FOUND IN TRANSLATION: STRUCTURAL AND COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF THE ADAPTATION OF COMIC ART TO FILM

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ABSTRACT
FOUND IN TRANSLATION: STRUCTURAL AND COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF THE ADAPTATION OF COMIC ART TO FILM
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This dissertation seeks to answer questions concerning how film adaptations of comic art are constructed and received. Through investigating several bodies of literature, including work on literary adaptation, telepresence theory, comic art and cognitive film theory, the following primary questions are arrived at: (1) What are the different types of comic art to film adaptations that exist based on the devices and strategies used in adapting the content of comic artwork to film? (2) How is the film viewer’s experience of telepresence influenced by prior experience with the comic art source material of the film adaptation? (3) Which medium produces a stronger sense of telepresence?

Two studies that were developed to answer these questions are reported. Through a textual analysis comparing different types of comic-to-film adaptations selected from a nearly comprehensive list (Jones, 2008), a set of adaptive operations was discovered based upon the narrative and stylistic relationships between film adaptations and the comic art source materials from which they derive. Depending upon which operations are used, adaptations may be classified as predominately structural or thematic. At one extreme there are purely structural adaptations that feature an almost precise
correspondence of narrative events between comic source and film adaptation. At the other extreme, *thematic* adaptations have no relationship of narrative structure to the comic source being adapted, but retain thematic elements in the form of key conflicts and characters.

Having established this opposition, a second study was performed to determine the differential effect of reading and viewing a *structural* versus a *thematic* adaptation on the experience of telepresence. The following hypotheses are asserted: (1) viewers of film adaptations of comic art will experience higher levels of telepresence if they have prior experience reading the comic art source material than if they do not, (2) viewers of film adaptations of comic art will experience higher levels of telepresence if the film is adapted structurally from the comic than if the film is adapted thematically, (3) viewers with a higher level of preexisting interest in the priming stimulus will report higher telepresence scores in response to viewing the film adaptation than participants who have less preexisting interest, (4) the medium of film will produce a stronger sense of telepresence than the medium of comics when content is held constant across media forms.

Of the four main hypotheses, evidence was found to support the first one: the general priming hypothesis that individuals who are primed by comic art source material prior to seeing the film adaptation experience higher levels of telepresence than those who are not. Marginal support was found for the second hypothesis (structural priming produces more telepresence than thematic priming), but this should be interpreted critically because of mixed results. Similarly, conclusions for the third hypothesis (preexisting interest in the comic art priming stimulus will produce higher telepresence
scores in response to the film adaptation) should be cautiously interpreted for the same reason. Finally, results obtained for the fourth hypothesis (film viewers will report higher telepresence than readers of comic art) went in the opposite direction of what was expected. Interestingly, these findings were also the most decisive in terms of statistical significance.

Implications for telepresence theory and cultural transmission of experience are discussed.
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CHAPTER FOUR

TELEPRESENCE IN COMIC ART AND FILM

Having expounded upon the general role that cognition plays in the presence experience, it is now appropriate to direct attention more specifically to how these principles of cognition function in the media that are of specific concern to this project: comic art and film.

The Language of Comic Art

In this section the relationship between words and images, their combination and their synthesis will be discussed insofar as they constitute the language of comics.

Eisner (1985) explains the emergence of the language of comics through repetition: “In its most economical state, comics employ a series of repetitive images and recognizable symbols. When these are used again and again to convey similar ideas, they become a language” (p. 8). What is unique about the language of comics, however, is that it brings together two seemingly disparate forms of communication: the written word and the iconic image.

Eisner further points out that words and images “are derivatives of a single origin” (p. 13) and McCloud (1993) explains their relationship within the context of a triangular continuum which locates realistic representations in the lower left corner, written language in the lower right corner and abstraction at the top. With the help of this model, I turn to the question of where comic art is located on this continuum since it makes use of both realistic representation and written language.

In considering the puzzle of how images and words combine to affect meaning, Barthes (1977) develops the terms anchorage and relay. Anchorage refers to a denotative
relationship between word and image where the text serves to describe or explain the image. He further observes that anchorage is frequently found in press photographs and advertisements. In opposition to anchorage is relay:

The function of relay is less common (at least as far as the fixed image is concerned); it can be seen particularly in cartoons and comic strips. Here text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis (which is ample confirmation that the diegesis must be treated as an autonomous system). (Barthes, 1977, p. 41)

In explaining how relay functions, Barthes makes the preliminary case for comics as its own language. This seems to come about as a result of the union between written words and images as separate means of communication. The resultant intermingling between word and image makes it difficult to consider either outside the context of this “complementary relationship” (Barthes, 1977, p. 41).

Along the same lines as Barthes’ assertion, Eisner (1985) compares comics to “the act of weaving a fabric” (p. 122). If a comic text were a fabric being weaved, certainly the threads would consist of words and images.

In an in-depth analytic examination of word/image combinations in comics, McCloud (1993) locates seven specific styles of union. McCloud’s word specific, picture specific and duo-specific styles function much in the same way as Barthes’ notion of anchorage in the sense that words and images, although combined, still function as discreet systems. McCloud’s additive, parallel, montage and interdependent styles, on
the other hand, are more exemplary of what Barthes would call relay. The reason for this is that these styles form meaning out of word/image interplay. In other words, if either words or image were removed from the panel, meaning would be changed or lost. In the case of the montage style, word and image are combined so thoroughly (because each form takes on the characteristics of the other) that they, in fact, could not be separated from one another systematically.

In a descriptive content analysis, Duncan (2002) found that the method of production used in creating a comic story was related to which one of McCloud's styles was used. In fragmented writing (writing which employs a separate artist and author), word specific panels were used more frequently than in unified writing (writing which is done by a single artist/author). This seems to suggest that unified writing would go further toward establishing comics as a unique language because it does not treat the process of drawing and writing as two separate forms, but as a single form consisting of two symbol systems.

