Constructing the Mangaverse: Narrative Patterns in Marvel's Appropriation of Manga products

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ABSTRACT:

Even though American and Japanese publishers dominate comic book sales globally, their respective contexts and products could not be any more different. In the case of American comics, the best-known and most celebrated genre – often criticized for being considered mainstream—is that of superheroes. However, the relationship between genre, theme and audience in the history of manga presents a different pattern. Japanese comics, particularly diverse with regard to demographic and generic segmentation, show a greater homogeneity in the use of stylistic codes which have come to be known as Japanese Visual Language (Cohn 2010). The American publishing market has mobilized several strategies in order to benefit from the international success of manga, coupled with the parallel success of anime at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The most common strategies have been the introduction of Japanese cultural elements and the adoption and hybridization of Japanese Visual Language, through the publication of products of Japanese and international authorship. The publishing imprint Mangaverse (2000-2003; 2005-2006), a relative failure in terms of its reception, represents a good example for the analysis of these trends and appropriative strategies. Through this case, aspects of the story are analyzed, as is the deconstruction/appropriation of characters, different forms of transcultural adaptation as well as the hybridization of media and genres.

The comics in Japan and the USA

Few countries can claim to have brought so much to the world of comics as Japan and the United States. Both cases can be considered authentic historical "powers": main producers of contents in the sequential medium, unrivalled even by the influential contributions of the Franco-Belgian world to the *Bande dessinée.* We shall not pause here to name a large list of authors that have contributed to the development of this means of expression in these two countries. It would be an unfair and unnecessary error to highlight some names while neglecting others, who may be not as influential but also be part of the tradition of these cultural industries. Instead, I shall adopt the strategy, in spite of its limitations, of describing the importance of the industries of American and Japanese comics by means of a brief summary of the history of the development of their markets.

In both the United States and Japan the comics have a similar source: as products of mass culture linked to the emergence of the mass media, especially the printed press. The first comics to appear in the USA were an accompaniment of other contents offered by the newspapers and, following this common model in western countries, in Japan, comics also emerged in connection with the printed press. The leading western figures of Charles Wirgman and George Bigot, directors of the corresponding publications *The Japan Punch* (1878) and *Tobaè* (1887) would bring about as a consequence the importing of aesthetic and narrative codes from recent comic medium. The connection to the printed Press also brought about the appearance of two quite different market niches in Japan and in the western world. The first one was the adult audience through the natural evolution of the political caricature of the 19th century. Examples of this trend have been studied in relation to the subsequent Russo-Japanese War in the Japanese press (Duus 2001; Mikhailova 2008), as well as numerous examples in the emerging American comic strip of the era (Hess and Northrop 2011). The second: the progressive development of the language of comics, in the case of comic strips and children magazines and, with the emergence of those genres –practically indistinguishable in their beginnings–, the irremediable link to child and youth audiences.

By the end of the Second World War, the American market for comics was now strongly established and aimed at a young audience in the shape of comic-books. Just as with pulp literature, the first approximations of the American comic-book dealt with a great range of themes such as the western, detective, adventures and science fiction among others. However, as has been pointed out on occasion, it soon abandoned the adoption of a multi-genre strategy in favor of a single genre one. This was firstly centered on the success of the detectives (*Detective Comics*, 1937) which would lead, after the success of *Superman* (*Action Comics*, 1938), to the later hegemony of the superhero comic (Lopes 2009).

Parallel to the appearance of the comic-book, the Japan of the 1930s adopted the youth magazine as a standard, took as its model the *Shōnen Gorakubu* (*Boy's Club*), which included, among other contents, collections of stories in much bigger volumes of up to 150 pages. After the publication of youth stories ceased during the war period, manga narratives re-emerged strongly during the mid-1950s, absorbing influences from other mediums based on the graphic narrative, such as the *Kamishibai* or the *e-monogatari* (Kinsella 2000; Holmberg 2011).

From then onward, the industries appear to have developed in very different ways, particularly with regards to the segmentation of their audiences, as well as in the co-existence of national products with other cultural products coming from the international market. In the comic-book, for example, the predominant genre is nearly exclusively associated with the theme of superheroes, which has frequently led to the erroneous genre-medium association in the American context (Eisner, Miller et al. 2005). This tendency would be interrupted temporarily with the emergence of other genres, such as that of horror and science fiction at the beginning of the 1950s. Also of great importance would be the appearance of other minor genres such as the comic strip, children's cartoon strips (aka "Funny Animals") or romantic stories, which left the door open to the regeneration of the medium through new audiences.

