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SIN CITY, AN INTERMEDIA ANALYSIS: FROM COMICS TO MOVIES

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Abstract: This article aims to explore the intermedia relations between the comic book, “Sin City”, the sub-story of Marv, written and illustrated by Frank Miller and transformed into a film version by Robert Rodriguez. The analysis identifies elements of the visual identity of the original work in the adaptation, as well as adjustments for the transposition of one language to another. In addition to the undeniable differences between supports such as the use of dialogue balloons, the use of frames, gutters, frames in the cinema or the use of effects and soundtracks, it is necessary to consider the different stages of production or elaboration of each medium separately, thus, as the nuances of perception, as the time of viewing the images, the paths to be followed while reading and the actions of subjective contemplation on the part of the spectator/reader. However, it is important to consider the space/time issues about the sequential chains of images and especially about the aesthetic choices of each author/director on the narrative composition of each support. Therefore, the analysis was based on a theoretical basis by Ismael Xavier, Robert Stam and Doc Comparato, on the main aspects of this adaptation model, in order to understand the aesthetic options of the illustrations as a storyboard tool for the production of the film adaptation.

Keywords: Sin City, film adaptation, interart studies.

INTRODUCTION

The interest in the theme of adaptation comes from the enthusiasm for the dramatic possibilities and the curiosity to seek to understand how film directors appropriate the literary plot that are resignified in the audiovisual work, identifying these redefinitions from the degree of fidelity in the adaptation, that is, of the similarities and differences observed between the book, the

comic, the short story, and the filmed script.

First, it is necessary to point out that, in this relationship between writers and film directors, there is a marketing nexus; therefore, many screenwriters use *best-sellers* in the creation of their screenplays, such as the classics, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings or *super man*, in this logic, the audiovisual work and its derivatives intend to attract these followers in order to absorb the success of the original work. However, failures can also exist, not always all films adapted from literature manage to reach the audience of the original work and achieve a positive review. Therefore, adaptations can become a challenging terrain when the director assumes to adapt some content already established by the public.

In this analysis we separate Frank Miller’s comic book *Sin City*, the city of sin, to analyze how this transposition took place. What were the necessary adjustments as a narrative, for the adaptation between these languages? In this particular case there is a particularity that the writer Frank Miller participated in the direction of the film along with Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino (guest director). Therefore, it was sought to verify if in this combination between director/writer, how the search for the essence between the two works took place, that is, if the screenwriter/writer (since in the film it was chosen not to list a screenwriter and in the credits, Frank Miller appears as creator of the *Graphic Novel*) sought to imprint aesthetic fidelity to the comics in the film?

In order to obtain an understanding of the creative options of the adaptation, we sought to carry out a careful reading/analysis of the Sin City comics, and later watch the film, to be verified from the formal point of view proposed by Aumont, as composition of shots, framing and the plasticity in the succession of these shots. This detailed process of analysis and deconstruction of the works from a

formal point of view is one of the methods to understand the process of construction of the adaptation. The feature film has three dramatic arcs that develop independently in the plot, despite being interconnected in some way. So, it was decided to make a cut and choose the sub-history, *The city of sin*, as the *corpus* of this analysis.

Within the field of academic research and commercial criticism, there are other works on the theme of the adaptation of Sin City, such as that by Eduardo Rodrigues ¹, who compares another sub-story, *O Assassino Amarelo*, in which the degree of fidelity of textual composition between the two comics/film media. Another work that is an analysis published by the digital post of the Omele page ², Erico Borgo makes a general analysis of the strengths of the film technique, a positive review in the comparison between the comics and the film. It must be noted that there are other analyzes on other perspectives, such as the film's photography or the construction of characters between the comic and the proposed script, these works helped to understand the importance of verifying the interaction relationships between the HQ/film supports. In this sense, it is expected to find elements that contribute to the universe of research, in the sense of understanding the many manifestations of languages as a product of entertainment and construction of meaning.

