities provided by a photographic picture in order to extract features such as edges. Therefore the British psychologist John Willats (128) calls it an optical denotation system: the picture elements denote features of the array of light reaching the eye or the camera, rather than physical features of the scene such as edges and contours.

By contrast to a photographic image a drawn panel from a comic usually offers clear edges. Generally the artist uses clear contour lines to denote the various objects in his pictures. Although such outlines in drawn pictures may be less analogous to the external world, they are not necessarily inferior in their capacity for grasping the essential aspects of a scene. Moreover, as art historian Philip Rawson (1979, 8–10) states, a well-developed language of marks can convey far more about what it represents than any mere copy of appearances. Good drawing always goes beyond appearances. A good portrait does not necessarily need a perfect imitation of all the individual traits, but rather the depiction of the essential aspects. Gestalt psychologist Rudolf Arnheim (149) claims that the better picture is one that leaves out unnecessary detail and chooses telling characteristics, but also that the relevant facts must be unambiguously conveyed to the eye. This outcome can be obtained by picture elements such as simplicity of shape, orderly grouping, distinction figure and ground, use of lighting and perspective and distortions.[21]

In addition a drawing offers many possibilities. A drawn image can more easily show impossible views (e.g. Escher) or combine various views (as in cubist art), and an artist will not be limited by budgets. Comic artists can choose their cast at will, imagine complete new worlds or civilizations; only their imagination and artistic skills pose restrictions on the creative act. The most fantastic scenes can simply be drawn in comics: people can fly in the air; whole cities can be destroyed and so on. In the past it was quite complicated and difficult to film such scenes, but with the coming of digital techniques special effects entered a new age. Thanks to the combination of computer animation with live-action filming the most fantastic and credible scenes can be created: ordinary looking people transform fluently into horrible monsters (e.g. *Hulk*), characters and objects fly in the sky (e.g. *The Matrix*), deformations and exaggerations are possible

(e.g. *The Mask*). Such imaginings, though, while now possible in cinema, can still be a point of criticism in comics films when such effects do not live up to viewer/critic expectations of realism (such as, for example, criticism of the effects in early *Hulk* teaser trailers as cheesy). Also, of course, such effects remain quite expensive to do in that medium, especially when compared to the cost of a pencil as the necessary "special effects tool" for comic art.

Arnheim suggests that every successful work of art, no matter how stylized and remote from mechanical correctness it may be, conveys the full natural flavor of the object it represents. Rawson (1987, 78) tries to explain the richness of drawings: "Without precision in formulating the elements there can be no true variety; for it is only possible to recognize variety and variation if distinctions between the forms are made quite clear. And there can only be variety within an ordered structure, or else differences are simply chaos and not variation. Variation implies a substratum of norm-units which are varied." The "language" of the form creates its own reality and has a personal touch. In contrast to an average photographic image, a drawing is literally and figuratively "signed" (Groensteen, "Du 7e au 9e art" 23). "The structure of the artist's visual thought is what matters; and somehow or other it must be 'true,' i.e. have a functional relationship to what artist and spectator accept as truth." (Rawson, 1987, 23). A successful artistic solution is so compelling that it looks like the only possible realization of the subject (Arnheim 144). Hochberg and Brooks (382) even claim that comics approximate the ways in which people think of the visual world, which would be an explanation for their popularity.

An artist not only depicts something, but s/he expresses at the same time a philosophy, a vision—but one rather difficult to verbalize. Every drawing is by its style a visual interpretation of the world, in that it foregrounds the presence of an enunciator (Christiansen 115). The form of the drawing influences the manner the viewer will experience and interpret the drawing. A drawn image offers a specific view on reality and the creator's subjectivity of this reality is built into the work, and a fairly obvious part of this work. The viewer is obliged to share this figuratively view of the maker, and can not look at the object-in-picture from another visual point of view than the one the picture offers. The viewer, says film scholar Jan-Marie Peters (14), is invited to share the maker's mode of seeing, not

only in the literal, but also in the figurative sense. Nevertheless the reader is not just a passive agent: he or she looks at images with prior knowledge and activates the images. The perspective and style of the particular artist also may foreground—as a medium—the human-constructedness of images in comics, even for realistic drawing styles. This may perhaps encourage speculation from readers and polysemic meanings. And, of course, the individual context is thus also of considerable importance in introducing variability in reader interpretation. So every drawing style implies a certain interpretation of the reality in visual terms, a particular visual ontology (Rawson, 1987:19).