Taking this into consideration, it would seem that the language of comics is most effective when it is located somewhere in the center of McCloud's triangular continuum where image, word, and the union of both in the form of abstract representation serve to create meaning within the constantly evolving lexicon of comics.

It should not be forgotten that comics are read and that reading of any sort requires some degree of consistency within a symbol system. The medium of comics becomes more involving and effective the less that the reader is aware of the word image distinction. When comics function successfully, the reader is not looking at images and reading words or vice versa, he or she is experiencing the story. The idea that words and
images should become one has been stated repeatedly throughout the scholarship and
epitomizes this by writing that what “the ideal comic should provide is precisely such a
contact between image and word, to the point that the two form an ideal unity” (p. 67).

Taking things a step further, Magnussen (2000), dissatisfied with the inadequacy
of a simple division between iconic and symbolic signs to describe comics, suggests that
the semiotic framework of Pierce be employed to understand the role of context within
the signification process of comics. Magnussen explains:

When the Peircean sign is used in the study of communication, the existence of
the interpretant as an integral part of the sign means that a sign is to be considered
always in the context of an act of communication. (p. 195)

In considering this, we are asked not only to recognize the iconic and symbolic signs
interacting within the frame, but also the interaction between the larger signs of the
frame, the page, and the entire work within the context of “social reality” (Magnussen,

Now that the construction of the language of comics has been elaborated upon,
some discussion of transmission is in order. McCloud (1993) states that the transmission
of meaning in comics “follows a path from mind to hand to paper to eye to mind” (p.
195). In this way, comics function very much like a code. Reflecting this relationship
between comics and codification, Carrier (2000) observes the following about reading
comics:

We seek consistency, aiming to interpret all the elements in the visual field in
some way that makes sense of them; and we are remarkably adaptable, willing to
overlook minor inconsistencies so long as the words in the balloon can be
attached to the image and the sequence of images constitutes a meaningful
narrative. (p.5)

Spiegelman (1997) writes: “The essential magic of comics is that a few simple
words and marks can conjure up an entire world for a reader to enter and believe in” (p. 9). This is an important observation about how the language of comics is received by the reader. If Barthes’ notion of anchorage is denotative in the sense that words serve to
anchor or define an image, then the most effective comics are almost certainly
connotative in the sense that words and images work together to evoke signifieds within
the reader. The question remains, though, as to how this connotative code of comics is
capable of provoking a sense of telepresence in the reader.

Telepresence in Comics: The Code Comes Alive

One of the unique aspects of the comic text is the capacity it has for reality
approximation. As previously mentioned, Lombard and Ditton (1997) define
telepresence as the “illusion of nonmediation” (Presence Explicated, ¶ 1). One of several
ways this illusion can occur is through realism or the “the degree to which a medium can
produce seemingly accurate representations of objects, events, and people” (Lombard &
Ditton, 1997, Presence as Realism, ¶ 1).

Eisner (1985) asserts, “comics are a representational art form devoted to the
emulation of real experience” (p. 91). Delving deeper into the specifics of how reality is
constituted in the comic text, Lefèvre (1999) writes: “Paraphrasing Grodal, we can argue
that comics readers use exactly the same constructive procedures in reading a comic as in
constructing reality out of real-life perceptions” (p. 142). This comment is especially
interesting when considered in light of Gibson’s (1979) theory of visual perception. Gibson states, “The information in a line drawing is evidently carried by the connections of the lines, not by lines as such” (p. 288). For Gibson, visual perception occurs through our ability to extract meaningful information about the unchanging aspects of our environment from within the flux of perception. If those unchanging aspects, or invariants, are depicted on a surface, it makes sense that we should be able to recognize them as reality approximations. Although Gibson would stop short of suggesting that such a representation might be mistaken for reality (as in the telepresence experience), this is still an important initial observation.

In light of this, is it possible, through reality approximation, for comics to achieve the “illusion of nonmediation” known as telepresence? An investigation into comic art’s vocabulary of visual iconography should provide some understanding of its potential to approximate reality.

Spiegelman (1997) asserts, “Cartoons have a way of crawling past our critical radar and getting right into the id. It may be that their reductive diagrammatic qualities echo the way the brain sorts information” (p. 5). Eisner (1985) also notes “The cartoon is the result of exaggeration and simplification” (p. 151). Similarly, McCloud (1993) refers to the cartoon as “a form of amplification through simplification” (p. 30).

Perhaps the most useful definition of a cartoon, though, comes from Carrier (2000), who states that “Representation making itself is emotionally neutral; caricature is essentially aggressive in its distortions” (p. 6). Based on such distortions, McCloud (1993) believes comics to be capable of evoking “emotional or sensual” (p. 121) reactions from the reader. Eisner (1996) also explains the reader’s response to the
caricature as one that relies on empathy. Taken together, this would seem to indicate that readers respond emotionally to the images of comics and that this may have an influence on how real the depictions seem.

Eisner (1985) suggests that we respond to comics based on anatomy, specifically posture and gesture. He explains that “The human body, and the stylization of its shape, and the codifying of its emotionally produced gestures and expressive postures are accumulated and stored in the memory, forming a non-verbal vocabulary of gesture” (p. 100). In applying this to the situation of comics, he writes, “when a skillfully limned image is presented it can trigger a recall that evokes recognition and the collateral effects on the emotion” (p. 100).

The special role of emotion in the constitution of reality in the comic text calls into question how we define reality. As previously mentioned, Lombard and Ditton (1997) refer to realism as “the degree to which a medium can produce seemingly accurate representations of objects, events, and people” (Presence as Realism, ¶ 1). But can reality, on some level, be formed out of emotional engagement and still factor into the creation of a sense of telepresence through realism? Reality in terms of telepresence may not be constituted solely through faithful and accurate representation. The experience of emotions does play some role in our perception of what is real and what is present. As argued in chapter two, although an emotional stimulus may be fictional, the emotions experienced by the individual are genuine.

