CREATING TRANSNATIONAL SUPERHEROES

The adaptation of American superhero
comics in Finland in the late twentieth century

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ABSTRACT

Superheroes are an American popular culture phenomenon that has spread across the globe. Superhero narratives are told in comics, film and TV, as well as in games and various fan-produced materials. In addition to superheroes having spread across different media, they are also published in different parts of the world in several languages, including Finnish. As comics are translated, they are also changed in many other ways as they cross cultural and national borders. In this dissertation, I argue that these changes can be described as transnational adaptation. I understand adaptation as a creative interpretation of and engagement with the work being adapted.

Using concepts and methods from adaptation studies, comics studies, fan studies and transmedia studies, this study analyses different aspects of transnational adaptation in four peer-reviewed research articles. The research material consists of the 1980–1995 volumes of the *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* comic books, the 1966–1969 volumes of the Finnish *Batman* comic book and an advertising campaign for a Finnish Batman soft drink (1967). In Article 1, I find and name the practices of adaptation used by the Finnish editor of *Ryhmä-X* and *Hämähäkkimies* in the 1980s and 1990s. Finding the practices lays the groundwork for the whole thesis, as it shows the local editor's agency in shaping the comic books for the new Finnish audience. In Article 2, I focus on the comic books' letters pages, where the local editor's different roles in the adaptation process become evident. I argue that the editor Mail-Man acted as a gatekeeper of Marvel's comics in Finland, simultaneously guiding and educating the Finnish readers in fannish activity. Through an analysis of the letters pages, I show how adaptation continues also in the paratextual elements of the comics.

This shows both in the analysis of the letters pages, and in the third article's analysis of how the comic book event 'Fatal Attractions' (1993) was adapted in Finland. The comic book event is a specific publication format typical of the superhero genre in the USA, where stories span over several comic book titles and issues. The Finnish adaptation differs noticeably from the original both in content and in form, as the publishing context in Finland is very different to that in the USA. Finally, in the fourth article I analyse drawings published on the letters pages of *Batman* and an advertising campaign for the Batman soft drink as adaptations of the

character. This case study focused on Batmania in Finland in the 1960s shows how local adaptations expand the transmedia universe of superhero characters.

Building on my discovery of the adaptation practices, the major contribution of this dissertation is that it shows how the entire comic book can been seen as an adaptation, instead of only focusing on the stories as adaptations. My research shows, on the one hand, the significant role of local agents in transnational comics publishing, and on the other hand, the importance of audiences in the adaptation process of superhero comics. My findings regarding how the letters pages became an integral part of the adaptation when the editor used them for facilitating the reading experience and filling in gaps in the stories expand the scope of adaptation studies.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Supersankarit ovat amerikkalainen populaarikulttuurin ilmiö, joka on levinnyt ympäri maailmaa. Supersankaritarinoita kerrotaan sarjakuvissa, elokuvissa ja TV:ssä sekä peleissä ja erilaisissa fanien tuottamissa materiaaleissa. Sen lisäksi, että supersankarit ovat levittäytyneet eri media-alustoille, supersankarikertomuksia julkaistaan useilla kielillä, myös suomeksi. Kun sarjakuvia käännetään, niitä muutetaan monilla muillakin tavoilla niiden ylittäessä kulttuurisia ja kansallisia rajoja. Väitöskirjassani esitän, että nämä muutokset ovat ylirajaista adaptaatiota. Tutkimuksessani adaptaatio merkitsee kohteena olevan tekstin luovaa tulkintaa ja vuorovaikutusta tekstin kanssa.

Tutkimus hyödyntää adaptaatiotutkimuksen, sarjakuvatutkimuksen, fani-tutkimuksen ja transmediatutkimuksen käsitteitä ja menetelmiä, ja se tarkastelee ylirajaista adaptaatiota eri näkökulmista neljässä vertaisarvioidussa tutkimusartikkelissa. Tutkimusaineisto koostuu *Hämähäkkimies-* ja *Ryhmä-X* -sarjakuvalehtien vuosikerroista 1980–1995, suomalaisen *Batman*-sarjakuvalehden vuosikerroista 1966–1968 sekä suomalaisen Batman-virvoitusjuoman mainoskampanjasta (1967). Artikkelissa 1 esittelen ja nimeän adaptaatiokäytännöt, joita *Ryhmä-X*:n ja *Hämähäkkimiehen* suomalainen toimittaja käytti 1980- ja 1990 -luvuilla. Käytäntöjen löytäminen luo pohjan koko tutkimukselle, sillä paikallisen toimittajan toimijuus tulee esiin valinnoissa, joita hän teki muokatessaan sarjakuvia suomalaiselle yleisölle. Artikkelissa 2 keskityn sarjakuvien lukijapalstoihin, joissa paikallisen toimittajan erilaiset roolit adaptaatioprosessissa tulevat esiin. Toimittaja Mail-Man toimi Marvelin sarjakuvien portinvartijana Suomessa, samalla opastaen suomalaisia lukijoita fanitoiminnassa. Kirjepalstojen analyysin avulla näytän, kuinka adaptaatio jatkuu myös sarjakuvien paratekstuaalisissa elementeissä.