However, despite the competitors, the superhero comic-book has survived for more than 60 years as a hegemonic genre. A look at the distributor's figures, under the label of "Graphic Novel", might correspond to not only the contributions of independent authors, situated outside the *mainstream*, but also to the American editions of foreign

authors, mainly of manga and European *Bande Dessinée.* This means that for the industry and the majority of the public, the American market is effectively equivalent to the comic book format and the superhero genre.

In the history of the Japanese market, on the other hand, it is not so easy to establish a simple and functionalist relationship between genre, theme and audience. In Japanese comic-book production, the considerable diversification of the market is not based on different publication formats or on cultural tradition. The predominant genre, the *shōnen* is defined by its audience (young males), while other genres attend to different demographic segmentations. Therefore, as a natural evolution linked to that of the life cycle of the audience, are the *shōjo* (young women), the *seinen* publications (male adults), the *redisu* (women adults) and the *kōdomo* (children). These genres can be considered to be relatively isolated, while the themes in manga are a constant example of hybridization. Nevertheless, it is necessary to clarify that there are certain historical links, which include the predominance of the themes of sport (*Spokon*)[1] or of fights (*Nekketsu*)[2] in *shōnen*, as well as situations of romance in *shōjo*[3].

Currently, and after numerous moments of crisis during the 1950s, '60s and '70s, the comic-book market in the USA has stabilized, experiencing a considerable growth around the year 2000 (Beaty 2010). One of the reasons for this might be the growing traffic of contents between the superhero comic-books and other cultural industries such as the cinema, video games and animation. For example, the success of cross-media products based on the cinematic relaunching of characters may have stimulated the sale of a particular medium. Famous examples of this trend in integrated marketing of diverse industries would be the cinematographic sagas of *Batman* (1989-1997; 2005-2012), *X-Men* (2001-2011) and *Spiderman* (2002-2007; 2012-2014).

Other reasons for this upturn in sales of the comic market can be found in the increased penetration of Japanese products into the American market. Therefore, as in other Western countries, the success of the animated adaptations (anime) in the 90s caused a growing interest in the original manga, which began to be distributed in an adapted form. Subsequently, with the creation of specific audiences in the medium of manga,

[1] *Slam Dunk* (1990-1996); *The Prince of Tennis* (*Tenisu no Ōjisama*, 1999-2008)
[2] *Bleach* (2001-); *Naruto* (1999-)
[3] *Nana* (2000-2009); *Nodame Cantabile* (2001-2009)

publishers adopt a similar format to the common collection of serialized novels, known as *tankōbon* (sometimes also called just 'tanks'), also increasingly respecting the Asian way of reading. By the middle of the decade, around 2005, manga already represented over 40% of sales and was, along with other formats considered to be graphic novels, the largest contribution to sales of the publishing market in the USA (Publishers Weekly 2007). By around 2011 however, there had been a drop in international sales of manga; the fall may be attributed to the increase in digital piracy and a decrease in demand. After this considerable fall, the sales of manga in North America have stabilized, The 'boom' which began in the previous decade eventually gave rise to a 'smaller and more sustainable' market (Alverson 2013).

The years 2000-2002 were, therefore, a decisive moment in the recent history of the two industries. The fever for manga, which dominated the international markets, brought with it a consequent proliferation of local authors who incorporated Japanese narrative codes and aesthetics into their productions. Such internationalization is increasingly evident in the markets of South-east Asia, with examples such as the adaptations of *manwa* (South Korea) and *manhua* (China). However, in countries with a longer tradition of the medium of comics, such as the USA, the introduction of elements derived from manga cannot be defined as a mere transnational adaptation. As it will be seen throughout this chapter, the adoption of Japanese elements into the narrative of the American comic is dependent on the conventions of the superhero genre, which is idiosyncratic of the comic-book. To illustrate this trend, the example of Mangaverse has been chosen, an imprint launched by the Marvel publishing house through different miniseries published between 2002 and 2006. Enjoying little success within this period, Mangaverse is remembered by fan audiences as one of the most controversial products among those created by the prestigious publisher.