*Disguising Conventions*

The use of conventions in any medium may serve as a barrier to the experience of telepresence because they take on forms that have no grounding in real life experience.
In comics, when considering the potential barriers that exist to the capacity to foster a sense of reality and telepresence, two familiar conventions come to mind: the word balloon and the panel. In reality, when people speak, balloons do not appear above their heads. Neither are the events of life framed in small boxes that are nested in a sequence on a page. How do comics overcome these seemingly difficult obstacles to enable the reader to engage in a realistic and provocative experience? It appears that comics employ a variety of tactics intended to disguise or naturalize these apparently unrealistic conventions in order to maximize the experience of telepresence through realism.

Eisner (1985) believes “The word balloon is a desperation device. It attempts to capture and make visible an ethereal element: sound” (p. 26). But in addition to attempting to make comics audible, the word balloon also lends a quality to comics that no other form of still imagery has – time. Again, Eisner notes that “A comic becomes ‘real’ when time and timing is factored into the creation” (p. 26). The words in word balloons take time to read and are often structured in a fashion that mimics conversational give and take. This gradual elapsing of time that occurs as the reader’s eyes sweep the word balloons serves as a point of reference for the time that would naturally be elapsing during the events of the story (McCloud, 1993). Time spent reading the word balloon is like a thread uniting all elements of the comic text into realistic intervals. This is what makes the medium of comics (like film) unfold in the present tense.

In addition to providing time, both the letters within the word balloon and the shape of the word balloon itself become less obtrusive when they are used in the service of the narrative. The idea of achieving realism through emotion comes into play here as well. If the comic artist draws letters aggressively to represent anger, meekly to represent
whispers or crookedly to represent madness, then the narrative may play off the emotions that these styles connote in order to allow the comic to have a realistic effect. The same is true concerning the execution of balloon outlines. Once again, Eisner (1985) provides helpful insight on this point: “As balloons became more extensively employed their outlines were made to serve as more than simple enclosures for speech. Soon they were given the task of adding meaning and conveying the character of sound to the narrative” (p. 27).

As with balloons, the convention of panels must be used strategically if they are to convey a sense of realism. McCloud (1993) observes that “The panel acts as a sort of general indicator that time or space is being divided” (p. 99). Similarly, Eisner (1985) notes that paneling “establishes the position of the reader in relation to the scene and indicates the duration of the event” (p. 28). Eisner’s more elaborate and encompassing definition of the function of panels in comics opens the door to the consideration of a variety of avenues that are frequently taken in order to disguise their use as a convention of the medium. I will explore four of these avenues.

First of all, as previously described concerning balloons, panels have the quality of representing time, which permits for the experience of the events of the story in the present tense. By observing the static excerpts that are selected from the continuum of the action depicted in the comic, the reader is able to infer the passage of time. Since, in western culture, we perceive the transmission of time as the passing of discreet seconds, minutes, hours, etc., it is not such a far stretch to comprehend time as boxed up and sequenced.
Second, the outlines of panels “can be used as part of the non-verbal ‘language’ of sequential art” (Eisner, 1985, p. 44). Similar to the discussion concerning balloons outlines, the emotions implied in the graphic stylization of the panel outline can have an effect on the emotional realism experienced by the reader. For instance, the use of wavy panel borders may be used to simulate the emotional experience of dreaming. In a more specific example, jagged, diagonal panel borders that appear like fractured glass were used in the *American Splendor* story “American Splendor Assaults the Media” (Pekar & Crumb, 1983) in order to generate the emotion of anger.

Third, Eisner (1985) points out “The use of the panel border as a structural element, when so employed, serves to involve the reader and encompass far more than a simple container-panel” (p. 49). Perhaps the reason that the reader achieves a heightened level of involvement here is because the convention of the panel is naturalized to the point of invisibility. If the outline of the panel is also a doorframe or a window or a tunnel, it exists to a far lesser extent as an unnatural panel that interrupts the realism and telepresence experienced by the reader.

Fourth, when the panel borders are violated by the contents that they hold, the conventional aspect of the panel is undermined. That is, when the panel “invites the reader into the action or allows the action to explode toward the reader” (Eisner, 1985, p.46), it is exposed for the false construct that it is while the “real thing” confronts the reader. A similar strategy is sometimes employed in certain films when the mechanisms of production (lights, cameras, grip equipment, etc.) are made visible to the spectator for the purpose of giving the impression of access to the story on a deeper level (Ames, 1997).
Witek (1989) makes the point that “Comic books, however, have become ever more technically sophisticated: panel shapes and sizes are usually limited only by the artist’s imagination” (p. 8). In light of what has preceded, it may be suggested that comics are in a perpetual state of stylistic evolution aimed toward the goal of disguising convention for the purposes of heightening the realism and sense of telepresence for the reader. Naturally, in a medium so diverse, one cannot say that this is a universal pursuit. Art Spiegelman and Francoise Mouly’s *Raw* (1980-1991), for example, features many avant-garde comics by artists that deliberately flout formal conventions and call attention to the nature of the medium. However, other examples employ the previously described techniques for maximum effect. One widely popular title, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (Miller, 2002/1986), disguises the conventions of comic art by calling direct attention to the conventions of television through panels shaped like television screens and reporters and anchors addressing the reader directly.

*Joining Panels and Experiencing the Comic Text*

Having described some primary ways in which the convention of panels function on their own to foster realism and telepresence through time, emotional tone and disguising convention, I turn to the question of how panels are brought together to form a coherent narrative space sufficiently convincing to be capable of provoking telepresence. McLuhan’s (1964/1996) concept of hot versus cool media will be discussed in conjunction with the previously described concept of “closure” (McCloud, 1993).