Tämä näkyy sekä kirjepalstojen analyysissa, että Artikkelin 3 analyysissa siitä, miten 'Fatal Attractions' -sarjakuvatapahtuma (1993) adaptoitiin Suomessa. Sarjakuvatapahtuma on erityinen julkaisumuoto, joka on tyypillinen yhdysvaltalaisessa supersankarigenressä, missä tarinat ulottuvat useiden sarjakuvalehtien ja numeroiden yli. Suomalainen adaptaatio eroaa huomattavasti

alkuperäisestä sekä sisällöltään että muodoltaan, sillä Suomen julkaisukonteksti poikkeaa yhdysvaltalaisesta. Artikkelissa 4 analysoin *Batman*-sarjakuvalehden kirjepalstalla julkaistuja piirroksia ja Batman-virvoitusjuoman mainoskampanjaa Batmanin hahmon adaptaatioina. Tämä 1960-luvun Batmaniaan Suomessa keskittynyt tapaustutkimus osoittaa, kuinka paikalliset adaptaatiot laajentavat supersankarihahmojen transmediauniversumia.

Tämän väitöskirjan tärkein panos on se, että se osoittaa, kuinka koko sarjakuvalehti voidaan nähdä adaptaationa sen sijaan, että keskityttäisiin ainoastaan tarinoiden adaptaatioon. Tutkimuksessani korostuu yhtäältä paikallisten toimijoiden merkittävä rooli ylirajaisessa sarjakuvajulkaisemisessa, ja toisaalta yleisöjen merkitys supersankarisarjakuvien adaptaatiossa. Väitöskirjani laajentaa adaptaatiotutkimuksen kenttää osoittamalla, kuinka tärkeään rooliin sarjakuvalehtien kirjepalstat nousivat lehtien toimittajan käyttäessä niitä tarinoiden aukkojen täyttämiseen ja lukukokemuksen helpottamiseen.

ASIASANAT: Supersankarit, sarjakuva, fanitutkimus, populaarikulttuuri, adaptaatio, transmedia, käännöstutkimus

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List of original publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications. Please cite the original place of publication when referring to them.

I   Antola, Laura. 'Strategies of adaptation in the Finnish publications of Marvel's superhero comics.' *Journal of Popular Culture,* 2019; 52(3): 703–724. DOI: 10.1111/jpcu.12799

II   Antola, Laura. '"It is nice that you want to improve this comic book together with us." The letters page's significance in the transnational adaptation of Marvel comics in Finland.' *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 2020; 17(1): 29–46.

III Antola, Laura. 'Transnational adaptation of comic book events: The case of adapting "Fatal Attractions".' *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 2022; 13(2): 241–254. DOI: 10.1080/21504857.2021.1888762.

IV   Antola, Laura. 'Holy Transmedia! – The many faces of Batman in 1960s Finland.' *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/10304312.2024.2340009

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1   Introduction

Superhero comics have spread across the world, and the most famous characters and their stories have been told in several media, in several languages and in several formats throughout the years. As the comics cross national and cultural borders, they are changed in different ways for each audience, and in this thesis, I argue that these changes can be described as transnational adaptation. Adaptation is a creative process, an interpretation of and engagement with the work being adapted. Adaptations are usually understood as versions of existing works, and whether they are films, videogames or toys, the idea of adaptation often entails a shift from one medium to another. The change in medium is not necessary, however, as new versions of existing TV shows and films are frequently made. Even without a shift between media, adaptation is a creative engagement with the adapted work. Thus, I investigate translated superhero comics, drawings made by their readers and an advertising campaign featuring superhero characters as transnational adaptations. My research shows that the transnational adaptation of comics includes changes to the stories and the domestication of the translation, as well as altering the publication format.

Superheroes are franchised products that exist in many different forms simultaneously. Today, the two biggest publishers, Marvel and DC, focus increasingly on producing films, television or streaming series, games, toys and other products based on the famous comics' characters in their ownership, making adaptations the core of their multi-billion dollar business (Varis 2016, 275–276; Robinson, Gonzales & Edwards 2023). For example, the comics section of Marvel's website features curated 'reading lists' from the immense material available on their platform. Each one of the suggested titles features a superhero or a team of heroes who have appeared in audio-visual media or are scheduled to do so. With more than 5000 comic characters in their roster, the company chooses to highlight those that are already familiar from other media and thus those that already have appeal to the public (Marvel: Discover). Films, series, merchandise and games further inspire a variety of fan-made adaptations in different formats, such as art, videos and cosplay (see, e.g. Burke 2021). The increasing number of adaptations in our current media landscape is one reason why adaptation studies could be more widely utilised as a

methodological point of departure in media studies, as Liam Burke points out. According to Burke, adaptation studies is useful to all analyses of popular culture because it examines the relationships between texts. With its comparative methodology, adaptation studies is well suited for unpacking popular culture, which is often filled with intertextuality. (ibid., 3.)