Manga and the American Comic-Book as Media

It is necessary to clarify that manga is not an adaptation of the medium of comics, known as sequential art. It is, on the contrary, a completely different medium. Note that

terminology is of great importance here. The language of comics is ordinary, in spite of its diverse variations: it is common to all its manifestations. Using the terminology of narrative theory (Ryan 2004), this language is defined by the use of two linguistic and iconic spatial channels which form a single semiotic system. This double channel system can be reproduced in different products like the American market's comic-book, the graphic novel or *bandé dessinée*. However, those cultural markets are not only defined by the use of a language and physical medium –the format– but they are also the consequence of a particular system of production and, in many cases, of a specific cultural framework.

On the other hand, even though both mediums share the same semiotic code, it is undeniable that they possess significant aesthetic and narrative differences. For some, these differences are so determining that they regard manga a separate language in itself. The so-called Japan Visual Language (Cohn 2010) is characterized by the adoption of a particular style which is clear in the design of their characters, as well as a grammar of its own. This incorporates the use of non-conventional visual symbols, and metaphors when faced with elements of purely cultural interpretation (Cohn 2010). Characteristic elements of this style are the use of kinetic lines and the emphasis on the visual value of typographies. Other authors, however, have pointed out how the grammar of the Japanese comic presents significant differences in comparison with the American comics in terms of the reading experience it provides. This is determined by the relationship between the panels, which does not seek only to develop the action quickly but, on occasion, intends to look more deeply into the psychological consequences of the events (McCloud 1993).

However, it is difficult to believe that in the long history of contact between the two mediums, from the creation of the first comic strips in Japanese newspapers, no other episodes of mutual influence have occurred. Especially when for some the medium of comics is defined by its ‘transnational’ nature (Stein 2013). In this sense, numerous figures of the American comic-book have been influenced by the modern manga, incorporating themes and many references to the visual style of manga, or introducing iconic elements of Japanese culture into their work. Such is the case of, among many

others, Frank Miller (*Daredevil*, 1979-1983; *Ronin*. 1983-84), Scott McCloudd (*Zot*, 1984-1990) or Stan Sakai (*Usagi Yojimbo*, 1984-).

The figure of the superhero as a recurring feature of internationalization

Both the cultural products of the manga industry and the American comics possess meanings that do not only appeal to their national or local public—the natural audiences for whom a product is originally created. Beyond this initial reach, both markets have an international appeal. *Shōnen* manga, for example, although originally aimed at a specifically young male demographic profile, is consumed by audiences of different ages and genders both in Japan and abroad. Because of the size of this audience segment, it should be considered the key piece for the expansion of manga and anime culture in the West. On the other hand, in superhero comic-books, the target audience appears to have undergone more drastic changes, not only as a consequence of the international dissemination of its contents but also due to the natural aging of its primary public. Currently, the average reader is an adult and the majority of the publishers' revenue does not come from the consumption of comics but from the licensing of rights of derivative products, such as *merchandising*, films, and video games (Wright 2003).

Another consequence of the global dissemination of the American and Japanese comic is the contribution of new elements to the collective imaginary. In the case of manga and related industries, Japanese culture plays an important role in supplying the narratives with original elements from history, literature and national folklore. In a historic sense, the development of the *gekiga* genre ("dramatic stories") during the '60s and '70s, decidedly contributed to the reproduction of those national, cultural elements. Many of the authors from that era chose to introduce historical themes, in particular from the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), as a way of reinterpreting the narratives from folklore and the historical novel from a modern social perspective. As a consequence, tales of samurai, ninja and mythological creatures, which have always played an

important part in manga[4], became even darker and the medium evolved, incorporating more adult narratives, in line with its audience. However, it is arguable that those elements of national narrative are also present in other media with a greater reach, impact and international dissemination. The stories of samurai and ninja, for example, are also common on Japanese television and cinema (*chanbara* and *jidaigeki* genres). In the case of the American comic, the most widespread narrative figure is the Superhero, inevitably linked to its own genre. The superhero has been defined as one of the constants of the American comic-book and considered as a mono myth and a constant of the medium (Lang and Trimble 2004). So, in spite of its numerous episodes of crisis, regeneration and transformation, the superhero genre has always enjoyed great social importance in its own market. As with the characters and themes of manga, their popularity could be due to the propagation and coexistence of thematic elements in other related mediums. In this sense, it has been repeatedly highlighted that the success of the superheroes is due in part to the support and competition of the mediums of serialized fiction, particularly, radio and television series (Lopes 2009; Gabilliet 2010).

