The multiple Spider-People

An analysis of the playfulness in intermedial references found in the different genres of *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*

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Content

Abstract

This research aims to answer the following research question: *How does the animated film* Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse *demonstrate playfulness in its intermedial references in order to refer to various genres of animation?* The research is divided into the following three sub-questions: In what way does *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* fall into the category animated film? Which distinct genres are presented in the film? And how do these genres demonstrate playfulness in the intermedial references they make?

In order to answer these questions, this research will analyse the different characteristics of genres that are presented in the film. This is done by outlining genre theory and then applying it to the case study. It is a textual analysis and makes use of shot protocols to visualise the genre aspects of the film. Spider-Man is a popular icon in the current pop-culture world, and due to this it is interesting to take an analytical approach to the first feature film about this pop-icon.
The genres comics, anime, cartoons and film noir are outlined and discussed and the concepts of playfulness and intermedial references are used to provide a critical insight into the analysis of these genres.

1. – Introduction

During the 91st edition of the Academy Awards, the animated film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* won the Oscar for best animated feature film of 2018.[1] Ever since his first appearance in 1962, the character 'Spider-Man' has been a popular superhero in the comic-world, and has become a phenomenon of its own.[2] Spider-Man and his story have been adapted countless of times into animated television series, three film trilogies and various comic spin-offs.[3] Another recent development in the superhero-genre are the movie adaptations, that have become increasingly popular. Scholars argue that the main reasons for this rise in popularity are the new developments in digital film techniques and the increased fear of terrorism in Western society. Superheroes provide the audience with an example of hope in these times.[4] These movies have become a part of popular culture, and comics are continuously being adapted into series, films and animated movies.

Most of these movies are live-action adaptations of comics, such as the films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.[5] *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is the first film to combine the graphic style of comics with other animation techniques and live-action cinema techniques.[6] There have been films in the past that have combined live-action with animation, but up until *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* there have not been many films that were known to also mix genres of animation. [7]

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse is a different take on the story of Spider-Man and the first animated feature film in the Spider-Man franchise.[8] It is also the first film that does not focus on Peter Parker as Spider-Man, but on a younger, new Spider-Man named Miles Morales.[9] Miles Morales was first introduced in 2011, by Brian Michael Bendis and Sarah Pichelli, and he was the first non-Caucasian Spider-Man.[10] After deciding to introduce this new Spider-Man to the mainstream audience in his own animated film, the creative team decided to expand the idea and explore the other Spider-People that existed within the comics.[11]

The creative team behind *Spider*-Verse have stated that the reason they chose to animate Miles' story is because it offered them a new way to explore the Spider-verse characters "in ways

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[1] "2019 | Oscars.org | Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, accessed March 19, 2019, https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/2019.

[2] William Irwin and Jonathan J. Sanford, "Introduction," in *Spider-Man and Philosophy,* (USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 2, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[3] Irwin and Sanford, "Introduction," 2.

[4] Liam Burke, "The Golden Age of Comic Book Filmmaking," in *The Comic Book Film Adaptation,* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 23-24, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[5] Travis Clark, "The 50 best superhero movies of all time, ranked," Business Insider, last modified May 1, 2018, https://www.businessinsider.nl/50-best-superhero-movies-of-all-time-ranked-marvel-dc-and-more-2018-3/?international=true&r=US. More than half of the movies in these list came out after the 2000s. Four of them are animated superhero movies.

[6] Zev Chevat, "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse's art style: we go behind the scenes," Polygon, last modified December 11, 2018, https://www.polygon.com/2018/12/11/18136056/spider-man-into-the-spider-verse-movie-art-animation-style-visual-effects.

[7] Jane Ridley, "10 great movies that mix live action and animation," New York Post, last modified March 20, 2015, https://nypost.com/2015/03/20/10-great-movies-that-mix-live-action-and-animation/.

[8] Ben Child, "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse proves Hollywood can't out-Marvel Marvel," The Guardian, last modified December 12, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/dec/12/spider-man-into-the-spider-verse-proves-hollywood-cant-out-marvel-marvel.

[9] Child, "Spider-Man: Hollywood can't out-Marvel Marvel."

[10] Ramin Zahed, "Introduction," in *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse: The Art of the Movie*, (London: Titan Books, 2018), 8.

[11] Zahed, "Introduction," 9.

that [they] couldn't do in live-action movies."[12] They also decided to take a different approach in how the animation techniques were used and have stated that they explicitly incorporated other genres of animation into the film.[13] The combining of media such as these different genres is characteristic for intermediality. The genres cartoon, anime and film noir have been specifically mentioned and incorporated by the creative crew of the film.[14] By doing this, the film plays with the notion of mixing these genres. They have also stated that for each different Spider-person they used a different rendering style.[15] As shown, this film has taken a unique approach to the mixing of animation genres and techniques. Therefore, this case study can provide useful insight into how intermedial references and playfulness are present in the different genres found in the movie.