McLuhan writes that: “Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience” (p. 23). Comic art, because of its “low definition” (McLuhan, 1996, p. 22), would certainly be considered a
cool medium. What does this mean though, and how can something that is low in definition, or incomplete, possibly hope to foster a sense of telepresence in the reader? For comics, the answers to both of these questions are found in the understanding of the concept known as closure (McCloud, 1993, p. 63).

McCloud (1993) defines closure as “the phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole” (p. 63), but how does the reader go about closing the gap between separate frames that contain related actions? Carrier (2000) theorizes “we understand many caricatures by forming some hypothesis about the previous or the next scene of the action” (p. 14). The basis for this assertion is that our own personal experience and the cognitive schemata associated with that experience are what form the hypotheses we make.

From the perspective of the comic artist, Eisner (1985) explains, “The task then is to arrange the sequence of events (or pictures) so as to bridge the gaps in action. Given these, the reader may fill in the intervening events from experience” (p. 38). Thus, as suggested in the previous chapter, if we each have a cumulative umwelt of experience stored within us, it is the individual sets of schemata that compose it which are summoned to mind and used during the process of deciphering the comic text.

The notion of closure goes beyond a simple use of experience regarding one empirical sense though. Referring to vision, McCloud (1993) asserts “we make that process work by bringing the full power of our own experiences to bear on the world our eyes report” (p. 136). Comprehending the reading process of the comic text from this perspective, we recognize the individual frames of the comic sequence as mere suggestions or connotative prods which encourage the reader to construct the narrative
internally using the pallet of experience that has been collected over a lifetime of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and feeling. McCloud (1993) summarizes as follows: “Within these panels, we can only convey information visually. But between panels, none of our senses are required at all. Which is why all of our senses are engaged” (p. 89).

In sum, it is posited that the formation of closure between panels of the comic text, through the use of recalled experience, can produce an acute sense of realism. If our experience is comprised of the recollection of empirical/sensual events and it is these that are applied to or inserted within the text, then, logically, our experience of the comic text cannot help but achieve some measure of realism. This position is buttressed considerably by relatively recent developments in cognitive science. Barsalou (1999) has theorized about “perceptual symbols” which are schematic representations of prior sensory experience that are stored in memory and recalled based upon immediate perceptual and/or cognitive tasks.

Comics as an Immersive Experience

Among the most commonly cited determinants of the telepresence experience is immersion. For example, Slater (2003) defines telepresence specifically in terms of immersion – “Presence is a human reaction to immersion” (Immersion and Presence, 2). The term immersion, however, can be applied to both a perceptual and psychological response (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Heeter (1992) deals with this concept in terms of the subjective experience of virtual worlds. Of this phenomenon, Heeter writes: “A sense of presence in a virtual world derives from feeling like you exist within but as a separate entity from a virtual world that also exists” (Heeter, 1992, p. 262). Along these same
lines, McCloud (2000), in theorizing about the union between comics and computer technology, writes that "The goal of making comics 'come alive' seems closer in such works where the sound, motion and images create an immersive experience" (p. 210).

Even without the influence of digital technology, however, it is possible to make the argument that reading the comic text is akin to an immersive experience. This is the result of two related behaviors that the reader must engage in to read a comic: (1) gazing with intention, and (2) turning pages with intention.

It has been noted more than once throughout comic scholarship that comics are experienced at multiple levels (Eisner, 1985; Magnussen, 2000; McCloud, 2000). By this it is meant that individual caricatures and balloons have meaning in relation to panels that, in turn, have meaning in relation to pages and beyond. However, unlike film or television, the comic text has no way of asserting control over the gaze of the reader (Eisner, 1996, 1985). With the freedom to optically roam and investigate the page, the reader experiences a consciousness that he or she is choosing which aspects of the page to look at in addition to choosing the order in which to look at those aspects (Jones, 2005). There is, of course, an order intended by the comic artist, but (as previously stated) there is no way to enforce that order.

Through the awareness of the freedom that the reader realizes he or she has over gazing, the reader is given an existence that is immersed in the virtual world of the comic text. As the reader makes the choices of what to look at, the reader is aware that it is the self that is making those choices, thus, to this extent, the reader is afforded the awareness of self being immersed in the comic text.
Miller (2002) likens this awareness of freedom over the gaze to a “strip tease.” Drawing from Barthes (1975), he notes that:

The pleasure derived from narrative suspense, like the gradual unveiling of a striptease, is one of expectation driven by epistemophilia (the obsessive desire to know). Just as striptease holds out the promise of fulfilling ‘the schoolboy’s dream’ of seeing the sexual organ, reading habits that privilege the hermeneutic code anticipate the revelations at the end of the story. (p. 145)

What Miller is saying here is that the pleasure in reading the comic page is found in the delay of textual gratification. This is especially the case concerning comics (as opposed to books) because comics contain pictures that are immediately comprehensible and apparent long before the reader arrives at a particular point on the page. Thus the reader sees what will eventually happen but does not glance too long, instead choosing to return to the proper progression in the narrative, all the while savoring what is known to lie ahead. Of course, the metaphorical ‘striptease’ of reading comics is completely controlled by the eyes of the reader.

Strongly related to the intentionality of the gaze is the intentionality of turning the page. In the Sesame Street children’s comic titled The Monster at the End of this Book (1971), the Grover character informs the reader that there is a monster at the end of the book and that the pages should not be turned lest the monster be revealed. As each successive page is turned, Grover devises increasingly drastic methods to ensure that the reader will not turn any more pages (Stone & Smollin, 1971). The fact that the reader continues to turn pages despite Grover’s warnings and contraptions is evidence of the reader’s power over and immersion within the narrative. In addition to this single
example, there exist a whole genre of children’s picture books that actively engage the reader’s kinesthetic agency through a combination of sight, touch, and even smell. Examples include the following: *Pat the Bunny* (Kunhardt, 1981) in which the reader is able to stroke a rabbit, smell flowers, and even try on a wedding ring punched out of cardboard. *Touch and Feel Farm* (1998) in which the reader is able to feel the textures of various animals. Even *Pirates* (Matthews, 2006), a more sophisticated example intended for young adults, makes use of maps, booklets, pamphlets, and other materials that are folded, stapled, or otherwise inserted into the main page so that the reader must remove these items by hand in order to make use of them. A variety of other examples exist on topics ranging from fairies and dragons to Vikings and wizards.