The Superheroes and the samurai, the ninja and other figures of Japanese narrative have reached beyond the borders of their national narratives to form part of a wider set of meanings shared by international audiences. However, it could be argued that the influence and permanence of the American superhero is greater than that of other elements of Japanese culture. Their contribution can be framed within what, in the context of Cultural Studies, has been named 'The Global Popular': a phenomenon which is indistinguishable from other aspects of globalization such as the internationalization of capitals, financial systems and cultural markets (During 1997). One piece of evidence of the international nature of the superhero figure can be found in its historical connection with Japanese mediums and narratives. Similar characters to the American superhero are already present in the *kamishibai*, as it reflects the influences of the American serial products, especially the television series and the pulp novel (Nash 2009). Particularly significant is the work *Golden Bat* (*Ōgon Bat*, 1931) by Suzuki Ichiro and Nagamatsu Takeo which combines elements of adventure novels and serialized cinema, especially *The Mark of Zorro* (1920-), with Asian mythology and the

[4] These elements are also present in other graphic and sequential mediums, precursors of manga, like the *kamishibai* and the *e-monogatari* (Nash, 2009; Holmberg, 2011).

supernatural. Apart from the obvious similarities between Japanese action heroes and primitive American superheroes (as both are influenced by the same things) the growing presence of the superheroes would continue without making any significant impression in Japan. In 1966, the magazine *Shōnen King* purchased the rights to the characters of Batman and Robin for the Japanese market, developing them for a year through the work of the artist Kuwata Jiro. Another iconic character from the American comic book universe, Spiderman, would be reinterpreted by different *mangaka* for the magazine *Monthly Shōnen Magazine* some years later (1970-1971). Nearly completely forgotten, their interest can be related to their striking *vintage* look and the boom generated by the stories of superheroes all around the world. In contrast to these transcultural experiments of limited commercial success, it is in other media, like the TV series, where the figure of the hero with superpowers has developed a more thriving tradition in Japan. In 1966, TBS started to broadcast *Ultraman* (*Urutoraman*), which would have a big influence on subsequent products in the tradition of *Tokusatsu* and the teams of heroes (the *supersentai* genre). Here the Japanese and American view of the superhero differs significantly. While the American hero, especially the prototypical figure of *Superman*, is linked to his humanity, *Ultraman* is an avatar of sorts, an anthropomorphic representation of a kind of force of nature. He is a '*kamikaze*' whose only noteworthy ability is that of fighting against giant monsters (Gill 1998).

Finally, with the producers of American content becoming increasingly aware of the potential of growing international audiences, there have been many attempts to reinterpret the figure of the superhero from a different cultural framework. Following the first incursions of Batman and Spiderman there would follow other, more recent, attempts. In the case of DC, the one that stands out is Batman *Child of Dreams (2000-2001)* published in the Kodansha's Magazine Z and produced by the *mangaka* Asamiya Kia. This would be followed, several years later, by *Batman: Death Mask (2008)* by Natsume Yoshinori, an internationally recognized figure in the industry. With regards to the international adaptations from the 1960s and '70s –and even the end of the '90s in works such *X-Men* manga (1998-99)– there are significant differences in the relationship between the narrative of the character and the hybridization of cultural elements. Firstly, there is greater interest in safeguarding the coherence of the saga's macro/story. The editorial line and the continuity of the character's storyline are ensured

by presenting stories which are coherent with other tales of the character in the western market. This aspect of coherence is evident within the works of Natsume, edited by CMX manga. This last is a publishing house belonging to Wildstorm Production and therefore part of the Time Warner DC Group, managers of the rights of the original character. Additionally, an attempt at hybridization in a stylistic sense, or of visual code does not appear to exist: in both cases it is *shōnen* manga; as such they are adjusted to the usual codes in the medium and the genre. It does not try to emulate the style of the Western authors, something which, although with varied results, at least formed part of the original aims of the work of Kuwata (Kidd, Spear et al. 2008). Lastly, it is significant that Japan plays a decisive role in the storyline of both products. Not just as a geographical location but also through several elements derived from its culture (ritual masks, martial arts, mythology...). Through this resource, the relationship with the audience is deepened, to which not only amateur manga style is represented but also the subtext of Japanese art and culture. In this way the story of the character is reinforced, by going into more detail about aspects of their past. Given that in 1987, the series was relaunched by the authors Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli (*Batman: Year One*), it has been implied that the character has a deep relationship with Japan, as Bruce Wayne spent some years there in his youth. In later series, for example, readers discover that it is during this period that the future Batman learns *ninjutsu* with the *sensei* Kirigi (Batman, #431, 1989).