In this thesis, I investigate how American superheroes were adapted for the Finnish audience in the latter part of the twentieth century. I argue that as the comics were translated, they were also adapted as they crossed cultural and national borders, which is why I study the Finnish versions as adaptations of the original American comic books and characters. Chronologically, my study starts from 1966, when Finland was taken over by Batmania when *Batman* made its debut on Finnish television. The show and a similarly titled comic book inspired new interpretations and adaptations in Finland. As adaptations of the character, I investigate the readers' drawings, published in the *Batman* comic book, as well as a marketing campaign for a Batman soft drink. Concepts and methods from adaptation studies and transmedia studies help me to conceptualise the local adaptations as part of a transnational and transmedial phenomenon. After the 1960s, interest in superheroes was scarce in Finland until 1980, when *Hämähäkkimies*, the Finnish *Spider-Man* comic book, was launched. In this study, I investigate the 1980–1995 volumes of *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* (the Finnish *Uncanny X-Men,* which followed the publication of *Hämähäkkimies* in 1984), as adaptations of the original American comic books. I use concepts and methods from adaptation studies, comics studies, fan studies and transmedia studies to analyse them, showing that the Finnish editor used different adaptation strategies – such as localising pop culture references, shortening stories or even adding pages – to create local versions of the American originals.

In Articles 1–3, I study the *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* comic books in their entirety instead of only focusing on stories and their elements. Thus, my research material includes the letters pages, an integral part of the superhero comic book. I show how the editor's notes and the readers' letters contribute to conveying the story and character development to the audience, as well as serving as a site for engaging with other readers and their interpretations. In Article 4, a study of Batmania in Finland, the advertisements in the research material contribute to the building of Batman as a transmedia character and thus participate in the formation of different interpretations of superheroes. The various types of research material contribute to my understanding of the Finnish superhero publications as adaptations because they allow me to study the transnational publication practices from different angles.

At the beginning of my research process, I was interested in the connection between superhero comics and films, and 'the real world'. I wanted to examine how superhero narratives highlight individualism and neoliberal ideals, ranging from the content of the storylines to the free labour done by fans. While doing research for

what was to be my first article, I realised that while common themes from the American comics had been omitted from the Finnish translations of *Spider-Man* and *X-Men*, there were many other differences and omissions as well. Moreover, it was not even clear where all of the comics in my Finnish research material were originally published as the information I found from an otherwise very useful database, *Marvel-lehdet Suomessa* (n.d.), did not seem to match completely. From a 2020s perspective, where large media corporations such as Marvel and DC guard their intellectual property tightly and have recently even instructed that the names of their superheroes should be left untranslated in foreign markets, this seemed peculiar. I wanted to take a closer look at Finnish superhero publications to better understand the omissions and other differences between the Finnish comic books and the American ones.

This thesis expands the existing understanding of comics adaptations and contributes to ongoing discussions about the relationship between translation and adaptation. My main finding is that the transnational versions of superheroes and their narratives are adaptations that are constructed through different practices, which helps to understand how transnational popular culture is produced in a complex network of people working in different stages of the process. Despite being global products of popular culture and retaining certain essential characteristics throughout the many versions published across different media, superhero comics are adapted in local production processes, and local agents had the power to shape how superheroes reached the Finnish audience in the second half of the twentieth century. Superhero comics have not been studied from this perspective before, and in my research, I show the practices or strategies that the Finnish editor has used to adapt the comic books, how the editor's choices affect the storytelling of the comics and the importance of fan engagement and the letters pages for superhero adaptations. The superhero comic books published in Finland in the 1980s and 1990s were altered in many other ways besides translation of the natural language, which indicates that the local publisher had some freedom to operate. Similarly, the 1960s advertising campaign investigated in Article 4 shows how the character of Batman was made into a national version. By focusing on the period between the 1960s and 1990s, I shed light on the history of transnational comics publishing in Finland.

David Roche, Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot and Benoît Mitaine (2018, 4) describe the field of comics studies as dominated by a semiotic or formalist approach, on the one hand, and an approach drawing from cultural studies, on the other. Works such as *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers* (Pustz 1999), *The Comic Book Film Adaptation: Exploring Modern Hollywood's Leading Genre* (Burke 2015), *Manga in America: Transnational Book Publishing and the Domestication of Japanese Comics* (Brienza 2016) and *Comics as a Nexus of Cultures: Essays on the Interplay of Media, Disciplines and International Perspectives* (Berninger, Ecke &

Haberkorn 2010) serve as models of the cultural studies tradition within comics studies. These books and authors examine comics as products that exist in media culture, saturated by different kinds of audiences, intertextuality and interpretations. An orientation towards cultural studies also means a critical approach to culture, society and audiences. Instead of focusing on a detailed analysis of the language of comics from a semiotic point of view, Pustz, Burke, Brienza, Karin Kukkonen and Anja Müller-Wood (2010) study comics and their meaning as a part of national, international and transnational cultures, communities and narratives. My research contributes to these discussions as I examine the adaptation practices of Marvel comics in Finland.