A photographic image has, by its optic nature alone, a quite different visual ontology. Viewers do not react in the same way to a drawing as to a photographic image. Although photos can also be manipulated by using special software such as Photoshop, generally the viewer still accords more realism to a photo than to a stylized drawing. For instance, stylized drawings do not deliver a successful trompe l'oeuil, whereas an optic image can easily fool the eye and the mind of the viewer. That explains why a viewer more likely accepts violence in a drawn medium than in a photographic medium. If the violence of the *Tom and Jerry* animation series was not cartoonesque, but filmed with real-life cats and mice, the violence would probably seem much more difficult to digest. Viewers tend to accept more from a stylized medium than from a photographic medium.

The different visual ontology may also be the reason why it is extremely difficult to adapt a strongly stylized or caricatured drawing in a photographic image. The failure of the various filmic adaptations of Hergé's *Tintin* is exemplary, according to French writer and comics theorist Benoît Peeters: "Ambiguity is probably constitutive, because the work of Hergé balances between realism and caricature. The style of the artist—the famous 'clear line'—is the unifying element of the work that guarantees its coherence; when this is lost, confusion and incredulousness surface. On the whole, the Tintin-adaptations are an indirect demonstration of how strongly the qualities of Hergé's work are linked with the formal language of the comics medium."[22]

Also the Italian film scholar Antonio Costa (25) stresses the importance of the comics' figurative fascination: "Cinema can try to substitute this by complex operations of selection and stylization of its own

expressive means."[23] As successful examples Costa mentions the art direction and photography of Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) and Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy* (1992). Elsewhere in this book Michael Cohen analyses in more detail what he calls *Dick Tracy*'s "aesthetic of artifice" in production design, framing, prosthetic makeup and other techniques. *Sin City* (2005, Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller) and *Immortel*[24] (2004, Enki Bilal) are rare examples of comic artists as crafty (co)directors of films (see further in this book the analysis of *Immortels*). The mise-en-scene and the art direction are thus of paramount importance, because not only the characters, but also the decors are being defined by the visual style of the drawing. Real locations often look too ordinary and are not adjusted to the fictive and graphic world of a comic book.

Most filmic adaptations however do not succeed in grasping the stylization or mood of the original work as was achieved in *Sin City* or *Immortel*. If a film director does not find a way to transpose the visual style into photographic images, s/he can also develop an alternative, such as in *Annie* and *From Hell*. The deliberate choice for a clearly artificial, but credible world seems to work well.

When a comic is rendered in a more "realistic" style or in various styles, cinematographic adaptations seem to be less insuperable (e.g. *Superman*, *Spider-Men*, *X-Men*). Usually long-running comic book series do not have a unique defining style: such series can be drawn and told in very different ways, costumes and looks can change in time. Series like *Batman* or *Superman* were not only written by different scriptwriters, but also drawn by scores of artists. One cannot confuse the angular Dick Sprang Batman (from the 1940s and 50s) with the stylish Neal Adams Batman (of the early 1970s) or, the minimalistic and chunky Frank Miller Batman (of 1986) or, the photorealist painted Dave McKean Batman (of 1989)—these are only some of the scores of artists who worked on *Batman* since 1939. Because *Batman* is multifaced a reader of a certain period can have a particular idea about Batman that is not necessarily shared by readers from others periods, or even another contemporary reader. Moreover, as Bennett and Woollacott (1987:59) have demonstrated in their study of James Bond, there is no stable meaning of such a popular figure. Bond or Batman can not be abstracted from the shifting orders of intertextuality through which their actual functioning has been organized and reorganized. This is also the case

for so called graphic novels. The various graphic treatments of the Harvey Pekar stories of *American Splendor* (since 1976) make a movie just another interpretation that fit in well with that series' visual eclecticism.

Finally the use of sound in films adds another layer of difference to the issue of adaptation. There was a time that the movies were more like comics. During the first decades of cinema the actors and the narrator only received a "voice" through written texts on intertitles. But the introduction of sound in the late 1920s changed the nature of cinema drastically. All films became "talkies"—except for some experimental films. Sound is a powerful film technique, because sound engages a distinct sense mode and sound can actively shape how the spectator perceives and interprets the image (Bordwell & Thompson 291–92).

Comics do not have a sound track: music, voices and noises can only be suggested by stilled and visible signs (text, ideograms, balloons . . .) printed on paper. It is possible to use similar techniques in film, but they do not function as well. Except for tongue-in-cheek approaches as in the *Batman* television series (1966–68), onomatopoeia in a cinematographic context looks rather strange.

The change from "silent" to "talkie" is fundamental. As in novels in comics a reader can never hear the sound of the characters' voices.[25] Of course, the written text can inform the reader about that aspect. Moreover in comics the visible appearance of the character and other ideograms can suggest the sound of a voice, but it remains largely an interpretation by the reader. 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.