In recent years, other attempts have been made to reinvent the characters of superheroes by introducing elements of hybridization and transposition into the plots of their stories and those of other narrative worlds. Therefore, the internationalization does not seem very different from other recent transpositions of contents by the publisher, such as the imprint *Marvel Fairy Tales* (2006), *Marvel Apes* (2008) or miniseries such as *1602* (2003) and *Marvel Zombies* (2005-2006). All these products would incorporate, in one way or another, elements of transculturalization and internationalization, although it is as a secondary consequence of the alteration of the original framework of their stories. So, for some academics, internationalization is part of ‘some of the strategies by which authors seek to negotiate between the standardization implicit in comics continuity and the diversification desired by contemporary readers’ (Jenkins 2009). Among the cases recently studied would be *Spiderman India* (O'Rourke and Rodrigues 2007; Davé 2013)

and the different versions of *Spiderman* manga (Stein 2013). The case of defunct imprint Mangaverse (2000-2003; 2005-2006), which will be analyzed below, is particularly interesting in this regard. Firstly, it represents a test (on a large scale) of the possibilities that transculturalization and internationalization offer the figure of the superhero, not only in the context of a mini-series or character, but also in a completely new alternative version of the Marvel universe. Secondly, it is an authentic hybridization of codes which cannot be completely classified as belonging exclusively to the tradition of manga or that of the American comic-book.

Case Study: Narrative Patterns in Marvel´s appropriation of manga products

In 2002, coinciding with the peak of the wave of manga and Anime in the West, Marvel decided to create a new imprint, in order to appeal to new audiences. The product was launched as a miniseries in two issues with the titles *Marvel Mangaverse: New Dawn* and *Marvel Mangaverse: Eternity Twilight* in March 2002. Along with this mini-series were also published *Punisher* (2002), *Fantastic Four* (2002), *X-Men* (2002), *Ghost Rider* (2002) and *Spiderman* (2002). These series were limited to a single issue of 40 pages, which included independent stories of previously presented characters. The sole exception was *Avengers: Ensemble!* (2002) which was connected to the central story and it served as both an introduction to the climax and subsequent resolution of the events in *Eternity Twilight*. In June of the same year, the publication of a mini-series of 6 issues was launched with the name *Marvel Mangaverse*. In contrast with the first mini-series, the goal on this occasion was to create a regular series based on two very different story arcs. Later on, both series were picked up as two volumes of compilations. In 2003, another series was added to the new imprint, with the main protagonists being Wolverine (*X-Men: Ronin*) and Spiderman (*Legend of Spider-Clan*). Without further new products during the subsequent period, in 2005, *New Marvel Mangaverse: The Rings of Fate*, was published; a mini-series in 5 issues which signaled the end of the imprint.

From a formal point of view, Mangaverse products cannot be classified as manga. In comparison with other products, such as those published by Tokyopop or CMX, they do not fulfil the traditional requirements of manga formats. Their difference lies in aspects such as the use of color, the number of pages and size. As comic-books, however, they have a distinctive visual style which tries to reflect the essence of manga-anime design and employs the use of the Japan Visual Language. Therefore, it seems a logical solution to classify these products by labels belonging to other international products of transnational character. Terms such as "*Amerimanga*" and "*Amerime*" have been previously used as a way of expressing this influence. Although valid, it must be qualified that the term "*Amerimanga*" may be too inclusive. Originally, it was used to designate productions with Western capital (American) adopting an anime aesthetic (*Thundercats*, 1985-1989; *Transformers: Generation 1*, 1984-1993), and has subsequently been used in recent years to describe those American authors who included features of manga narrative in their own works. As it has been argued previously, the relationships between the Western and Japanese media have a long history of hybridization. It is not easy to acknowledge that only in the case of a small group of authors can this influence be observed. Thus, the influence of manga in the American comic-book is a fairly general characteristic that can be observed with greater abundance in products such as those that concern us. In terms of genres, however, Mangaverse can be considered as an interesting case of hybridization between the two classic traditions of the American comic-book (the superhero genre) and manga (the *shōnen* genre) respectively.