THE INTENTIONALITY OF CINEMA

The audiovisual language of expression as broad as the other arts, expanded and developed a style tending to control the cultural industry market. If making a film is related to architecting a certain aesthetic, objective or poetic vision of the world (BETTON,

1 To learn more about it, visit: <http://www.rua.ufscar.br/sin-city-analise-comparativa-versao-quadrinhos-e-versao-cinema/> accessed on 03/10/2021, 10:02.

2 <https://www.omelete.com.br/filmes/criticas/sin-city-cidade-do-pecado>

1987), then the creative possibilities provided by technology, especially by the use of computer graphics, offers us an infinite range of alternatives to work with. the freedom of choices in the construction of the narrative, and above all, giving movement to images.

Through editing, for example, a specific element of cinema, a spectacular world is elaborated to be observed through the combination of shots, scenes, non-linear sequences and manipulation of time. Furthermore, in the creative construction of a script according to Ismail Xavier, there are three basic elements for a realistic and naturalistic effect in cinematographic composition:

- Classic decoupage capable of producing illusionism and triggering the identification mechanism.
- The elaboration of a method of interpreting the actors within naturalistic principles, framed by the preference for filming in studios, with scenarios also built according to naturalistic principles.
- The choice of stories belonging to genres very stratified in their easy reading conventions, and of popularity proven by a long tradition of melodramas, adventures, fantastic stories, etc.

(XAVIER, 1947. 41)

Therefore, cinema is thought and manipulated to cause predetermined effects on its audiences, Eisenstem (2002 p. 11) describes that, "Cinema is the most intentional of the arts"; either by the abundance of creative options or by the technical possibilities in causing certain dramatic effects in collective proportions. In the analytical work of (de) construction of meaning, in which the objective and subjective purposes of a film work are verified, the decoupage – can be defined as a process of deconstructing the film in parts.

Smaller units that together form a continuous sequence, marked by a dramatic function or position in a given narrative (XAVIER 1947). Nevertheless, we can define that the shots of a film are composed of each scene in question, that is, the shot is a continuous segment of the image and corresponds to a certain point of view within the film, and will define the purpose of the message within a work.

This technique of linking photographic plans is similar to the sequential art of comic books, which tell stories dialogically between image/writing.

Sequential art emerged through the daily strips of periodicals in the modern times of the 20th century. The first comic books appeared around 1934, and contained random works with short stories (EISNER, 1989 p.7). The parameters and stylistic structures of comic books (HQs ³) became evident as language characteristics, with the emergence of *graphic novels* in complete editions. Eisner will argue that modern comic book artists have been developing a “successful hybridization of illustration and prose” (EISNER, 1989 p.8). The superposition of words and images in order to create a story with the visual experience, configured in comic books, requires two interpretation skills from the reader. In the field of art, which involves – style, perspectives, symmetry, brushwork, strokes, among others – and in the literary sphere, which involves – grammar, plot, syntax, narrative style, etc. Therefore, the understanding of the message is anchored in the aesthetic perspectives of the image and in the effort of the written code.

WHEN THE ARTS MIX

The changes from one sign system to another, normally from one medium to another, have several functions, and is seen by some critics as a mark of a subversive character, “as a work of art is understood as a

generally complex sign structure” (CLUVER, 2006 p.15). The “deconstruction of categories” (VENEROSO 2006 p.63) of traditional art has placed writing and drawing on a very narrow threshold, there is a “dissolution” of the limits between artistic languages causing an intimate approximation between the arts.

André Bazin is in favor of interactivity between the different fields of art, a cinema he calls impure, and states that “the evolution of cinema has been necessarily influenced by an example of the consecrated arts” (BAZIN, 2008 p.104).).

The scripts used in adaptations, according to Doc Comparato, are units of content and form, which only appropriate the content and express themselves in another form, which he calls “transubstance”:

An adaptation is a transcription of language: we change the linguistic support used to tell a story. This applies to the act of transubstantiating, of transforming a substance, since a work of art is the expression of a language (Comparato 1983, p. 216).