A lot of research has been done about the phenomenon that is Spider-Man, but due to the different ways in which this movie approaches the Spider-Man comics, and due to the new take on Spider-Man, this film is an interesting case study for this analysis. In addition to that, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is a recent example of a superhero movie that explores new ways of adapting comics into film. In addition to using aesthetics found in comic books, the film also explores the merging of different genres of film and animation. The film makes use of intermedial references to refer to different genres of animation and this is done through playfulness. Playfulness is the attitude taken by the filmmakers by playing with the genres. Therefore, the research question of this analysis is; *How does the animated film* Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse *demonstrate playfulness in its intermedial references in order to refer to various genres of animation?* In order to answer this question, this analysis will be divided in the following three sub-questions:

    1. In what way does *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* fall into the category animated film?

    2. Which distinct genres are presented in the film?

    3. How do these genres demonstrate playfulness in the intermedial references they make?

This research will perform a textual analysis of the case study *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* by creating a framework of academic literature and referencing to a shot list protocol as defined by Thomas Kuchenbuch.[16] Firstly, in the first chapter, the film will be placed in the bigger context of animation by defining it as animated film. In the second chapter, genre theory will be discussed in order to provide insight into how genre is defined for this analysis. Chapter three of this research will outline each specific genre and their characteristics in order to determine how they are present within *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse.* After discussing these characteristics, they will be

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[12] Zahed, "Introduction," 8.
[13] Chevat, "Behind the scenes."
[14] Chevat, "Behind the scenes."
Shiyoon83, "Penni Parker went through a lot of iterations…," *Instagram,* December 12, 2018, last accessed March 19, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/BrR2hkCFu6T/.
[15] Chevat, "Behind the scenes."
[16] Thomas Kuchenbuch, "Zu Analyse- und Filmtheorie," in *Filmanalyse Theorien – Methoden – Kritik*, (Germany: Utb Gmbh, 2009), 40-44.

applied to the analysis of the case study. In the last chapter, the concepts playfulness and intermedial references will discussed and then used as instruments in the critical review of the analysis. The findings of the analysis will then be outlined in the conclusion.

2. - Animation as seen in Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse

In this research, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is classified as a CGI-animated film. In order to define animated film and determine if Spider-Verse fits the criteria, it is important to define what animation entails. This section aims to answer the sub-question: In what way does *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* fall into the category animated film?

First, the technique with which *Spider-Verse* was made was through computer-generated imagery (CGI). CGI-animation makes use of images that are created by a computer program.[17] By using a computer-generated image, every aspect of what is visible on screen must be crafted by the animators.[18] The creators of the film have stated that they used a combination of CGI and hand-drawing techniques to create the comic book feel of the movie.[19] Often times, to create a fluid animation, filmmakers will use motion-blur, a technique used to prevent movement from looking like stop-motion.[20] However, Spider-Verse does not use motion-blur in order to not make the animation look too fluid.[21] Spider-Verse uses techniques known in animation film, but in a unique and new way to create this specific style of animated film.

In her book *Art in Motion*, Maureen Furniss describes the aesthetics that are unique to the medium of animation. She relates animation to live-action media, and states that "the use of inanimate objects and certain frame-by-frame filming techniques suggest 'animation'".[22] *Spider-Verse* makes use of animated characters and frame-by-frame techniques to make it appear as if these characters are moving (see appendix 1). Most of these frames are made through CGI, but the film also makes use of 'pop frames' that are completely hand-drawn.[23] Everything that is visible in these frames was intentionally placed there. Because the sequences are constructed frame-by-frame, there is no unintentional movement created by the characters, or unintentional elements found in their clothing or facial expressions. In contrast to animation, live-action film could have unintentional elements that could be visible if you played it frame-by-frame. Everything that is visible in a frame of *Spider-Verse* was intentionally put there, and therefore S*pider-Verse* can be classified as animated film as described by Furniss.

A few elements of film this analysis will focus on are images, colour and sound. These elements are all part of the mise-en-scene of *Spider-Verse.* In the book *Film Art,* David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson define the concept mise-en-scène, and Furnisse relates this to the art of animation in her own book. Mise-en-scène can be defined as the way in which the director stages the frame

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[17] Andrew Selby, "Glossary," in *Animation*, (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2013), 206.
[18] Andrew Selby, "Production," in *Animation*, (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2013), 148.
[19] WIRED, "How Animators Created the Spider-Verse | WIRED," YouTube, last modified March 22, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-wUKu_V2Lk&t=300s, [5:50].
[20] Selby, "Production," 143.
[21] WIRED, "How Animators Created the Spider-Verse."
[22] Maureen Furnisse, "Introduction to animation studies," in *Art in Motion*, (Australia: John Libbey & Company, 1998), 5.
[23] WIRED, "How Animators Created the Spider-Verse."

with the use of setting, lighting, costume, staging and performance.[24] The director stages the event for the camera.[25] However, animation has different aspects than live action, so Furnisse describes the subjects of images, colour and line, movement and kinetics, but also non-visual aspects such as sound and structure. These all could be considered the mise-en-scène for animation.[26]

Images, or image design, can be divided into two categories; characters and background.[27] Characters are the central point of animation, they undertake action and attract the viewers' attention. Backgrounds are static but provide the areas in which characters' actions take place.[28]

The use of colour can play an important part in conveying meaning. Important are the ways in which colour schemes are used and what meaning they might convey. Colour can also function as a way to emit a feeling to the viewer, in a similar way in which sounds can convey emotion.[29]