Not only the sound of a voice is different but also the way the characters speak. The texts in speech balloons are generally not suited for film dialogue and they need some rewriting. Superhero comics, for example, often use very stylistic and bombastic dialogue; a literal screen translation may emphasize such dialogue's artificial nature to the point of unintentional camp. Stan Lee (2000) explains how Ken Johnson changed the texts in *The Incredible Hulk* television series (1978–1982): "He changed it quite a bit from the comic book, but every change he made, made sense. In the comics, when the Hulk talked—he'd go, 'Me Hulk! Me smash! Hulk kill!'

That type of thing. Well, that would have been corny as hell on the screen. He left that out . . . He didn't have the Hulk talk at all."

So the change from a "silent medium" to a "sound medium" poses also a lot of problems for the adaptation.

The starting point of this article was the debate on the value of filmic adaptations of comics. Such films may be popular, but they remain controversial, especially in the eyes of the cultural elite and the diehard comics fans. Although there are many similarities, the differences are still considerable. After a short look at the different reception and the production modes, four main problems were described at the creative level: first, to what extent has a scriptwriter for film to rewrite the story, second, how to go from page layout to a single, unchangeable screen frame, third, how to translate static drawings into moving and photographic images, and fourth, how to give the "silent world" an audible sound? These seem to be the crucial problems of filmic adaptations of comics. Although new computer technology facilitates the recreation of the comics' fantastic allures, cinematographic adaptations remain problematic; not the least because the reader of a comic constructs a mental image of the fictive world. Moreover, the reader adds elements that are not necessarily explicit in the comic, for instance the sound of the voices of the various characters. When an actor interprets a character from a comic, his/her voice does not always match the imagined voice by the reader.

Given these differences, perhaps we should not be too purist concerning adaptations and accept that a work may inspire a creator in another medium. If we look at an adaptation, we should forget—for a moment—about the original work and evaluate the newly created work on its own merits. Films such as *Annie*, *Dick Tracy*, *Batman*, *Ghost World*, *Hulk*, *American Splendor*, *Immortel* or *Sin City* should be judged as movies and not as successful or unsuccessful adaptations of comics. After all, Western spectators who watched and enjoyed the Korean film *Old Boy* (Chan-Wuk, 2004) usually did so without having read or even knowing about the original manga.

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DICK TRACY

IN PURSUIT OF A COMIC BOOK AESTHETIC

—MICHAEL COHEN

"Reality was not our goal on this picture."
—Warren Beatty (Bonifer, *Dick Tracy: The Making of the Movie* 12)

When Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy* arrived in 1990, it was the most meticulous effort to capture the aesthetic of a comic in a live-action film, and paved the way for the exploration of the visual correlations lying dormant between cinema and comics. Although there are ontological differences between cinema and comics, and it is not possible for a live-action film to replicate the formal properties of comics, *Dick Tracy* demonstrates how the cinema can adapt the conventions and characteristics of a comic. *Dick Tracy* is a fascinating film for boldly tackling the differences between these two media, and in doing so deploys a combination of an "aesthetic of artifice," "cartooning," framing of the hero, and "paneling," to create a cinematic comic aesthetic. The result is a film with eye-popping colors, a blatantly artificial diegesis, a bizarre mélange of villains, and a stalwart hero wearing a yellow hat and trench coat.

Comics do not possess a singular style, or a finite set of visual attributes, which are either inherent to the medium or historically stable. In his article, "Shaping *The Maxx*," Greg Smith explains that adapting material from different media "is necessarily a process of translation, since one cannot merely import forms from one medium to another" (32). Smith makes

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NOTES

Pascal Lefèvre, "Incompatible Visual Ontologies? The Problematic Adaptation of Drawn Images"

1. My translation of a French quote by Alain Resnais (Thomas 247): "Toujours est-il que jusqu'ici je n'ai jamais vu de film tiré d'une bande dessinée qui me paraisse ajouter quelque chose à l'œuvre d'origine, ça a toujours été des soustractions."

2. For instance in the recent *1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die* (Schneider, 2003) there is only one live action adaptation of a comic, namely Tim Burton's *Batman*. Also in other lists comics adaptations seldom appear: *Les films-clés du cinéma* (Beylie, 1987) or *Beste films aller tijden* (Hofman, 1993).

3. It is not unusual to read reviews such as "Another Movie Based on Comic Book Disappoints" (Baxendell, 2005). The Spanish scriptwriter and critic José Miguel Pallarés (2003) devotes a complete book to adaptations of comics, but explicitly excludes the superhero genre because in his view those films get already too much promotion. On the contrary adaptations of "graphic novels" such as *Ghost World*, *American Splendor*, *Immortel*, or *Sin City* seem to please more the film critics. Only exceptional superhero adaptations such as *Spider-Man* or *X-Men* get a quite positive press (Boogaerts 83–88, 157–62).