The adaptations of comics for the cinema is a widely used practice, since this, initially, can take advantage of the marketing success of the literal work, since a successful adaptation depends on a series of factors. Some comic book adaptations with box office success in cinema, such as: *Superman*, by Richard Donner(1978), *Batman*, by Tim Burton(1989), *Men in Black*, by Barry Sonnenfeld(1997), *Spider-Man*, by Sam Raimi (2002) and *Sin City*, by Robert Rodriguez (2005) had, before the movie screens, great success in the original vehicle. As they are two different media, comic book adaptations seem to be popular as well as controversial (LEFÈVRE, 2012 P. 190). Some comic book artists even oppose the idea of film adaptation.

From the aforementioned adaptations, the film, *Sin City - the city of sin*, the sub-history

3 An abbreviation for comic books, widely used in Brazil.

of Marv was selected for analysis, from the technical and stylistic resources extracted from the film, will be analyzed in a formal technical approach, the equivalence relations among the peculiarities of the original work in Frank Miller's comics. An inter-art study dealing with transmedia relations, which will "co-determine" the questions raised about the researched object (CLUVER, 2006 p.17).

Since this is an investigation of the object through empirical analysis, it is necessary to expose some generic differences and similarities between the media in question, which differ in terms of artistic matter. According to Eco (1995 p.190) we are approaching arts that use different relations of enjoyment. The literary work receives a set of stimuli in the private and subjective relationship of writing, while the spectator in the cinema consumes the work in the collective and social relationship. Another evident feature is about the temporality that Eco presents to us:

Now, the difference between filmic action and narrative action seems to be the following: the novel tells us <<this happened, then this happened, etc.>>, while the film places us before a succession of <<this+this +this, etc.>>, a succession of *representations of a present*, hierarchical only in the assembly phase. (ECO, 1995 p.192)

Lefèvre also explains that, "while reading a comic book is a solitary action, watching a movie at the cinema is usually a group experience" (LEFÈVRE, 2012 p.193), the soundscape that composes the film allows to the viewer a more intense experience in the interpretation of the images, that is, they carry a dramatic load concomitant with between images/track/effects. Another distinction is about Layout, while in comics it is generally thought of in several images in frames separated by gutters, usually in 3x3 format, so nine images on one page or variations within this logic. It is worth mentioning that the

standardized consistency arranged on each page helps to increase the visual impact of the story on a page with different layout and frame sizes. In cinema, unless the director chooses to work with a simultaneously split screen, images are usually presented at 24 frames per second and in full-screen format.

Another factor to be considered is about the production process, in cinema there is production (filming) and post-production (editing), that is, two distinct stages. In comics, this process occurs inherently and simultaneously. In the analysis of the adaptation according to Diniz (2005 p.14), the director works in the search for "equivalences", with the intention of finding technical means specific to cinema to replace the literary ones. Some elements such as time that is fluid and continuous in cinema, unlike reading in which the reader determines his own speed in the story. Other multifaceted characteristics of cinema that support and sustain an "aural atmosphere", as already mentioned, are the film's soundtracks and sound effects, the dark room of the cinema itself and the "animated photographic images" (STAM, 2008 p. 20).

Therefore, the basic problems of equivalence are - that in comics, the frames are usually organized on a single page, and have static drawings that do not produce noises or sounds (LEFÈVRE, 2012 p. 193,194) - in cinema there is a frame in a screen, has moving and photographic images and soundtrack. Despite these differences, the author raises the question not of the fidelity of the adaptation, but, "how much less different from the comic can the film be".

An issue that can be discussed specifically as a contribution to the adaptation of comics to cinema is the similarities of the images of the comics and the drawings in the *storyboard* in a pre-production. According to Kellison the technique serves as a shooting plan in pre-production;

Storyboard, These are simple, comic book-like drawings of each scene in the script. They are numbered frames, containing a drawing; each frame refers to a scene or shot number in the script. When the image or camera angle changes, so does the content of the frame. (KELLISON, 2007 p. 84,85).