Sounds such as dialogue and the musical scores are also an important aspect of animation. Furnisse mostly describes the importance of voice acting in animation, but in this analysis the content of dialogue will be analysed rather than the way in which the dialogue is said. However, the musical score is important in shaping the understanding of the images that are seen and directs our attention to certain aspects that are of importance to the general film.[30]

[24] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, "The Shot: Mise-en-Scene," in *Film Art*, (New York: McGraw Hill Education, 2015), 113.
[25] Maureen Furnisse, "General concepts: Mise-en-scène," in *Art in Motion*, (Australia: John Libbey & Company, 1998), 61.
[26] Furnisse, "Mise-en-scène," 62.
[27] Furnisse, "Mise-en-scène," 66.
[28] Furnisse, "Mise-en-scène,", 66.
[29] Furnisse, "Mise-en-scène," 71-72.
[30] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, "Sound in the Cinema," in *Film Art*, (New York: McGraw Hill Education, 2015), 268.

3. - A background in genre theory

Genre theory has been a subject of debate since the early 1990s. This is because of the diverging conceptions of what a genre constitutes as. In order to understand exactly how genres are presented in Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, it is first necessary to precisely define what constitutes as a genre. In his introductory text about genre theory, Daniel Chandler discusses the difficulty that comes with defining a genre. He mentions a few scholars who have different beliefs on what criteria to base genre on, but the general criterion is that genres "tend to be based on the notion that they constitute particular conventions of content" and that they share these conventions with other texts. In the book *Film Art*, Bordwell and Thompson, agree with this definition of genre but expand on it by stating that conventions that shape the expectations of viewers and provide materials for filmmakers to work with.[31] It is essentially a classification of movies that share the same characteristics.[32]

Paul Wells expands on the idea of genre and relates this specifically to animation in his book *Animation – Genre and Authorship*. He discusses twelve ways in which a genre can be understood. These ways can be divided in the three following groups: importance of content, overall structure of a film and questions of authorship.[33] Because this analysis focuses on *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, the most important aspects on which genre is based is the importance of content. The other nine ways are not relevant for this research, because they do not focus on the content of genre. Therefore, the three following ways are most relevant for this research:

1. "As a discrete 'category or 'type' of film, which is defined by its visual, technical, thematic or subject-oriented consistencies.

2. As a set of codes and conventions, which determine particular expectations and outcomes in the narrative and the mise-en-scène of a film.

3. As a term predominantly based on the recognition of particular kinds of visual and aural iconography, which serve as the key signifiers of an implied common language shared by the makers of the film and the audience, which in turn defines the cinematic construction of the text".[34]

The first one is important because this analysis will examine the visual and thematic aspects that are specific to animation and recur in *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse.* However, the second one is similar to how Chandler defines a genre based on conventions of a text and relates back to mise-en-scène as defined by Bordwell and Thompson, and Furnisse. The third one is similar to the definition

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[31] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, "Film Genres," in *Film Art*, (New York: McGraw Hill Education, 2015), 331.
[32] Bordwell and Thompson, "Film Genres," 329.
[33] Paul Wells, "Genre in Animation," in *Animation Genre and Authorship*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 43.
[34] Wells, "Genre in Animation," 43.

Bordwell and Thompson give to genre and the expectations filmmakers and the audience has while viewing a film.

The way genre is defined in this research will be a combination of definitions given by the scholars mentioned earlier. Because this research analyses a film that contains several different genres, it will focus on conventions and specific genre-characteristics of these genres.

4. - The four genres in Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse

In the film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, genres of film are presented as their own universes within the overarching universe of the film. There are four distinct genres, each with their distinct aesthetics and narrative conventions that are presented to the viewer. Those genres will be analysed based on their aesthetic conventions and how the film references to these genres. The following genres will be analysed; comics, anime, cartoons and film noir. These genres will be analysed in order to answer the sub-question: Which distinct genres are presented in the film?

4.1 – Comics

The first genre that the audience is presented with is the genre of film based on comics. Stylistically, the main genre present in *Spider-Verse* is based on a comic. Comics are a visual way of telling a story, and it makes use of images to represent characters and the settings they are in.[35] As mentioned in chapter… - animation, *Spider-Verse* is an animated film and also uses images to convey a story to the audience. Therefore, comics are a good genre to use in an animated film, because the concept on which they are based on are almost exactly the same. There are a few stylistic elements that can be found in *Spider-Verse* that are based on the aesthetics of comics.

The first element that can be found in the film are the panels. A page from a comic consists of panels, boxes in which the images and words are presented. These panels are a sequence and represent the basic feature of storytelling in comics.[36] Spider-Verse also makes use of these panels to refer to the comics on which the film is based on. In figure 1, these panels are used to individually highlight these three characters and their actions. In this scene, the panels are also used for comedic effect. The three characters are frozen one by one, in reference to the medium on which it is based on, and the audience is left wondering what is going to happen next.