In Finnish comics research, comics have been analysed from a transnational point of view in, for example, dissertations regarding the translation of Disney comics (Toivonen 2001) and the specificities of the 1950s so-called comics panic in Finland (Kauranen 2008). Finnish comics scholars participate actively in global and local discussions on different topics related to comics, and several dissertations about comics are forthcoming. Superhero comics have been researched in Finland by, for example, Mervi Miettinen in her dissertation about geopolitical tensions in superhero comics (Miettinen 2012) and by Oskari Rantala in his research on the narrative structures of Alan Moore's comics (2016, 2020 and 2022). The field of literature studies is the typical home for comics scholars, but research is also conducted in sociology, art history and media studies. In addition to academic writing, there is a strong tradition of non-academic fannish writing about comics in Finland. Timo Ronkainen, a comics artist and graphic designer himself, has written several volumes about comics in Finland from a historical perspective. He has focused on the history of translated comics in Finland, such as Disney comics, Tintin and other Belgian comics, and older comics characters such as Rodolphe Töpffer's Monsieur Cryptogame.

This article-based dissertation is composed of a summary section and four peer-reviewed research articles. The summary section presents the background and research questions of the thesis, provides a theoretical and methodological framework for my research, outlines each article briefly and presents the main argument and findings of the thesis.

1.1   Research questions

The purpose of this study is to analyse Finnish adaptations of superheroes. With research material from the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s, I ask 'What kinds of practices of transnational adaptation were used to introduce superhero comics in Finland in the second half of the twentieth century?' I approach the practices from different

directions. First, I focus on the practice of selecting stories, making omissions and additions in the adaptation process, and the translation of the natural language. Second, I look at practices of facilitating the reading experience through the use of paratexts, such as the letters page. Third, I look at adaptation practices on the level of the fans and advertisers as I examine local versions of superheroes made by them. Each research article has a question that helps me to consider the main question from different perspectives. The articles, their questions and research materials are presented in Table 1 below.

The articles approach the main question from different directions, providing several points of entry into the phenomenon of transnational adaptation of comics. As presented in Table 1, I investigate in Article 1 the strategies of adaptation used by the Finnish editor of Marvel comics through a comparative reading of the Finnish and American comic books. In Article 2, I analyse the different roles occupied by the editor of the Finnish comics, including his work as the editor of the letters pages. While Article 1 focuses on the comics' main content, the storyline – selecting stories, omitting and adding material, and domestication of the translation – Article 2 highlights the importance of the letters pages in introducing the new characters, and the Marvel Universe, to the readers. In Article 3, these points of view are combined as I analyse the adaptation of a specific publication format, the comic book event. This article shows how transnational comics publishing is influenced by local cultural and industry traditions and it gives further insight into how the strategies presented in Article 1 were used. While the first three articles focus on comic books published in the 1980s and 1990s, Article 4 offers the perspective of superhero adaptations of the 1960s. In the final article, I expand the view of adaptation to encompass versions made by fans, as well as by marketing professionals. With different versions of Batman blending into each other, the adaptations participate in the building of a transmedia universe.

In my articles that were written at an earlier stage of my research process, I write about strategies of adaptation when discussing the work of the editors of the Finnish comic books. However, in the framework of this whole thesis, I prefer to ask what kinds of practices of adaptation have been used to bring superheroes and superhero comics to Finland. In this context, I understand a practice as a concrete activity at a certain time and place, with certain aims, involving specific knowledge of how and why to perform that activity (Olohan 2020, 15). Practice is more directed towards the actual task of adaptation, what has been done to the comics, and this is why I analyse the adaptation process through the concept of practice. I find that it encompasses the different ways in which fans and other agents that are not involved with the official publisher of the comics also participated in the adaptation. As a more abstract concept, strategy can be used to analyse the practices of adaptation, as I have done in my research articles. The strategies I name and describe in Article 1

are my findings and based on the practices of adaptation I have detected through careful reading of the research material.

Each research article has a specific set of research material and answers its own research question, presented in Table 1 below and in more detail in Section 1.2.

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Table 1 Research articles, questions and research materials