Entering into the details of the respective storylines is beyond the aims of this essay. However, the most important aspects of the story shall be commented on with the aim of illustrating the theoretical matters most relevant to my argument. So, for this study on the narrative patterns of Mangaverse, closely related aspects shall be considered: the deconstruction/appropriation of characters and strategies of adaptation/transculturalization.

1. Deconstruction/Appropriation of Characters

The story of Mangaverse gives alternative versions of some of the main characters from the Marvel universe. The Marvel figures are visibly altered, their identity reduced to a

minimal semiotic relationship between the name (signifier) and their main attributed power (signified), which allows them to still be recognized. However, the identity of a character cannot be constructed solely with these elements. In the superhero genre, in order to be able to recognize a character through different storylines in a series, –which might extend over decades in many cases –, something else is needed. The material part of the personality of a character is the memory, their identity, which is reconstructed by means of the recreation of the relationships of meaning which they maintain with other characters. Dr Banner, for example, it not only a scientist with an extravagant double personality but is actually also characterized by the relationships he establishes. These include his engagement and later marriage to Betty Ross as well as his antagonism with General Thadeus E. "Thunderbolt" Ross, his fiancé's father[5]. These and many more stories are represented in the form of semiotic relationships between various secondary actors, independently of the author-scriptwriter and of the period in which the comic was written. When these relationships are altered, the character cannot be recognized easily, due to the loss of their original identity. In the Mangaverse version, Hulk is a totally independent entity from Banner—a monster whose aspect is similar to the well-known Godzilla (*Gojira*, 1954), one of the major icons of Japanese pop culture (Figure 1). Another of the main characters from Marvel, Iron Man is transformed into Iron Maiden, whose alter ego is the sister of the original Tony Stark, Antoinette (Toni) Stark who is in a romantic relationship with Banner. Other elements are added from Japanese popular culture, widening the spectrum of influences of the manga-anime dyad. As an example, the manga version of Iron Man capitalizes on the natural association between the character's armor and the manned robots (*mecha*) that are frequently found in *shōnen* manga. However, the Mangaverse version takes this further by reinterpreting the armor-man association into another classic icon that is the *super robot*, which belongs to the genre of the Japanese super group (*supersentai*). When the vehicles of the

[5]Establishing concrete references for the story of any classic character is complicated because over the years many changes may take place; hence, many details of their biography are true only for a certain time. Even so, classic publishers such as Marvel and DC have published different guides to their stories and characters over the years. The information given here on The Hulk can be found in *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe* Marvel Comics Group (1985). "Gardener to the Hulk (The Hulk)." The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe (Deluxe Edition) **2**(5): 62-64..

different members of the Avengers are joined together they form the "Ultimate Iron Man", giving at the same time a clear nod to their famous catchphrase[6].

Therefore, it can be stated that the first of the main features of the narrative of Mangaverse lies both in the appropriation of iconic elements of Japanese pop culture and in the reinterpretation (or deconstruction) of the identity of their most important characters. In this way, it fulfils one of the rules of serialized narrative, irrespective of the medium that is the existence of a social network. This last, understood as the set of personal relationships that works as a background for all character motivations and attitudes and, ultimately causes the extension of the narrative. However, this social network, and therefore, the rest of the narrative are united around a small group of characters.

2. Forms of Adaptation/Transculturalization

In the American comic-book, where the series are a product of collaborations between different groups of scriptwriters, cartoonists, colorists and letterers, each team of professionals undertakes a task of adaptation each time a new instalment of the series is made. The existence of different teams working on the same story (often even on the same story arc) explains the constant pace of publication and the increasingly elaborate finish on the product. So, the entrance of a new artist or a new scriptwriter during some instalments of the series allows time to be given to the professionals to work properly on subsequent episodes. These replacements are usually more obvious in the visual treatment of the series than in other aspects of the narrative, which is why it is normal that radically different aesthetic treatments coexist in the same story, albeit in different episodes.