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[35] Karin Kukkonen, "Novels and Graphic Novels: Adaptations," in *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels*, (Sussex, John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 75.
[36] Karin Kukkonen, "Glossary," in *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels*, (Sussex, John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 174.
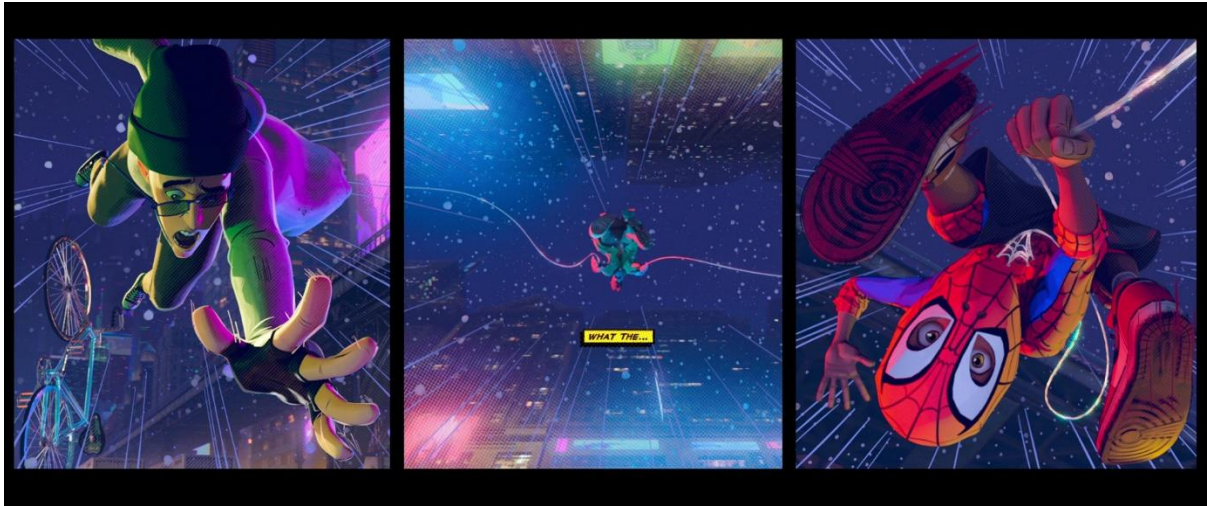
Figure 1 – Panels and speed lines

Figure 1 also presents another aspect of comic aesthetics, specifically the speed lines. Speed lines are comic-specific signs in which it is shown that a character moves through space with a high speed. These speed lines connect the space where the character was and where the character is going now.[37] As is visible in figure 1, these lines are also used in Spider-Verse to suggest movement and indicate how these characters will move from point A to point B.

Another characteristic element of comics are the speech bubbles and the visualised sound effects. In comics, speech bubbles present what a character says through a bubble and a tail that points to the character's mouth.[38] Character's thoughts can also be presented to the audience, but this is usually done through a thought bubble, that is stylised as a cloud and in which the tail changes to little dots.[39] These speech bubbles are also used in *Spider-Verse* (see figure 2).

Figure 2a – "WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?"

Figure 2b – "STOP STICKING!"

Figure 2c – "KEEP STICKING, MILES!"

The visualised sound effects, or onomatopoetic effects, are used in comics to reflect the meaning of a sound such as "wham!" or "bang" (see figure 3). The size and shape of these letters reflect the qualities of these sounds, such as the loudness. [40]

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[37] Kukkonen, "Glossary," 174.
[38] Karin Kukkonen, "What's in a Page: Close-Reading Comics," in *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels*, (Sussex, John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 24-25.
[39] Kukkonen, "Close-Reading Comics," 24-25.
[40] Kukkonen, "Glossary," 174.

Figure 3 – 'bonk!' as onomatopoetic effect

Another aspect of comics that is very distinct is the 'pop-art' style in which the comics are made, also known as half-tone printing. Half-tone printing is the process of colouring in an image using dots.[41] In order to achieve the classic comic look for this film, the creators applied this technique to the film. The half-tone effect is most noticeable at the edges of the screen, where the camera is not focused on (see figure 4). This is done as to not distract from the main actions that are taking place on screen, but the dots and lines are always present to still give the film a sense as if it were a comic book.

Figure 4 – Left corner of the screen is half-tone

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[41] Parul Jain, "Halftone process | printing," Encyclopaedia Britannica, last accessed June 13, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/technology/halftone-process.

4.2 – Anime

The second genre in the film is anime. Anime is often used as a term for Japanese animation so for this analysis, anime will be used to refer to animation that is specifically based on Japanese aesthetics.[42] In *Spider-Verse*, the character Peni Parker and her robot companion SP//dr are stylised in the aesthetics of anime. Therefore, Peni Parker and SP//dr will be analysed on their aesthetics regarding anime. In the style of anime, the way a character's head is stylised is very specific. The head often appears too large in comparison to its body. This is due to the neck of the character being extremely thin and the facial features that are displaced, which creates the illusion of a larger

Figure 5a – Peni Parker and SP//dr

Figure 5b – Miles Morales

head.[43] This is visible in Peni. In figure 5a, a medium long shot of Peni shows her body from the knees upwards. In this shot, her neck is barely visible, and her head seems as broad as her shoulders. When compared to another character, such as Miles, her head seems bigger on her body than Miles' head does on his. (see figure 5b)

Not only does Peni have a seemingly large head, her facial features also belong to the style of anime. The eyes of a Japanese anime character are very distinct and can be described as "larger … than normal, with rounded shape and devoid of actual details" and both the mouth and nose are minimally visible.[44] In figure 6, Peni's facial features can be seen up-close. Her eyes are very big, compared to the rest of her face. Her mouth is also large, but her nose is simply a line with shading to create the idea of a nose. All these aesthetic features in her character design can confirm that the

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[42] Antonio Horno-López, "The particular visual language of anime: Design, colour and selection of resources," in *Animation Practice, Process & Production,* vol. 5 (2015): 40, https://doi: 10.1386/ap3.5.39_1.