Far beyond these examples of children’s books, however, turning the page is a physical realization of the reader’s own active and kinesthetic agency as it is subsumed and immersed by the comic text. As the reader turns the page, the hand is seen entering the field of view and intermingling with the icons on the page. The result of this is that the reader potentially perceives the physical self as existing “within but as a separate entity” (Heeter, 1992, p. 262) from the page and the narrative world it presents.

*Telepresence as Transportation in Comics*

In addition to realism and immersion as concepts that determine telepresence within the comic text, there is also the concept of transportation. Transportation in comics likely occurs much in the same way that Gerrig (1993) describes it in regard to literature. Specifically, there are three types of transportation defined by Lombard and Dittion (1997): “you are there” (¶ 2), “it is here” (¶ 4), and “we are together” (¶ 6) (Presence as Transportation). Telepresence as transportation in terms of “you are there”
exists to the extent that “the user is transported to another place” (Presence as Transportation). Due to the fact that the comic text presents the reader with another place (the locale of the story), the type of transported telepresence that is of interest to comics is of the “you are there” variety.

Before examining the reader’s transportation into the comic text, I should first observe that it is the comic artist who makes the initial journey into the comic text. For example, Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* (1993) draws himself into the pages of his book as a lecturer speaking in direct address to the reader. Perhaps an even more drastic example is Peter Kuper’s graphic novel *Comicstrips* (1992), which details his personal travels through Africa and Southeast Asia via his own comic art.

There are a number of other comic artists who transport themselves into their own stories including Robert Crumb, Art Spiegelman, Harvey Pekar, Milo Manara, Frank Thorne, Ted Rall, Giovanna Casotto, and Paolo Serpieri. Harvey (1996) writes of comic artist Robert Crumb that he “has appeared as a character in his own work ever since the first issue of Zap” (Harvey, 1996, p. 220). Harvey (1996) also reports Frank Thorne’s comment that:

In Ghita’s adventures, I have crafted Thenef the wizard in my own image. I have allowed my hair and beard to grow to flowing lengths as a device to make it easier to imagine myself as Ghita’s comrade-in-arms and ginmead-guzzling cohort.

Thus I gain entry into her world. (p. 234)

But how is it that the reader is capable of bridging the gap to obtain a sense of transported telepresence within the text? Perhaps the answer lies in the fundamental building block of all comics – the cartoon.
McLuhan (1996/1964) refers specifically to cartoons in describing cool media. He writes that “A cartoon is ‘low definition’ simply because very little visual information is provided” (p. 22). Being a cool medium, the cartoon requires input from the reader to become complete (McCloud, 1993; McLuhan, 1964/1996). McCloud (1993) observes, “The cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled...an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel to another realm. We don’t just observe the cartoon, we become it” (p. 36). Looking at things in this way, if the comic text is the destination that the reader is transported to, it is the cartoon that is the vehicle that will take him or her there.

_Two Kinds of Experience_

Carrier (2000) writes:

[S]ince we the audience project into a comic our fantasies, fears, and hopes, analysis needs to explain what attracts us to a successful comic – its image of our shared desires, presented in ways we can adapt for our individual purposes. (p. 83)

Similarly, Eisner (1985) asserts, “the recognition by the reader of real-life people portrayed in the art and the addition of ‘in-between’ action are supplied by the reader out of his own experiences” (p. 140). These two observations, taken together, imply that readers not only transport themselves into the text, but their experiences of other people as well. For readers, the cartoon caricatures of the comic text become signifiers for people they know from their own day-to-day reality. Next-door neighbors, coworkers and acquaintances all become the material with which the reader constitutes a transported
sense of telepresence. This occurs through the reader’s depositing of their interpersonal experiences into the receptacles of caricature located in the comic text.

Some comic artists have crafted their product specifically to be compatible with reader experiences. Vergueiro (2001) observes the work of Carlos Zefiro in the following way: “Zefiro’s protagonist was not a superman, nor a person with a particular advantage in terms of physical attributes; instead, he was a rather ordinary man experiencing extraordinary circumstances” (p. 74). Vergueiro follows up by suggesting that this “was the kind of situation any Zefiro reader could presumably find himself in” (p. 74).

Beyond direct experience, the experience of other forms of media play a role in what we take with us into the comic text. Eisner (1996) observes, “While readers may adjust their expectations to the discipline and conventions of comics, there is a reflexive referral to other media just as there is to a memory of a real experience” (p. 70). Similarly Duncan (2002) notes “Intertextuality can extend this interanimation of meaning beyond a particular story” (p. 140).

Intertextuality can be used to provide a more complete conception of a character within the comic text and, especially, within a film adaptation of that text. This is accomplished by drawing from previous mediated encounters with a particular character and applying that composite understanding to the current incarnation. In this sense, intertextuality serves the same function as Elliot’s (2003) previously discussed de(re)composing concept of adaptation in which “novel and film decompose, merge, and form a new composition at ‘underground’ levels of reading” (p. 157). Through this synthesis of intermediated representations, the reader/viewer is better able to bridge gaps
in the text through the function of closure and experience a more complete sense of transportation into the world of the narrative.