Therefore, each scene drawn means an outline of the shot to be filmed, it contains framing information, lighting, camera angle of each shot, the dialogue between the characters, etc., and serves to guide the director on the film set. In a way, in the conception of the adaptation, the comics are a kind of *storyboard* of excellent pre-conceived quality, with information necessary for the filmic act, especially if the story of the cinematographic script is based on the same story of the comics, in the case of *Sin City. the city of sin*.

SIN CITY, THE CITY OF SIN

Sin City the city of sin, was designed and written by Frank Miller in the early 1990s, and marks a new phase of the author tired of the clichés of superhero stories. Sin City's script and aesthetics carry a "noir" atmosphere,⁴ alluding to American crime films of the 40's and 50's. *Basin City* is a fictional city created by the author and named by its residents as *Sin City*. A decaying metropolis that brings with it marks of violence at all levels and a system where corruption is widespread. Borgo (2005) in his post (digital article) defines the alleys of Sin City as: "the underworld of a corrupt city, where crooks, murderers, vigilantes and femme fatales transit".

Robert Rodriguez's feature film combines the three-volume adaptation of the series: *O Adeus Difícil*, *A grande matança* and *aquele bastardo amarelo*, and an introduction. Comparing the two versions (graphic novels and cinematographic), the work aims to find the similarities and disjunctions inherent to

this level of adaptation.

The plot in the *City of Sin*, has an adult narrative, has as its protagonist the anti-hero Marv, who has a violent nature, with psychological problems, a discredited truculent giant of life, protector of marginalized women. An ex-criminal who lives in the alleys and bars performing illegal favors and surviving the rough-and-tumble journey of Basin City's chaotic nightlife. A character who constantly ignores the presence of fear, a "myth-adventure", where the figure of the hero crosses a surreal landscape, full of dangers and tricks, survives fighting most of the times at a disadvantage against his antagonists (CAMPBELL, 2007 p. 102). A non-linear structure, where characters die in some stories and reappear in other episodes.

After a night of lovemaking with Goldie, a luxury prostitute who escapes a brutal criminal scheme from the upper clergy, Marv wakes up to find the girl dead in the same bed, where three hours earlier they had had an intense night of pleasure. The giant who carries with him a complex for his grotesque appearance, and believes he would never have slept with someone with Goldie's beauty, he falls unconditionally in love with the girl, who is now dead, so he decides to go out on the streets of Sin City determined to find the killer to avenge his death and find out who tried to frame him.

As previously mentioned about the *storyboards*, director Rodriguez chose to use the frames of the comic in the conception of the film. Both the film and the comic are revealed in black and white (B&W), contrasting between realism and illusionism. A dynamic contrast, a technique widely used between light and shadow, with a predominance of dark scenes.

The scene that opens Marv's story begins with the silhouettes of his shadow spilling a

⁴ Film genre originally made between 1940 and 1969 in the United States, characterized by low lighting and depicting sinister and dark themes. Noir films are marked by cynical characters and a pessimistic mood.

bottle through the neck, obtained through the window in a motel room, the layout of the elements of the scenery, framing and camera shots are identical to the HQ.

and flat.

At the same moment that Marv wonders about the murder, he notices the arrival of the police with their flashing red spotlights, operating a state of tension.



Figure 1 – HQ Images and Film Frames.

The difference in the film adaptation is that Robert uses monochromatic black and white tones, and gray scales, in certain scenes the use of the strong tone of yellow-gold, highlighting Goldie's hair, her body wrapped in silk sheets. bright red, the same color as the heart-shaped bed.



Figure 3 - HQ Images and Film Frames.

He faces the riot police, and after throwing himself through the window of the building, he clashes with some more police officers and takes one of the vehicles.