[43] Horno-López, "The particular visual language of anime", 41.

[44] Horno-López, "The particular visual language of anime", 41.

genre in which Peni is stylised is anime. However, there are other aspects visible in Peni's character that are based on aesthetic conventions from anime.

Figure 6 – Peni Parker

Peni's facial expressions and some other gestures she makes are also specific to anime. In anime, facial expressions and gestures have their own symbols with a special meaning. A sweat droplet conveys stress, worry or shame, while a huge red vein expresses anger or frustration.[45] Anime can be seen as a visual language that is easy to interpret because of the meanings that are linked to specific symbols.[46] Peni also expresses emotions through these expressions and gestures. Appendix 2 shot 19 shows her normal expression, but throughout the scene this expression changes in accordance to what she feels. One example of this is visible in shot 46 (appendix 2), the little white dots that are visible in her eyes change into little diamonds. This was done in order to portrays Peni's excitement and determination to save the other Spider-People. Later in the scene, both Peni and SP//dr can be seen with a big, red vein on their heads (figure 7). As mentioned earlier, a vein expresses anger or frustration. These examples show that the emotions Peni experiences are primarily conveyed through her facial expressions and symbols such as the red vein.

As mentioned earlier, the soundtrack in animation can also play a role in conveying aspects the creators want to emphasise. In Peni's case, her soundtrack is present when she takes centre stage during a scene. In scene 9, during her introduction the music changes to a faster pace (see appendix 2, shot 8 to 10). Any time after that when the scene focusses on her, the soundtrack receives another layer of music, with techno-undertones (see appendix 2, shot 27 to 31 and appendix 3, shot 1 to 11 and shot 36 to 43). In addition to the music that accompanies her character, she also speaks Japanese when first introduced (see appendix 2, shot 9). The Japanese is a reference to that country, because that is where the genre anime originates from.

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[45] Horno-López, "The particular visual language of anime", 44.
[46] Horno-López, "The particular visual language of anime", 44.

Figure 7 – Big red veins to express anger

During the fight in scene 12, Peni and SP//dr team up in a sequence that is reminiscent of a magical girl transformation sequence. A sub-genre in anime that is well-known is the magical girl-genre, or 'shojo' genre. In these genres, girls accidentally acquire magical powers and use these powers to transform from their normal selves into a warrior.[47] In scene 12, Peni has a similar transformation sequence. In the shots 36 to 43 (appendix 3) the audience can see how Peni 'transforms' and elegantly jumps into her robot, SP//dr. In shots 38 to 41 (appendix 3), the background and sound changes, and Peni is surrounded by vivid colours while she jumps into the air. In magical girl transformations, "disintegration of space paired with the expansion of time is a major characteristic".[48] The sequence in itself is not very relevant to narrative of the rest of the scene, but it does highlight the roots of the world where which Peni is from, which is the genre of anime.

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[47] Kumiko Saito, "Magic, Shōjo, and metamorphosis: Magical girl anime and the challenges of changing gender identities in Japanese society," in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 73, No. 1, (February 2014), 145.
[48] Saito, Magic, Shōjo, and metamorphosis," 154.

4.3 - Cartoon

The next genre that is present in *Spider-Verse* is that of cartoons. This genre is embodied by the character Peter Porker, also known as Spider-Ham. The genre of cartoons is known for their surrealness in which animals with extravagant personalities end up in bizarre situations.[49] In *Spider-Verse*, Spider-Ham's whole backstory is a bizarre situation. He is a spider that was bitten by a radioactive pig, which transformed him into Spider-Ham (see appendix 2, shot 21).

Spider-Ham has a classical cartoon look to him. This is mainly because he was based on the Warner Brothers' Looney Tunes characters when he first was introduced in 1983.[50] However, his character design is not the only thing that is a reference to the Warner Brothers. When Spider-Ham is first introduced, his introduction shot is reminiscent of the title pages seen at the beginning of Looney Tunes cartoons (see figure 8).