Num-ber	Title	Research question	Methodolog-ical framework	Material	Publication	Contribu-tion
1	Strategies of adapta-tion in the Finnish publications of Marvel's superhero comics	What are the strate-gies of ad-aptation used by the Finnish editor of Marvel comics?	Adaptation studies, comics studies	*Hämähäk-kimies*, vol-umes from 1984, 1990, 1995 (Semic) *Ryhmä-X*, volumes from 1984, 1990, and 1995 (Semic)	*Journal of Popular Culture*	Finding and nam-ing the strategies of adapta-tion used by the Finnish editor
2	'It is nice that you want to im-prove this comic book together with us': The letters page's sig-nificance in the trans-national ad-aptation of Marvel comics in Finland	What is the role of the local editor in the transna-tional ad-aptation process?	Fan studies	*Hämähäk-kimies*, 8/1980 to 5/1983 and 11/1984 to 5/1997 (Semic) *Ryhmä-X*, 1/1984 to 12/1992 and 2/1994 to 8/1996 (Semic)	*Participa-tions: Journal of Audience and Re-ception Studies*	Showing the role of the local editor in establish-ing a fan community and mediating the adap-tation to Finnish readers
3	Transna-tional ad-aptation of comic book events: The case of adapting 'Fatal Attractions'	How are event storylines altered in transna-tional adap-tation?	Adaptation studies, fan studies, comics studies	*X-Factor* #92, *X-Force* #25, *The Uncanny X-Men* #304, *X-Men* #25, *Wolverine* #75, *Excalibur* #71 (Marvel Comics), *Ryhmä-X* 3–5/1995, *Sar-jakuvalehti* 5/1995 (Semic)	*Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*	Building on the re-search for Articles 1 and 2 in order to focus on the pub-lishing format of a comic book event
4	Holy trans-media! The	How are readers	Adaptation studies	Drawings on the		Expanding the scope

| many faces of Batman in 1960s Finland | and advertisers engaged in transnational and transmedial adaptation? | | letters pages of *Batman*, volumes 1966–1969 (Sarja-kustannus Oy), Batman advertisements in *Helsingin Sanomat* 1966–1968, '*Mallasjuoma Batman',* advertisement film (Veikko Laihanen Oy) | | of adaptation to include fan-made material and advertising |

1.2   The research articles

Article 1, titled 'Strategies of adaptation in the Finnish publications of Marvel's superhero comics', analyses the Finnish superhero comic books *Ryhmä-X* and *Hämähäkkimies* as adaptations, new interpretations of the original X-Men and Spider-Man comic books published by Marvel. The research material consists of the *Ryhmä-X* and *Hämähäkkimies* comic books from 1984, 1990 and 1995. The article shows that as the comics are translated, many other aspects besides the so-called natural language are altered. Answering the research question of how Marvel's superhero comic books were adapted into the Finnish media culture in the 1980s and 1990s, I introduce several adaptation strategies used by the editor: the selection of stories for publishing; cutting and pasting (i.e. combining stories, pages and panels from different original sources); and the domestication of the translation. This article lays the groundwork for the whole thesis, introduces the main concepts and establishes the Finnish Marvel comic books as adaptations.

Article 2, titled '"It is nice that you want to improve this comic book together with us": The letters page's significance in the transnational adaptation of Marvel comics in Finland', focuses on the letters pages in comic books. Media products and their fan cultures have become increasingly global, and an analysis of national sites for fannish activity provides new insight into the roles of local agents in transnational adaptation processes. In 1984, the Swedish publishing house Semic acquired the rights to publish all of Marvel's comics in the Nordic countries. The translator and editor of the Finnish Marvel comics, working under the pseudonym Mail-Man,

participated in the making of the publication plans in Finland and the rest of the Nordic countries, in addition to translating and editing the letters pages (Häkkinen 2013; Mander 1997, 5). Mail-Man was a fan of Marvel comics before being hired at Semic and becoming a gatekeeper between Finnish readers and Marvel. The letters pages in both *Ryhmä-X* and *Hämähäkkimies* were sites for legitimising editorial choices and publishing strategies. Emphasising the role of communication between the producers and the consumers, the article broadens the perspective to include the local production process of global media products and establishes the agency of the local editor.

Article 3 continues to explore both the practices of transnational adaptation and the role of the local editor and publishing industry through a case study of a specific form of comic book storytelling and publishing practice. 'Transnational adaptation of comic book events: The case of adapting "Fatal Attractions"' investigates how a particular form of storyline, the comic book event, is altered in the transnational adaptation process. Focusing on the originally six-part event storyline 'Fatal Attractions' and its adaptation in the *Ryhmä-X* comic book, the article demonstrates how storylines and characters are altered as they are published in another cultural setting and another language. The American 'Fatal Attractions' included spectacular features, such as collectable wraparound covers with holograms, and a story that involved all the X-titles. Most of the qualities that made 'Fatal Attractions' an event were lost when it was adapted for the Finnish audience.

Article 4 looks at an earlier superhero adaptation in Finland. The *Batman* TV series produced in the 1960s stirred massive interest globally, and its popularity was referred to as 'Batmania'. Besides being an adaptation of Bob Kane and Bill Finger's *Batman* comics (starting from 1939), it sparked several local adaptations in Finland, including drawings and poems made by its young audience, an advertising campaign for a soft drink and several other commodities beyond the soft drink. The article asks how readers and advertisers are engaged in transnational and transmedial adaptation. It demonstrates how fan-made drawings, a local advertising campaign and two Batmen in different media occupied the same universe and expanded the world inhabited by the character. Analysing the visual material produced by audiences of Batman, as well as advertisements for Batman-related products including the marketing campaign for a Batman soft drink in the 1960s, the article explores how readers and/or fans are engaged in transnational and transmedial adaptation.