Understanding these replacements as ways of adapting allows us to learn more about the complexity and the heterogeneous nature of the medium of comics. As often occurs with other serialized mediums such as television series, soap operas or radio series, each new professional who is incorporated into the series can carry out important changes to the narrative. This creative process must respect the presence of elements recognized by

[6] In Mangaverse*: Avengers Ensemble!* (2002) and *Marvel Mangaverse: Infinite Twilight* (2002)

the audience, because as with other genres, the public experiences pleasure in anticipating the result (Altman and British Film Institute 1999). These changes are combined with other more innovative elements, differentiating a series from other similar products. These constant processes of copying and modification, require the work of a manager of the publication (e.g. chief editor), who safeguards the continuity and coherence of the story. Therefore, adaptation, understood as an exercise in intertextuality, would be the basic principle of all serialized narrative.

In the case of the Marvel products of the Mangaverse imprint, the processes of adaptation occur on different levels. In this sense, although there is a process of continuity between the first series of two issues and the rest of the imprint's comic-books, it is their relationship with the regular Marvel series which attracts the most attention. Some authors have previously described Mangaverse using the term *'transcreation'* (Jenkins 2009; Stein 2013). This concept in fact comes from the creators of *Spider-Man India* who introduce the reinvention of the character by combining meanings shared by both Hindu and Hindu-American audiences (Saffell 2007). Nevertheless, simply assuming that the underlying processes in the creation of both products are similar may be a slightly superficial assessment. For example, one of the problems that the transcreation of Spiderman faces is the search for elements which can be more strictly identified as Hindu, a problem which is normally resolved by resorting to stereotypes (Davé 2013). In the case of Mangaverse, however, it is not difficult to find signifiers which can be understood as Japanese and/or belonging to the visual culture of manga and anime.

The difference between both products lies in the fact that, in the case of anime, the mechanics of identification with the audience are not based on a national identity but rather on the use of a cultural capital formed by the most famous products of manga and anime in the American market. A process of adaptation by colonization could therefore be spoken about in which the interest of the producers for particular sorts of foreign material has motivated the appropriation and reinterpretation of their main narrative elements (Leitch 2007). Therefore, the various authors of the imprint –particularly Ben Dunn, creator of the first two mini-series– establish multiple references to Japanese

popular culture by means of the mechanisms of allusion. These are recognizable in the narrative but also, more obviously, in the design of the characters.

The reinterpretation which was carried out by Namor, Prince of Atlantis in *Mangaverse: Eternity Twilight* (2002) could be seen to be an example of this form of allusion. Namor had always been an ambiguous character, due to his proud and independent personality. This allowed him to take on the roles of both the villain and temporary ally (Marvel Comics Group 1985). It was not surprising that the character had the function of antagonist in this story arc, even in the way in which the character was reinterpreted. It was obvious that the design of Ben Dunn in this issue made numerous references to *Dragon Ball Z* (1989-1996), based on the manga of Toriyama Akira, which has become one of the most successful animes in the world, including within the American market (Figure 2). Namor, for example, was redesigned following the character of Vegeta, one of the most charismatic antagonists in the history of anime. Both possess a similar temperament and they perform the same functions of antagonist and occasional ally. The similarity with the anime character is reinforced with the adaptation of Baron Strucker, one of the classic baddies, who was repositioned as Namor's henchman and has a very similar physical appearance to Nappa, Vegeta's bodyguard. Other anime characters could be clearly seen in the pages of Mangaverse but it is of more interest to clarify the sense and way in which this appropriation was executed. The inclusion of these characters was carried out arbitrarily, transferred from different products to a new text. However, in doing so, they did not lose their ability to evoke meanings for a certain audience. With regard to the relationships of intertextuality established between *Mangaverse: Eternity Twilight* (2002) and *Dragon Ball Z* (1989-1996), the aim of the author seems to be that of appealing to the audience's memory through the usual formulae of *shōnen* manga, most particularly in the elaborate scenes of fighting and martial arts. Ultimately, the adopted aesthetic seems exaggerated and has a sense of parody. This serves to remind us that both ‘parody and pastiche’ are closely related forms of ‘adaptation’ (Leitch 2007).