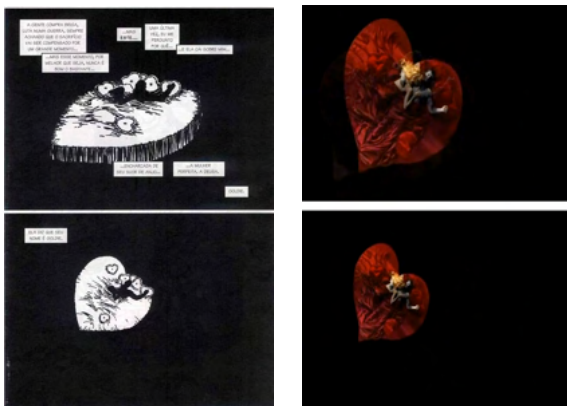


Figure 2 - HQ Images and Film Frames.

Emphasized by Marv's narration, the colors sharpen the senses in the dramatic charge as a form of delirium, lust and pleasure. The HQ, has no shades of gray and no colors, the construction is made in black and white, solid



Figure 4 - HQ Images and Film Frames.



Figure 5 - HQ Images and Film Frames.



Figure 7- HQ Images and Film Frames.

Amid the pallor of black and white, the highlighted blood reflects violence and pain.



Figure 6 - HQ Images and Film Frames.

Another emotionally charged scene occurs when Marv enters Kadie's bar, a stripper nightclub. The scene runs in black and white and when you pass through the bar's door, the film's temperature becomes hot, sepia, and blends in with the movements of the bar's original lights. Nancy is the "striper" who is performing.

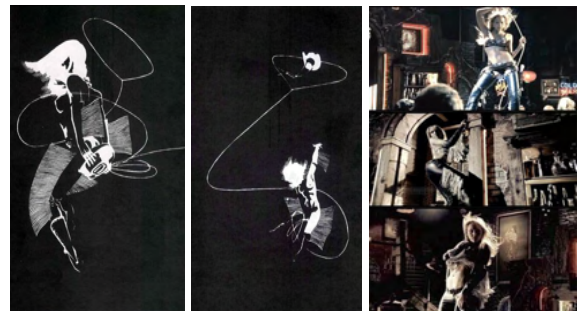


Figure 8 - HQ Images and Film Frames.

Marv has mental disorders and needs medication. He seeks out Lucille, his probation officer, who gets the prescription medication from his psychiatrist girlfriend. On this occasion the drug vial is almost orange-yellow, another scene marked by color, signaling Marv's need for drugs.

The bar is the link between the three stories in the film. Marv is surprised by two hit men, who make him leave the bar. The action sequence is the same as in the comics, in the same framing perspective, differentiated by the use of colors. Marv dominates the situation, extracts information he needs and kills them. Now the character already has clues to follow his impulses.



Figure 9 - HQ Images and Film Frames.



Figure 10 - HQ Images and Film Frames.

After a few twists and turns, a lot of killing, torture and persecution, Marv discovers that Cardinal Roark is the mastermind of a serial murder scheme of prostitutes, to serve as food in an act of cannibalism. The police manage to arrest Marv, but do not prevent the cardinal's death. The Roark family's influence is great, they command the political, economic and religious schemes of Sin City. Justice holds Marv responsible for the death of the Cardinal and for all the crimes committed by the religious leader, including the murder of Goldie, who was sentenced to the electric chair, and they only managed to kill him after a few attempts.

In terms of the construction of the characters, all achieved a very close resemblance to the illustrations in the magazine. The protagonist of this story, Marv is represented by Mickey Rourke, and with the help of makeup the character has incorporated the biotype of the comics. The characteristics of Miller's traits were translated to the cinema, and faithfully adapted within the possibilities of this media exchange.

The protagonist narrator style is impregnated with subjectivity, inducing the reader/spectator to share the particular feelings that dominate the character, who has a limited image of the facts causing a climate of suspense. This perspective makes it difficult to see the story as a whole, as the spectator evolves in the adventure along with the character.

The option to use colors in the film does not correspond to the HQ. In the feature, the warm and strong tones were placed to maximize and emphasize the emotional charge, which alternates between desire and fury, insanity and lucidity. Lights with very strong contrast were used in the backlit position, with the intention of reinforcing the features in the silhouettes of the characters, in the scenes of great impact. A widely used option in HQ. In film adaptations, you can have these adjustments to ensure a better interpretation, depending on which channel will be used for adaptation.