2   Background: Superheroes, comic books and the Finnish context

In this chapter, I provide the background for my research and present how previous studies have approached similar materials and themes. Justifying the importance or relevance of comics as a research topic is not necessary in the twenty-first century as comics studies have been established as a field over the past decades. Since I argue in this thesis that adaptation entails the entire comic book instead of only the story told in its pages, I start by defining comic books. The American comic book is a specific publishing format and its transnational adaptation entails several changes related to the number of pages, choice of covers and the placement of advertisements. The history of American superheroes is connected to early comic book publishing, which is why I connect the history of comic books and superheroes to a summary of the current definition for superheroes, before focusing on recent research on the transnational movement of comics. There is recent research on the transnational publishing of comics from different perspectives, such as Romain Becker's (2023) study of a German publisher of translated comics or Martin de la Iglesia's (2023) research on the reception of early manga in the West. My literature review is focused on literature regarding the transnational publishing of superhero comics, as well as Disney comics (Bryan 2021; Ronkainen 2021) and manga (Brienza 2016). Similar qualities can be found in the transnational publishing processes of manga, Disney comics and superhero comics, which is why I present relevant cases from previous research on other genres of comics as background for my research.

Because the topic of my research is specifically the Finnish adaptations of superhero comics, I also present the Finnish context regarding the availability and production of foreign comics. I focus on the superhero genre, as well as on the publication of foreign comics that have been connected to TV series.

2.1 Comic books and superheroes

Superhero comics are distinctly American products of popular culture (Miettinen 2012, 10). The earliest American comic books, before superheroes entered the scene, were collections of newspaper comic strips, such as the *Funnies*, a newspaper supplement started in 1929 (Bryan 2021, 30). Comic books comprised of reprints of comic strips were used for advertising. In the early 1930s, comic books or booklets containing comics could not be purchased separately from the newspaper or commodity they were promoting. In 1934, two crucial steps in continuous comic book publishing were taken. *Famous Funnies*, the first comic book sold on its own, and *New Fun Comics*, the first comic book containing original material instead of reprints, were published (Gordon 1998, 128–131.) In 1938, the first superhero comic book, *Action Comics* #1, came out, featuring the debut of Superman (Bryan 2021, 30).

The American comic book is an established format with a determined place on the shelves of comic book shops, and an established size and number of pages (thirty-two including advertisements) (see, e.g. Rota 2008, 81). The adventures of superheroes have been told in comic books for several decades. A single issue of a superhero comic book rarely features a story that would simply be self-contained, and instead issues often start with a recap of past events or some sort of introduction into the current adventure. While some plot points or conflicts are concluded in each issue, others are left open and a comic book often ends in a cliffhanger. These narrative aspects can also affect the international publishing of superhero comics, as different comics markets function very differently.

As Liam Burke (2019, 1) writes, superheroes are easy to identify but difficult to define. A definition agreed upon by many superhero scholars comes from Peter Coogan and it includes three basic elements: a mission, powers and identity (Coogan 2006, 30). Having a mission means that it is not enough for a superhero to perform a heroic deed once, but instead, they should have a selfless and pro-social mission. A superhero must also have superpowers, which can range from the typical superhuman strength to high intelligence or access to advanced technology. In addition to having a mission and powers, the third defining feature of a superhero is an identity manifested in a codename and costume that usually represent their powers, origin or biography. Although Coogan's definition is well-organised, it still leaves space for questions, particularly regarding the origin of the genre. Some scholars see mythical heroes such as Hercules as superheroes' predecessors, while others cite pulp heroes as their inspiration (Burke 2019, 2). According to Coogan, genre conventions (for example supervillains, urban settings, and advanced technologies) set superheroes apart from characters in related genres, such as pulp adventures and mythical tales (Coogan 2006; Smith 2016, 128). Jason Dittmer (2011) adds narrative to the definition of the superhero. The superhero narrative

begins with an origin story and continues with an everlasting battle against evil in defence of a good community, and it is usually in serialised form (Dittmer 2011, 118). Other researchers have added violence as a defining feature of superhero narratives. The heroes often resort to violence against supervillains and other criminals, and many of their origin stories include violent elements. (Smith 2016, 129.) Batman swore revenge at his parents' grave, Spider-Man's mission was crystallised by his beloved uncle's death and the mutants in X-Men go through violent changes in their bodies as their mutations manifest.

Narratives of violence are also an integral part of the birth and development of superhero comics. Pulp literature about colonising faraway frontiers and masked vigilantes, including Thomas Dixon's Grand Dragon, inspired early superheroes (Gavaler 2018, 87), and characters such as Captain America and Superman were seen fighting alongside the US army in stories published during the Second World War (Gavaler 2018, 111, 113). During that war, superhero comics were at the height of their popularity, and Gerard Jones even states that no other entertainment phenomenon has paralleled real life on a similar scale to the way that superhero comics imitated the Second World War during the war years (Jones 2004, 231). Due to their origins in American pulp literature and their connections to the American war effort in the 1940s, superhero comics are traditionally seen as representing and building a certain American worldview (see, e.g. Miettinen 2012, 10–11). Even after the war, superheroes continued to comment on and represent American society as the 1960s brought the atomic age to comic books. The nuclear threat, as well as the Cold War and fear of communism, were typical themes for heroes such as the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, Iron Man, Spider-Man and the X-Men (Gavaler 2018, 126). In the 1970s, themes shifted towards questions of identity, personal relationships and local concerns. The military and police, who were still allies to many superheroes in the 1960s, were now seen as suspicious or evil (Gavaler 2018, 145).