Conclusions

As has been demonstrated throughout this essay, the medium of comics can be a good example for the study of internationalization – understood as international production and distribution –and transcultural hybridization. A brief summary of the history of the medium in Japan and the USA –two of the main powers in the medium of comics– illustrates the global circulation and hybrid quality of much contemporary comic book culture. The imprint Mangaverse (2002-2006) in particular illustrates these trends in two ways: firstly, via, the deconstruction of its own collective imagination, particularly of the characters of the Marvel franchise; and secondly, by examining the appropriation of elements of manga and anime culture through different processes of adaptation from elements of Japanese pop culture, including colonization, pastiche and parody. In essence, Mangaverse uses the classic formula of *What If?*, a collection started by Marvel in the 1970s that introduced new versions of their characters by altering their story. This formula added interest by appealing to new audiences, manga-fans, through the evocation of shared meanings: the super-hero background stories. These processes of alteration and rewriting are widely shared by other recent products from the franchise that have been referred as 'Transcreations' (Jenkins 2009; Davé 2013).

The unceasing search for manga and anime audiences on behalf of Marvel has also been echoed in other products such as the imprint Tsunami (2003), a project that was launched between the two versions of Mangaverse. The project was no more successful than its predecessors, though some of their most successful collections (*New Mutants, Runaways)* were reintroduced into the publisher's other regular imprints. Furthermore, Marvel, which since the 1990s has also been a multimedia group, has developed other international products such as anime versions of their most successful characters, in collaboration with the Japanese producer MadHouse. The project comprised the *Iron Man* (2010), *Wolverine* (2011), *X-Men* (2011) and *Blade* (2011) series. These productions are themselves worthy of another case study, and strongly suggests that future collaborations of this kind will continue to exist between the USA and Japan, being new examples of the fascination that the West has for manga culture.

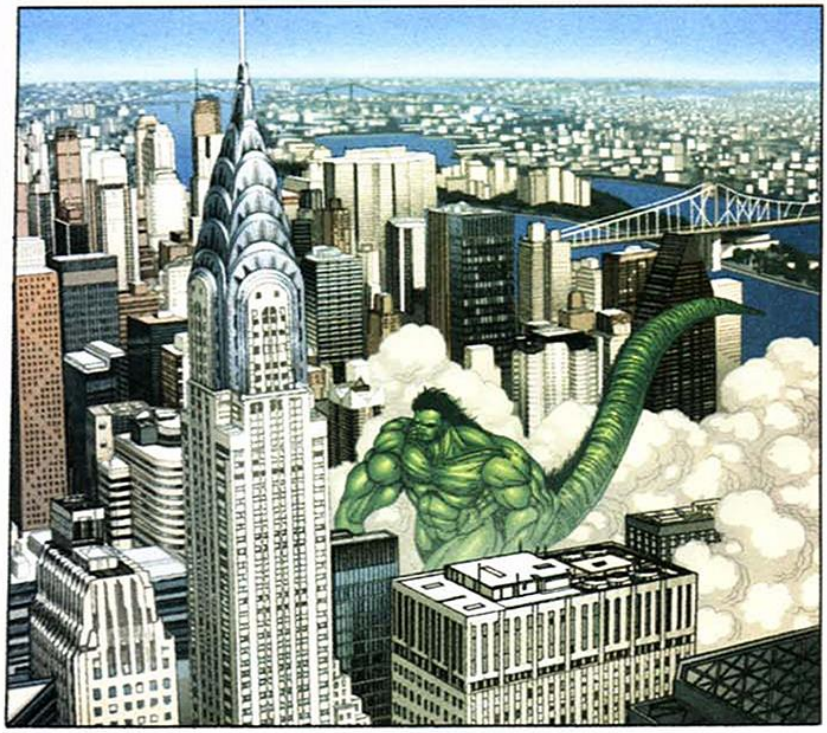

Figure 1. The Hulk transcreation in Mangaverse makes an explicit reference to *Tokusatsu* cinema products such as the film *Godzilla* (*Gojira,* 1954). From Mangaverse*: Infinity Twilights* (2002). Image Source is property of Marvel ©.

Figure 2. Hank Pym transcreation in Mangaverse (left) resembles the most iconic Toriyama's characters. From *Mangaverse: Infinity Twilights* (2002) and the anime series *Dragon Ball Z* (1993). Image Sources are property of Marvel © and Toei Animation ©.

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