Figure 8a – The title card from Looney Tunes

Figure 8b – Title card from Spider-Ham's introduction

Spider-Ham's last line in the film is also a reference to the Looney Tunes. In appendix 4, shot 106, Spider-Ham says, "That's all folks." and exits the scene. This is a reference to Porky Pig, a Warner Brother's character that was known for ending his cartoons with this line.[51]

All these references suggest that Spider-Ham is based on the cartoons created by the Warner Brothers. Other aspects that originate from this genre of cartoons are a comedic narrative in which the dialogue is stressed, there are boneless characters and the use of visual jokes.[52]

Spider-Ham's dialogue and actions are mostly comedic in nature. This becomes apparent in the stress on dialogue, when analysing most of his lines. Most of the times, when he says something it is a joke, or implied to be a joke. This can be seen in appendix 2, shots 12 and 13, where he says "It CAN get weirder. I just washed my hands, that's why they're wet. No other reason". Due to the way he phrases this, there could be a different reason as to why his hands are wet and it encourages the

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[49] Paul Wells, "Smarter Than the Average Art Form," in *Prime Time Animation,* ed. Carol Stabile and Mark Harrison, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 21, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[50] Ramin Zahed, "Spider Team Suit Up," in *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse: The Art of the Movie*, (London: Titan Books, 2018), 118.
[51] Looney Tunes Wiki, "That's all Folks," Looney Tunes Wiki, last accessed June 13, 2019, https://looneytunes.fandom.com/wiki/That%27s_all_Folks.
[52] Wells, "Smarter Than the Average Art Form," 19.

audience to think about this. Other times, lines he says are in reference to the genre he originates from "You got a problem with cartoons?" (see appendix 4, shots 75 and 76). He is aware that he is a cartoon, and references to this several times.

Boneless characters are a common trope in cartoons.[53] Spider-Ham also portrays this characteristic. In appendix 2, shot 92 Spider-Ham hits his own head with his hands, and it pulsates through his head. In this shot, it appears as if Spider-Ham does not have a skull, which makes it possible for him to hit his own head and have his head react as if it was made from rubber.

Lastly, visual jokes also aid in the comedic nature of this character. Spider-Ham makes use of some common tropes that are known in cartoons. Examples of this are the use of an anvil during battle (appendix 4, shots 72 to 74) or when he pulls a big hammer out of his pocket that will allegedly fit in Miles' pocket (appendix 4, shots 76 and 103 to 105). These moments can take place because Spider-Ham follows the rules of his own universe.[54]

His cartoon origins are not only visible in his comedy, but also in the way he is stylised as a character. The colours used for Spider-Ham are brighter than the rest of the characters. This was done to emphasise that Spider-Ham does not come from a dark and depressing world, such as Spider-Man Noir. Spider-Ham is the main comedic relief in the group of Spider-People, so his colours match his comedic personality.

Not only his character design fits the comedic aspect of cartoon, the soundtrack that plays when he is first introduced is reminiscent of circus-music. It is very upbeat and has a quick tempo compared to the soundtracks of the other characters. His character also has the most sound-effects, as his actions are emphasised through these sound-effects (see appendix 2, shot 13, 20 and 42).

4.4 - Film Noir

The last genre that can be distinguished in *Spider-Verse* is film noir. Some scholars argue that film noir is not necessarily a genre but rather a style of film.[55] However, because of the way in which genre is defined in chapter 3, this research can argue that film noir can be classified as a genre. This can be argued because the genre consists of aesthetic and narrative conventions. Spider-Verse refers to these conventions with the character of Spider-Man Noir.[56]

As a genre, film noir has both aesthetic and narrative conventions, and the character Spider-Man Noir is based on these conventions. The name of the genre can be translated to black film, and this name is a good description of the visual aesthetics that are mainly present in these films.[57]

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[53] Norman M. Klein, "The Advantages of Being Boneless and Incomplete," in *Seven minutes : the life and death of the American animated cartoon*, (London: Verso ,1993), 172.
[54] Zahed, "Spider Team Suit Up," 118.
[55] Frank Krutnik, "Introduction," in *In a Lonely Street*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 9, ProQuest Ebook Central,
[56] Zahed, "Spider Team Suit Up," 126.
[57] William Luhr, "Critical Overview," in *Film Noir*, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 50, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Spider-Man Noir is the only character in the movie that is in black and white, as a homage to the film noir world from which he originates (see figure 9). During his introduction, the other characters remark his black and white visuals (see appendix 2, shot 6). In appendix 3, shot 12 the filmmakers again reference that Spider-Man Noir is from a world that consists only of black and white, as he is seen examining a Rubik's cube (see figure 10).

Figure 9 – Spider-Man Noir in black and white

Figure 10 – Spider-Man Noir exploring a Rubik's Cube

The central character in film noir is known for portraying feelings of entrapment, moral failures and anxieties, and they express these feelings through a retrospective voice-over.[58] Spider-Man Noir portrays these characteristics as well. In his first introduction (see appendix 2, shot 5 and 7) his cape is blowing in the wind, but the scene is located in a basement. Later in the same scene, he is seen burning a match while his retrospective voice-over says "Sometimes I let matches burn down to my fingertips just to feel something. Anything." (appendix 2, shot 32 and 33). In the same scene, he also confronts Miles and says "Can you close off your feelings so you don't get crippled by the moral ambiguity of your violent actions?" (appendix 2, shot 84). In these sentences, the filmmakers give the audience a glimpse of the feelings of anxieties and moral failures that Spider-Man Noir feels. Usually, a femme fatale joins the central character in his story.[59] In appendix 2, shot 24 Spider-Man Noir can be seen protecting a woman from shots fired from an unseen enemy. This is a reference to the femme fatale that is usually found in film noir but is not present in this film.

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[58] William Luhr, "Historical Overview," in *Film Noir*, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 28, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[59] Luhr, "Historical Overview," 28.