Telepresence in Film

In contrast to comic art, film has a relatively established history of association with telepresence phenomena. As early as the late fifties and early sixties, the well-known theorist Andre Bazin specifically addressed “The Concept of Presence” with respect to film, noting that

Presence, naturally, is defined in terms of time and space. ‘To be in the presence of someone’ is to recognize him as existing contemporaneously with us and to note that he comes within the actual range of our senses – in the case of cinema of our sight and in radio of our hearing. (1967, p. 96)

Beyond a vague description, however, later theorists referred to the experience of telepresence through film as the “diegetic effect.” Burch (1979) defines this as the experience of the world of the story as the immediate environment. Further, though, he delves into the techniques and practices responsible for achieving such an effect. In particular, Burch calls attention to the importance of three techniques: (1) “invisible” editing, wherein discontinuities between shots are disguised through transitions which maintain the spatial and temporal consistency of the environment depicted on film, (2) composition, lighting, and depth of field used to emphasize a three-dimensional appearance, and (3) the development of synchronization between dialog on the soundtrack and the lip movements of actors. Such stylistic and technical innovation indicated to Burch that cinematic conventions were developed to actively attempt to incite the diegetic effect (i.e. telepresence).
Also seizing on this notion of diegetic effect, Tan (1996) explicitly connects the phenomenon to telepresence, observing “the feature film creates the illusion of being present in the fictional world” (p. 52, my emphasis). He attributes this in part to the more general effect that perspective has on the medium of photography: “The awareness of the picture as a two-dimensional object, or even as an artifact, may recede to the background to a considerable degree, in favor of the illusion of looking into the virtual space” (p. 52). This, of course, is much in line with Burch’s previous observations regarding the importance of composition, lighting, and depth of field.

Outside of film theory and within the realm of presence theory proper, the capacity of cinema to provoke a sense of telepresence has also been addressed. Neuendorf (2004) for example has referred to film as “the original immersive medium.” In this same vein, Ijsselsteijn (2004) has pointed out that film, along with earlier technologies that made use of similar principles, has throughout its history been innovated toward the end of attempting to foster telepresence experiences. Marsh (2004) even suggests looking at aspects of cinema as a way of informing interactive virtual environments regarding how to maintain the telepresence experience of the user – a phenomenon he terms “staying there” (playing off the common description of presence as “being there”).

In order to probe more deeply into the cognitive and perceptual mechanisms responsible for our experience of telepresence in film, it is necessary to turn to a body of literature in the domain of film theory which seeks to explain, based on the theoretical principles of cognitive science, what makes the medium of film so compelling and engaging. This body of literature, referred to as “cognitive film theory,” distinguishes
itself from the psychoanalytic and Marxist trends of the 1960s and 1970s by using
corresponds to the constructivist ideas of Helmholtz).

The emergence and basic premises of the cognitive approach are attributable to
three theorists, David Bordwell (1985), Noel Carroll (1988), and Joseph Anderson
(1996). And, although they share much in common in terms of their approach (especially
insofar as it diverges from psychoanalysis), there are subtle distinctions among them that
return us to the external/perceptual versus internal/conceptual split among presence
perspectives that was discussed in chapter two.

In his book, The Reality of Illusion: An Ecological Approach to Cognitive Film
Theory, Anderson (1996) attempts to merge the ecological perspective of Gibson (1979)
with the existing work connecting cognitive psychology to film spectatorship in order to
explain why movies "seem so real" (p. 1).

He begins from the premise that the human perceptual system, through the
process of natural selection, evolved to respond to the physical environment in such a
way that action and behavior would be based upon information obtained through the
senses that corresponded as closely as possible to the external, physical reality of the
environment. "Veridical" perception of the natural environment, argues Anderson, was
necessary for human survival. As a consequence, however, our perception of mediated
environments (such as those depicted on film) resembles reality only to the extent that the
cues we have evolved to respond to in the natural environment are able to be reproduced.
A key aspect of human perception that enables this to occur in the context of film spectatorship is the existence of illusion. Visual illusion, according to Anderson, occurs "when the visual system, following its own internal instructions, arrives at a precept that is in error if compared to physical reality" (p. 15). And, indeed, every aspect of film spectatorship is premised on the existence of illusions. From the "persistence of vision" that allows us to perceive a motion picture (as opposed to a rapid-fire progression of stills) to the depth of field and appearance of physical space that is granted by the inscription of light onto emulsion by the lens of the camera, film is the stimulus for perceptual illusion.

Anderson, however, goes further than these basic prerequisite illusions and explains, from the perspective of ecological perception, why perceivers are able to assimilate a motion picture despite its seemingly fragmented progression of shots and scenes.

At first glance, the world depicted in the onscreen image differs radically from our concept of physical reality. This seems the case primarily because our understanding of physical reality is that of a consistent, seamless whole. Of course, our understanding of reality and our perception of reality are two different things. We visually perceive physical reality through our eyes that are constantly twitching, frequently blinking and situated on our head in such a way that we can only see a slice of the surrounding environment. The physical environment seems stable, not because we perceive it that way, but because we have learned to understand that just because things fall out of the range of our senses temporarily does not mean they no longer exist. As Anderson asserts, "The 'rule' of continuity of existence inherent in our visual system holds that objects that
exist continue to exist until they are seen going out of existence” (p. 97). Naturally, this principle is in effect when we view a motion picture. The camera’s lens, acting as a surrogate eye, perceives aspects of the environment that we assimilate as if they were first-hand.

Bordwell (1985) and Carroll (1988) describe a slightly different, though certainly not incompatible, perspective on how viewers make sense of and become engaged with motion pictures. In fact, much in line with the emphasis that Anderson places on illusion, Bordwell notes that “[a]s a medium of illusion, cinema counts on our making ‘wrong’ inferences” (p. 32) – an observation that is very much in step with the popular Lombard and Ditton (1997) definition of telepresence as the “illusion of nonmediation” (Presence Explicated, ¶ 1). However, a distinction surfaces when the processes responsible for the act of perception are considered. While Anderson asserts, from the ecological perspective, that perception is direct and in need of neither cognitive mediation nor interpretation, Bordwell takes up a much more internal/conceptual view, writing “Sensory stimuli alone cannot determine a percept, since they are incomplete and ambiguous. The organism constructs a perceptual judgment on the basis of nonconscious inferences” (p. 31). Further articulating this constructivist stance, he also explains the “top down” and “bottom up” features of information processing described previously in conjunction with the internal/conceptual view of presence (see chapter two).