Throughout the history of superhero comics, engaging the readers has been an integral part of introducing and establishing superheroes to audiences. As Alex S. Romagnoli and Gian S. Pagnucci write in *Enter the Superheroes: American Values, Culture, and the Canon of Superhero Literature* (Romagnoli & Pagnucci 2013, 41– 45), Marvel used their letters section, where readers could share their views on the stories or ask questions, as a publishing strategy that already set them apart from other comics publishers in the 1960s. Letters pages help readers understand the stories by reading how others have interpreted them and the letters pages provide the readers with information about future events (Pustz 2007, 163–164). Letters pages have been a part of the Marvel comics that are published outside of the USA as well. Letters pages also serve as an outlet for readers' creative interpretations of the characters and storylines in the comics. Fan-made elements are part of the transmedia

universe along with the official elements produced by the publisher (Koistinen, Koskimaa & Välisalo 2021, 3).

2.2   Transnational comics

According to Paul Williams and James Lyons (2010, xiii), the American comics scene includes the movement of texts, creators and money across national borders, providing good reasons to understand North American comics in a transnational context. Similarly, Ralf Kauranen (2013) describes how the transnational flow of comics in the Finnish context includes not only the comics that are imported and translated, but also the comics creators' and publishers' movement from one country to another. Kauranen also notes that the financial aspects of comics publishing are connected to the transnational spread of comics. (ibid, 11.) Following Williams and Lyons' and Kauranen's definitions, my research contributes to the understanding of the transnational aspects of comics publishing as I analyse superhero comics whose production cannot be clearly limited to their country of origin but rather continues in the local processes of adaptation. Transnational themes have also gained interest among other comics scholars, for example in research on comics translations (e.g. Brienza 2016; Bryan 2021), as well as comics adaptations (e.g. Davé 2013; Stein 2013). Previous research shows that the transnational publishing processes of mainstream comics involve translation, changes in storylines, the omission of pages or panels, and sometimes even censorship, as described by Peter Cullen Bryan (2021), Timo Ronkainen (2021) and Robert Aman (2020), among others.

As noted above, the movement of comics across borders is one aspect of transnational comics publishing. Although they are a quintessentially American form of popular culture, superhero comics have been widely published around the world and are these days seen everywhere. Iconic characters such as Superman have shifted from being representations of American exceptionalism towards globalism as superhero comics have sought to stay relevant in the changing times (Soares 2015, 748). Superheroes have traditionally been seen to be fighting crime on American soil and addressing concerns in American society, but characters such as Captain Britain, a British superhero created by British-American writer Chris Claremont, and Captain Canuck, a Canadian hero created by Ron Leishman and Richard Comely, have long been a part of the superhero genre. While Captain Britain and Captain Canuck, following in the footsteps of Captain America, are distinctly rooted in national identity, in the twenty-first century, the producers of superhero comics have begun to investigate the meaning of nationality and the American roots of their characters. For example, *Spider-Man India* (Marvel Comics 2004) is an Indian adaptation of Spider-Man where the American superhero is re-interpreted in a different cultural

setting. *The 99* (2006–2014), a comic book about a group of Islamic superheroes created by Kuwaiti comics creator Naif Al-Mutawa, emphasised ethnic and gender diversity and attempted to create a new breed of superheroes in a transnational context (Meier 2014, 159). Series such as these two complicate the assumption that all superheroes come from the USA and tell American stories.

The movement of creators across borders is another part of the transnationality of comics (Williams & Lyons 2010; Kauranen 2013), and previous research has been interested in how comics creators from different backgrounds have created superhero comics in a transnational context. Just as there are superhero characters from different countries, there are also creators of different nationalities. A famous example of transnational superhero creation is the 'British Invasion' in superhero comics. It refers to a period in the 1980s when British writers such as Alan Moore and Grant Morrison broke into the American superhero comics scene, which had previously been impenetrable (Miettinen 2012, 14). Their influential works – such as Moore's *Swamp Thing* (1984–1987), *Watchmen* (Moore, 1986–1987) and *Batman: The Killing Joke* (Moore, 1988) and Morrison's run on *Animal Man* (1988–1990) and *Doom Patrol* (Morrison, 1989–1993) – illustrate the transnational context in which superhero comics are produced. Published by an American publisher, written by a British writer, comics such as Moore's *Watchmen* are critical of American society, and these days, they are part of the canon of superhero comics, which primarily consists of works by American creators.