Not only visual aspects, but also narrative aspects from film noir can be found in the character of Spider-Man Noir. Film noir as a genre originated between the 1930s and 1940s, during WWII and the aftermath of it.[60] Most film noir films from that period were based on hardboiled crime-fiction, in which the main characters were usually detectives or private eyes.[61] During his introduction in scene 9 (appendix 2), Spider-Man Noir presents the audience with information that he is from a universe set in 1933 (during WWII) and in it he is a private eye. These characteristics are based on the origins of film noir.

Spider-Man Noir's soundtrack is, like the rest of the characters that represent their own genre, unique to his character. When Spider-Man Noir is introduced, he is accompanied by tense music with sounds from brass instruments. This creates an old-timey feeling and is in contrast with the music used for Peni and SP//dr, and Spider-Ham. Throughout his introduction (appendix 2, shot 22 to 26 and 32 to 33), the music sounds heavier compared to the usual soundtrack. This emphasises the dark environment from which Spider-Noir originates and his own cynicism and anxieties.

The dialogue from Spider-Man Noir is also a reference to the 1930s and 1940s. He has various lines in which old-timey phrases are used, such as the phrase "Show me some moxie, soldier" (see appendix 2, shot 94). The onomatopoetic effects that are used for his character are also references to his old-timey origins (see figure 11, and appendix 4, shot 61 to 62).

Figure 11 – Old-timey version of an onomatopoetic effect "APPLESAUCE"

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[60] Luhr, "Historical Overview," 20-21.
[61] Luhr, "Historical Overview," 48.

5. - Intermediality and playfulness in *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*

The goal of this chapter is to critically reflect on the analysis and link the analysis of the genres to intermediality and playfulness. First, intermediality, and specifically intermedial references, will be explained based on literature from Irina Rajewsky. After this, playfulness based on the notion of Miguel Sicart and Nina Lieberman will be explored and at the end of the chapter, these two concepts will be used to critically reflect on the analysis of the four genres.

5.1 – Intermediality - Intermedial references

Irina Rajewsky discusses the concepts of intermediality and remediation and according to her, there are three subgroups in which intermediality can be categorised. These are medial transposition, media combination and intermedial references.[62] The latter is the most relevant for this research. Intermedial references can be present in media objects and can "thematize, evoke or imitate elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means".[63] Rajewsky specifies that only one distinct medium is present with its own materiality, and the intermedial aspect of this category is the reference itself, which references to a different medium that has its own materiality and medium-specificity.[64] Intermedial references are relevant for this analysis, because references are made to other genres within the medium of the animated film. The distinct genres that are visible in S*pider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* have their own medium-specific conventions and means.

Rajewsky also discusses the concept of remediation in relation to intermedial references. She bases her definition of intermediality on the concept remediation that is given by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin in their book. Bolter and Grusin define remediation as digital media borrowing a property or element from older media without acknowledging this.[65] However, they later state that remediation can happen in both directions and can be aggressive in so far as making the audience aware of the individual properties in their new settings. In that case, audiences would be aware of the remediation of the properties.

5.2 - Playfulness

In his book *Play Matters*, Miguel Sicart discusses the concepts play and playfulness relating to digital media. He describes play as an activity, and playfulness as an attitude. Playfulness is having the

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[62] Irina O. Rajewsky, "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation," in *Remédier,* Number 6, (Fall, 2005): 51-52, https://doi.org/10.7202/1005505ar.org.
[63] Rajewsky, "Intermediality", 53.
[64] Rajewsky, "Intermediality", 59.
[65] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, "Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation," in *Remediation*, (USA: The MIT Press, 1998), 45.

attitude of play without the activity and outside the context of play.[66] Sicart expands on this and describes playfulness as "projecting some of the characteristics of play onto non-play activities".[67] Based on this definition, playfulness can be found outside the activity of playing and games, for example in media such as film.

The first to describe playfulness was Nina Lieberman in her research on young children. In it, she identified five components of playfulness: cognitive spontaneity, social spontaneity, physical spontaneity, manifest joy and sense of humour.[68] She measured these five components based on the way in which the children played. The sense of humour is the component of playfulness that is most relevant for this research. The creators of *Spider-Verse* make use of playfulness to play with the knowledge the audience has about the four genres that are presented.

5.3 – Critical reflection of intermediality and playfulness in *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*

The previous chapters have all set out to define how animation and genre are defined in the context of *Spider-Verse*. Each genre was analysed based on its characterising aesthetics and conventions. In this chapter, aspects from each genre will be analysed in relation to the concept of intermedial references, in order to demonstrate how playfulness is present in the film's referencing to other genres. This chapter therefore aims to answer the last sub-question: How do the different genres in *Spider-Verse* demonstrate playfulness in their intermedial references*?*

5.3a - Comics

Comics is the overarching genre of the film, and it is the genre that Rajewsky states is present with its own materiality.[69] The genre's materiality can be summarised as the characteristics of the panels, speed lines, speech bubbles, the onomatopoetic effects and the halftone colours.[70] The rest of the genres are referenced to within these characteristics. Each genre has their own distinct characteristics, but they copy effects from the overarching genre, which is comics.
An example of one of these effects represented in the other genres is the halftone colouring. In figure 12, all the Spider-People are lined up, and in this shot every character has parts where their colours seem like they were printed through halftone printing. This shows that all the characters were made in the same materiality of the overarching genre.