Another distinction exists, this time between Anderson and Carroll, in terms of the reason that sequences of shots are comprehensible despite the apparently disjointed nature of their presentation. As described above, Anderson explains this in terms of the resemblance that a film’s appearance bears to the natural act of perception combined with
our internalized assumption that, regardless of the choppy rendering of the environment bestowed by our eyes, we are surrounded by a stable world. In subtle contrast, Carroll views the variability of perspective from shot to shot as fostering an extreme sense of clarity that goes far beyond what would be possible in physical reality. He notes at length:

The arresting thing about movies, *contra* various realist theories, is not that they create the illusion or impression of reality, but that they reorganize and construct, through variable framing, actions and events with an economy, legibility, and coherence that are not only automatically available, but which surpass, in terms of their immediately perceptible basic structure, naturally encountered actions and events. Movie actions evince a visible order to a degree not found in everyday experience. This quality of extraordinary, uncluttered clarity gratifies the mind’s quest for order, thereby intensifying our engagement with the screen. (p. 205)

This is achieved, according to Carroll, through the use of variable framing techniques, including “indexing” (where our perspective moves forward through space, either as a result of the camera physically “trucking” forward or a zoom lens), “bracketing” (where particular objects are either included or excluded from the shot based on their salience to the action), and “scaling” (where particular aspects of the mise-en-scene are given prominence due to their dominant positioning within the shot). Through the use of these techniques, the viewers’ attention is always focused precisely where it needs to be in order to experience maximum comprehension of, and engagement with, the action (Carroll, 1988; Tan, 1996). The phenomenon that Carroll is describing here is strikingly similar to the concepts of flow, trajectory, and distillation mentioned in chapter three, and
also highly comparable to the presentation of comic art. By moving our perspective from point to point through space and time based upon what is most important to focus on, the film distills the action into its most critical features much the same way that comics progress from panel to panel, forever zeroing in on the next important action in the ongoing sequence.

Of course, the information presented through the assemblage of shots and soundtracks in the motion picture is not, alone, enough for comprehension and engagement to take place in the viewer. A central component of the more strictly cognitive stance is the role played by schemata in assisting comprehension. According to Bordwell, the juxtapositions created by the assemblage of shots that compose the film are comprehended through the application of various types of schemata. He articulates specifically that “[t]he film presents cues, patterns, and gaps that shape the viewer’s application of schemata and the testing of hypotheses” (p. 33). In particular, Bordwell discusses narrative, prototype, template, procedural, and stylistic types of schemata and explains how each plays a role in the comprehension of the motion picture. While narrative and stylistic schemata are fairly straightforward in that they refer to sets of expectations concerning the events that compose the story and the aesthetic quality of the image respectively, the other three, borrowed from Hastie (1981), require some further elaboration. Prototype schemata, according to Bordwell, guide the development of expectations related to identifying aspects of the narrative (including individuals, events, motivations, and places) through their relationship to existing social norms. Template schemata are less useful for identifying existing information than for inferring information that has been omitted. It is template schemata that fill the gaps in the film’s
assemblage. Finally, Bordwell describes procedural schemata as functioning to coordinate prototype and template schemata in a way that actively gathers, infers and classifies information.

If these sets of schemata, coupled with the clarity fostered through variable framing, indeed play an instrumental role in our comprehension of the motion picture, then, congruent with the assertions about cognitive priming in chapter three, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a particular schema or set of schemata might be primed through prior exposure to similar content (the comic source material) in order to offer a heightened experience of telepresence in the film adaptation of that source material. Especially with regard to template schemata, it seems almost intuitive that prior exposure to content will assist in smoothing over inconsistencies and supplying missing information.

Embodiment in Narrative Media

Thus far, what has been described provides a reasonable argument for how telepresence is experienced through both comic art and film. However, proponents of the previously described external/perceptual perspective may point out that there is little difference between this and an explanation of how we comprehend ordinary narratives that don't necessarily evoke telepresence. The missing element in inherently narrative media (such as comics and film) as opposed to interactive media (such as videogames and virtual reality) is the physical body. Transportation and perceptual immersion, two key components of the telepresence experience, presume the existence of a body to be transported and immersed. In addition, telepresence has been defined in terms of how a body is capable of interacting with the virtual environment.
refers to the extent to which the environment itself appears to know that you are there and to react to you” (Heeter, 1992, p. 263). This, of course, is not possible in media that do not allow the user to interact with the environment.

In his response to Glenberg’s (1997) target article evaluating the purpose of memory from the perspective of ecological perception, Graesser (1997) raises a question that addresses this dilemma directly: “Where is the body in the mental model for a story?” (p. 25). One possible response to this question is that the body is located outside of the story as a “side-participant” (Gerrig, 1993, p. 190) or “floating consciousness” (Ryan, 2001, p. 133). Side participation acknowledges the individual’s involvement and emotional response to what occurs in the story, but explains the lack of physical response to the events in the story (behavioral inhibition) in terms of the awareness of bodily location as being outside the parameters of dramatic action and, thus, unable to affect outcomes. Naturally, such an awareness of the self as being located outside of the world of the story raises serious doubt concerning the individual’s experience of telepresence to begin with. If behavioral inhibition results from the individual’s awareness that they are not “present” in the narrative, then it seems obvious that telepresence has not occurred. Although a voyeur might experience telepresence in a limited optical sense, exclusively visual access can also have the effect of distancing the voyeur and calling attention to his/her isolation and lack of presence (Jones, 2003).