4. For instance at *ALAS (a blog)*, fans of *Watchmen* say that they would not like to see *Watchmen* adapted to film.

5. Of course, not all comic adaptations were as financially successful; Altman's *Popeye* (1980) or Ang Lee's *Hulk* (2003) were viewed as box office disappointments.

6. Benoît Peeters (1996) states: "Si les rencontres entre cinema et bande dessinée n'ont pas donné naissance à beaucoup de chefs-d'œuvre, elles ont par contre conduit à un grand nombre de films curieux."

7. Art Spiegelman (1998): "I don't want to see *Maus* as a movie. I've had lots of offers. I fired my first agent because he wanted to make a movie, and I kept telling him I didn't want it. (. . .) I'm not interested in it because (A) that aforementioned line about large groups of people [Spiegelman's father told his son not to trust large groups] and (B) the fact that it took so long for me to find the proper way to get it told in panel form, thirteen years—it would have been eleven and a half if I hadn't tried to stop smoking for a year and a half. But thirteen years to learn about animation and adapt it again. And it required a lot of the abstraction that came with the comics medium."

8. After my query at the comix-scholars list in May 2005 various persons responded that they experience such a primacy effect. Among others Chris Hayton wrote (19 May 2005): "To a greater or lesser extent, depending on fidelity to the original story, I become irritated or disappointed by the departure from, for example, the *Tales to Astonish/Incredible*

cinema are predominantly created in an optical denotation system. The idea is that the digital must not be recognized as such; it must look real as much as possible.

21. Creative film directors use also some of these picture elements, but they are harder to manipulate and control on a film set than a drawer can with a pencil on paper. Given some drawing talent, leaving out elements—stressing the major lines—is easier on paper: what you do not draw does not exist. While a drawer has to add details, a director has to leave out details.

22. My translation of a French article by Peeters (1996): "Réussir un film convaincant à partir des Aventures de Tintin semble décidément un pari presque impossible. L'ambiguité est probablement constitutive, car l'œuvre d'Hergé se tient sur une corde raide entre réalisme et caricature. Le trait du dessinateur—la fameuse «ligne claire»—est l'élément qui unifie l'œuvre et garantit sa cohérence, sitôt qu'il disparaît, c'est la confusion et la perte de crédibilité qui s'installent. Au bout du compte, l'intérêt premier des films adaptés de *Tintin* est de prouver par l'absurde à quel point les qualités de l'œuvre d'Hergé sont liées à la bande dessinée et à son langage."

23. My translation of an Italian text by Costa (25): "Molto spesso si è rimproverato al cinema di finzione ispirato ai personaggi dei fumetti l'incapacità di restituire l'incanto, la magia, in una parola lo stile di quell'universo figurativo. In realtà, molti dei problemi posti dalla relazione tra il cinema e il fumetto sono analoghi a quelli che si pongono tra cinema e pittura: la staticità della pittura e quella del fumetto, rispetto al movimento del cinema, reagiscono in maniere diversa, in quanto la grafica dei comics ha inventato e codificato forme di dinamisme dalle quali dipende gran parte del suo fascino figurativo. Il cinema può cercare di restituirlo solo attraverso complesse operazioni di selezione e stilizzazioone dei suoi propri mezzi espressi."

24. Though the combination of digital animated actors with real actors in one frame is sometimes problematic in *Immortel*.

25. In some films (as Oshima's *Ninja Bugeicho*) naturalistic spoken dialogue and sound effects are added to the still images from a comic (in our example panels from the Sanpei Shirato's manga of the same name). But Oshima's fast cutting of stylized still images, naturalistic spoken dialogue, and richly musical sound effects produce a strange and often very striking disjunction (Burch 738–39).

Michael Cohen, "Dick Tracy: In Pursuit of a Comic Book Aesthetic"

1. In the original comic strip this character is called "Junior." At the end of the film the Kid must choose a proper name for himself, and decides on "Dick Tracy Jnr."

2. Measurements have been taken from a cross section of strips reprinted in Gould, *Dick Tracy: The Thirties*.

3. John Belton explains that when a soundtrack was added to film, the old standard ratio of 1.33:1 was lost. In 1932 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences established the Academy ratio, only it was now 1.37:1. He notes that although it is a slightly different ratio, it is still referred to as 1.33:1 (43–45).

Kerry Gough, "Translation Creativity and Alien Econ(c)omics: From Hollywood Blockbuster to Dark Horse Comic Book"

1. Many thanks go to the editors for suggestions on an earlier draft of this chapter, Lee Dawson for his continual availability, and Randy Stradley for all the information provided surrounding the development of the Aliens comic books. Lee Dawson is publicist for Dark