Figure 11 - HQ Images and Film Frames.

The illusion of the film according to Xavier (2008 p.18), discusses the reproduction of static frames at a certain speed, which provides the idea of movement and approximates the similarity in the film format to a certain fidelity in the comics, as if they gave movement to the films. comics. In this work, the resource was obtained through the technique of computer graphics, therefore, this tool made it possible for the scenes to be recorded entirely in the studio with the resource in *Chroma key*⁵, later the scenario was created and produced by computer graphics software, which mediated the realism of the scenes in the magazine with the film, which made possible the dreamlike setting of the scenario and the characters.

While on-screen features incorporate various elements such as close-up, camera movement, framing, soundtracks and sound effects, colors, silence - all contributed to the film's realism. From the point of view of expressiveness, the feature lost as a representation, where absolute darkness is characteristic of the City of Sin, there are no nuances or middle ground, its inhabitants coexist with violence, madness, corruption, brutality, death, pain, and immorality. are alive on the corners of the city. The advance and retreat in the superimposition of the hard

lights and the total absence of light, give depth to the story.

As for the art direction, the details were very close to the original, costumes, scenery and the performance of the actors were of great contribution. In the photographic composition, the silhouettes obtained both in the film and in the comics stand out. Photography engaged with computer graphics achieved an expressive result for the whole body of work.

The montage has a different rhythm to that of the comics, as already mentioned, the temporal sensation is different in the two media, long shots, camera movements and long shots were used in the film⁶. On the pages of the comics, superimposed frames are created, which, when translated, must use a montage with short and fast shots. One last factor I want to highlight is the issue of illustration without dialogues. Lund (2012 p. 171) calls the technique "antiphonic illustration", which consists of alternating text and image, in which the text is absent to let the image alone create meaning. Resource widely used in the Sin City comics, and in other Frank Miller comics. In the film these spaces without dialogue are emphasized by the score or sound effects.

CONSIDERATIONS

This analysis format consisted of empirical research, that is, watching the film and reading the magazine to obtain the result between the two elements. Coutinho (2011 p.334) states that one of the challenges of this type of analysis is the need for "translation", interpreting the codes (visual and linguistic) to later present in the format of texts required in most scientific works, and there may be some limitation of the analysis categories themselves.

⁵ Chroma key is the technique of extracting a background from a scene to place another background, obtained through computer graphics.

⁶ It's filming a scene in a single *take*, without camera cuts.

In the general context of the work, it can be seen that Rodrigues' adaptation was a very close translation of the original work, not only because of the success at the box office, but in the concern to transpose Miller's traits to the screen as close to fidelity as possible, which inevitably it is a merit arising from long years of experience in the subject. Some adjustments were made, such as cuts of entire sequences from the comics, which, if preserved, would be redundant and even feel empty.

Another issue that was very well used in the film version was the use of colors in order to intensify the emotional charge of the scene, the change in light temperature at certain moments enriching the film version. The computer graphics resource, in the composition of the scenario in the studio, was responsible for the original texture translated from the comics, I believe that otherwise it would be different, I wouldn't risk saying if it was good or bad, however, the surreality was only possible through the digital resource.

The use of the comics plans adjusted in the film is very noticeable, and the texts of the characters' dialogues were transposed in full. The narrative content was preserved, a universe full of ambiguity, violent, without ethical or moral values just like in the HQ.

It is noticed that the graphic resources used worked in the film, but that adjustments to adapt a literary work to the cinema is inevitable, they are two different platforms that even if there is concern about the similarity with the original, it is necessary to make changes so that it fits into the new media mold. The characters from the comics are in the film, identical; it could be that there is some difference, considering that the characters in the comics came out of the imaginary first. I believe that the result was only achieved by working together between those responsible for the respective works, mutual collaboration in this type of work was essential mainly to ensure the identity of the original work to the new platform

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