An alternative way of conceptualizing telepresence in the narrative world is through a union of the perspectives of the narrator and individual experiencing the narrative (the reader or viewer). When the narrator serves as our point of access to the events of the story, we adopt his/her perspective and physical being as a surrogate for our
own in the world of the story. As Ryan (2001) observes, “[t]he virtual body whose perspective determines what is perceived belongs at the same time to the narrator and the reader” (p. 132).

This shared perspective, however, need not be confined to a specifically designated third-person narrator. We can gain a sense of embodiment in a narrative text through any character events are focalized through. Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis (1992) define focalization as “the activity of the character from whose perspective events are perceived” (p. 87). Thus readers/viewers of narrative media may occupy the perspective of any character through whom the events of the narrative are perceived.

Of course, such a form of embodiment, as it exists in both comic art and film, will not allow the reader/viewer to directly manipulate or influence the spatial or social environment. This has implications for the types of telepresence being investigated. It was noted at the beginning of chapter three that the types of telepresence under investigation include spatial telepresence, social telepresence, and engagement.

Engagement, because it does not necessarily require interactivity, is able to be defined in the same way that it might if a virtual environment were being assessed: “The degree to which users of a virtual environment feel involved with, absorbed in, and engrossed by stimuli from the virtual environment” (Palmer, 1995). To define spatial and social telepresence as it occurs, however, it is necessary to consider only those aspects that may be experienced through narrative media.

*Spatial Telepresence in Narrative Media*

Given the constraints imposed by narrative media, spatial telepresence is defined here as the extent to which the user is able to experience a sense of orientation in the
space of the mediated environment through the experiences and actions displayed or described through a character from within the narrative. Such a definition is consistent with the more encompassing definitions of spatial telepresence such as Steuer (1992), but inconsistent with more specific definitions that rely upon the user’s ability to manipulate the virtual world (e.g. Heeter, 1992; Zahoric & Jenison, 1998).

Social Telepresence in Narrative Media

Just as the experience of spatial telepresence in narrative media is constrained by the user’s inability to manipulate the physical world of the story, social telepresence in narrative media is constrained by the user’s inability to communicate directly with the characters in the story. One class of examples that run counter to this is media that incorporate “parasocial interaction” (Horton & Wohl, 1956) – whereby a performer, through use of direct address and anticipatory feedback, acknowledges the existence of the individual audience member. In cases where these techniques are employed in narrative media, one should expect a stronger sense of social telepresence to occur. However, use of this technique is relatively rare, and so, for instances in which it is not employed, further explanation is required. Thus, social telepresence in narrative media is the experience of interaction that the user obtains through identification with a character that is engaged in communication with one or more other characters. Similar to the case of spatial telepresence in narrative media, definitions that hinge upon the user’s ability to directly participate in social interactions (e.g. Sallnas, Rassmus-grohn & Sjostrom, 2000; Savicki & Kelley, 2000) are incompatible with the constraints imposed by the narrative format.
Summary/Synthesis

The overarching purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate the distinctive ways that comic art and film instill a sense of telepresence in the reader or viewer. By arguing that both media forms are capable of providing a sense of telepresence, however, research question three is called to attention: If both media forms can cause telepresence experiences, then “Which medium produces a stronger sense of telepresence?” Studying this phenomenon in the context of comic to film adaptations, of course, presents a unique opportunity to test responses that occur resulting from differences in media form since content is, for the most part, held constant across media.

Because film is more immersive than comics, this qualifies as a test of the well established telepresence “book problem.” While other investigators have examined this through the use of literature (e.g., Banos et al., 2005; Gysbers et al., 2004), this would constitute, as far as I am aware, the first attempt to measure telepresence experiences provoked by comic art and compare them to a more immersive medium (film) as a way of testing the book problem.

Arguing that comic art is a medium capable of producing telepresence responses in the reader, the chapter began by describing comics as a language of mixed iconic and textual symbols before moving into an exploration of how telepresence might be evoked. It is then argued that comics create a sense of telepresence through their capacity to achieve realism, provide the sensation of immersion, and transport the reader into the world of the story. Realism is achieved through reality approximation, use of stylistic techniques which illicit emotional response, the disguising of conventions such as panels and word balloons, and a graphic layout which encourages closure. Immersion occurs as
a result of the reader's autonomous control over his own gaze as well as the necessary activity of turning pages. Transportation is facilitated through the essentially *incomplete* nature of the cartoon and the resultant occupation of the caricature by the reader and his or her physical and intertextual experiences.

With respect to telepresence experiences in film, cognitive film theorists including Anderson (1996), Bordwell (1985), and Carroll (1988) have described our comprehension of movies by reverting to our comprehension of the natural environment. However, one key distinction between Anderson (1996) and the others is his appropriation of Gibson's (1979) ecological approach. This difference, once again, highlights the split between external/perceptual and internal/conceptual perspectives on telepresence.

When considering how the spectator cognitively constructs the experience of a movie and how he/she feels present within it, one might notice that it is not terribly different from how this occurs in a comic, except, of course, that a film would naturally require less closure. This fact, however, may be more than enough to suggest that a movie will provide a more drastic sense of telepresence.

In addition, the suggestion that both media rely upon schematic activation for comprehension and telepresence experience to occur carries strong implications for the second research question, since viewing an adaptation subsequent to reading the source will likely make use of schemata that are already activated. Presumably, the closer the structural resemblance between source and adaptation, the more relevant the active schemata will be.
Finally, because both comic art and film are inherently narrative media (as opposed to interactive media), it is necessary to define experiences of spatial and social telepresence as occurring through an intermediary character in the narrative through whom events are focalized. There is an important distinction here between voyeurism, which tends to distance the observer from the events observed (Jones, 2003; Metz, 1982/1977), and focalization, which tends to provide a vicarious sense of participation for the spectator.
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