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[66] Miguel Sicart, "Playfulness," in *Play Matters*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts. London: The MIT Press, 2014), 21.
[67] Sicart, *Play Matters,* 22.
[68] J. Nina Lieberman, "Playfulness in Play and the Player, "in *Playfulness: Its Relationship to Imagination and Creativity*, (New York: Academic Press, INC, 1977), 29.
[69] Rajewsky, "Intermediality", 53.
[70] Kukkonen, "Glossary," 174.

Figure 12 – All Spider-People have the halftone effect in their design

5.3b - Anime

With this genre, *Spider-Verse* played with the way in which the origins of anime were presented to the viewer. Anime originates from Japan and the creators subtly incorporated this into the way Peni was presented in the film.[71] In her first introduction, Peni speaks Japanese and later on in the movie, a sequence in which she jumps into her robot is reminiscent of the magical girl transformation sequence. It can be compared to the transformation of Sailor Moon, a popular shojo anime in Japan (see figure 13).[72] These intermedial references to the genre of anime play into the knowledge the audience might have about the genre. These aspects of Peni's personality become interesting once someone has enough background knowledge about the genre.

Figure 13a – Peni Parker looks like a magical girl in this shot

Figure 13b – Sailor Moon – transformation sequence

5.3c - Cartoon

Within the genre of cartoon, the filmmakers play with the knowledge the audience might have about the Looney Tunes. One specific example in which the intermedial reference plays with the knowledge of the audience is the line Spider-Ham says before he exits the movie; "That's all folks."

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[71] Horno-López, "The particular visual language of anime", 40.
[72] Saito, Magic, Shōjo, and metamorphosis," 154.

(see appendix 4, shot 106). If the audience had watched a lot of cartoons, they might have picked up on that reference. To make the reference even more obvious, Peter Parker's line in the next shot is "Is he allowed to say that, legally?" (see appendix 4, shot 107). This line emphasises that Spider-Ham's exit was a reference to the well-known sign-off from Porky Pig.[73]

5.3d - Film Noir

Spider-Man Noir is the only character throughout the movie that is black and white, and during his introduction everything else is in black and white. There is an intermedial reference to the genre of film noir, that is known for being black and white.[74] But the filmmakers play with the black and white of film noir in a later scene. In scene 12 (see appendix 3, shot 12) Spider-Man Noir is seen playing with a Rubik's cube while figuring out what the names of the colours are. Here, the filmmakers create a joke out of the intermedial reference to the genre of film noir. Later, during the exit of Spider-Man Noir this joke is referenced back to, as he says "I'm taking this cube thing with me. I don't understand it. But I will." (see appendix 4, shot 101).

Figure 14 – Spider-Man Noir back in his black and white universe, accompanied by the Rubik's Cube

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[73] Looney Tunes Wiki, "That's all Folks."
[74] Luhr, "Critical Overview," 50.

6. – Conclusion

In this research an attempt was made to analyse how playfulness can be used in intermedial references in order to refer to other genres of animation. This was done through a textual analysis of the film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, in which the different genres and their characteristics were highlighted in order to understand the intermedial references and how playfulness was related to this. In order to understand how the characteristics of these genres presented themselves in the film, a shot list protocol was used to analyse three different scenes from the film and images from the film were used as examples to support the analysis.

First, in order to understand the significance of the various genres in *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, it had to be classified as a CGI-animated film with hand-drawn elements. The film uses various animation-techniques to create a unique style of animated film. In addition to that, the film is also unique in the way that it incorporates different genres and lets these genres interact with each other. In the analysis, four different genres were distinguished in *Spider-Verse*; comics, anime, cartoons and film noir.

The genre of comics was the overarching style in which the whole movie was stylised, and the other three genres were embodied by three different characters. Peni Parker and SP//dr embodied the genre of anime, which was visible in the way these characters were designed and the expressions and gestures they used to convey emotion. Spider-Ham represented the genre of cartoons and this was noticeable in the comedy this character brought to the film. Spider-Man Noir embodied the genre of film noir, both in his character design as in his personality. He was the only character not in colour, fitting for the genre which he originated from.

Not only were the genres referenced to in the film, the film portrayed playfulness in the way the intermedial references were made to these genres. The references to these genres were made to provide the audience with a clear understanding of where these characters came from. But ultimately, the intermedial references created a playful way in which the filmmakers could incorporate jokes and play off of the prior knowledge the audience might or might not have about these specific genres.

In this analysis the focus was mainly put on the different genres that were presented in *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* and their conventions and characteristics. However, there is a lot more to be said about the way in which the film plays into the background knowledge the audience has about the phenomenon Spider-Man. In order to explore this more, a textual analysis of the narrative and the transmedial aspects of the film could provide more insight into what significance *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* has on the broader understanding of the superhero Spider-Man

and the multi-verse in which he lives. In this research, the conventions of four different genres were outlined and analysed in the case study of *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse.* This helped to provide an insight into distinctly, different genres can be mixed into one film in which they have the possibility to interact with each other.

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7.1 Images

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