While superheroes are at the centre of my research, the transnational production and distribution of Disney comics serves as a good place for comparison and as a background for my thesis. Disney now owns Marvel and many other global entertainment companies, but even before the acquisition, there were interesting similarities between the adaptation processes of Disney comics and the superhero comics in my research. Peter Cullen Bryan explores the history of transnational adaptation and the distribution of Disney's products in *Creation, Translation, and Adaptation in Donald Duck Comics: The Dream of Three Lifetimes* (2021). Bryan's study shows how cartoons and comic books have been transnationally distributed and even produced for foreign markets. His analysis of both the role of translator Erika Fuchs in the German publications of Donald Duck comics and of the development of fan communities and their significance for Disney's transnational comics production highlights transnational aspects of adaptation practices. The themes and point of view of Bryan's research are further explored in Chapter 3 where I present my theoretical and conceptual framework.

The production and distribution processes of Disney comics have been studied from a Nordic perspective (Koponen 2004; Toivonen 2001), as well as in a recent, more globally comprehensive overview (Ronkainen 2021). In Finland, the translators of *Aku Ankka*, a comic book dedicated to Donald Duck and other animal

comics by Disney, have been encouraged to make any necessary adjustments to the original comics for the Finnish readership, even to rewrite the stories when necessary (Koponen 2004, 30–33). Timo Ronkainen (2021) describes similar practices in several European publishing houses in his volume on the history of Disney comics. There is plenty of research on the spread of Disney comics, including their translation (see, e.g. Toivonen 2001; Wasko, Phillips & Meehan 2001; Koponen 2004; Meloni 2013), and the findings are similar in much of the research. As Ronkainen and Bryan show, from the United Kingdom to Germany, Italy and Scandinavia, comics featuring Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse and other favourite Disney characters have been adapted from the originals to better fit the new target audience. Both superheroes and Disney's comics have spread globally, and it is worth noting that while Disney's transnational comics production has been the focus of several studies, superheroes' transnational publishing processes have not yet been studied extensively.

The majority of literature regarding adaptations of superheroes is focused on film adaptations of comics. Liam Burke (2015), for example, describes comic book films as 'modern Hollywood's leading genre' in the title of his volume. Alain Boillat (2018) analyses how modern CGI technology allows for certain modes of representation in superhero films, and Dick Tomasovic (2018) focuses on the strategies of adaptation used by Marvel Studios in their superhero film production. In recent years, some scholars have begun to examine the transnational adaptation of superheroes. In *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives: Comics at the Crossroads* (2013), edited by Daniel Stein, Shane Denson and Christina Meyer, one section is dedicated to transnational superheroes. Katharina Bieloch and Sharif Bitar explore Batman as a transnational figure and argue that the *Batman* comics they investigate open up the possibility to challenge the idea of the superhero as an American icon (Bieloch & Bitar 2013, 104–105). Bieloch and Bitar analyse Grant Morrison's *Batman: Incorporated* series, where Batman establishes an international crime fighting corps with a diverse cast from different continents. They interpret the comic as an example of how American superhero comics have been influenced by other comics cultures, in addition to American comics serving as inspiration for others. (Ibid, 110.) Touching on similar topics, Jochen Ecke explores transnational authorship in his study of the British Invasion (2013). Both Bieloch and Bitar, as well as Ecke, focus on the transnational production context of American superhero comics as they investigate the work of British creators.

While *Batman: Incorporated* shows a multicultural cast of characters following in Batman's footsteps, Daniel Stein and Shilpa Davé study comics where the character of Spider-Man is re-created in a new country and setting. Stein's focus is on the manga versions of Spider-Man, and he details how Marvel tried to enter the Japanese comics market and ultimately succeeded with a version of one of its most

popular characters made specifically for the Japanese audience. The new adaptation was made for the Japanese cultural context, with the intention of easing the flow of cultural products across national and cultural borders. (Stein 2013, 131, 134.) Davé's research connects an Indian adaptation of Spider-Man to the transnational exchange of culture and capital, and Davé concludes that, while the Indian transcreation of Spider-Man did not lead to more adaptations of American superheroes, it did inspire new versions of traditional Indian heroes (Davé 2013, 126). Stefan Meier interprets *The 99* as an attempt to create a new type of superhero compared with the classic American ones (Meier 2013, 159). The articles by Stein and Davé focus on attempts to introduce a recreation of Spider-Man in a different style in order to expand the spread of Marvel's products, and Meier is interested in the creation of new comics for a transnational audience.

After Stein, Denson and Meyer's volume, new research on transnational re-creations of superheroes has emerged. Writing about Polish superhero comics, Tomasz Żaglewski focuses on new Polish superheroes and outlines the relations between the global pattern of superhero comics and their local versions. He argues that popular comics genres, such as superhero comics, are an inspiring object for studying the flow of popular culture, the conventions related to the spreading of popular genres and their reception (Żaglewski 2021, 575). Żaglewski analyses American superhero comics as, on the one hand, capable of adapting aspects from different cultural traditions and blending them into the superhero tradition, for example, the use of Norse mythology related to the character of Thor. On the other hand, superhero comics expand their American influence on other cultural forms to create new products for new markets, such as *Spider-Man India*. (ibid, 576.) Transnational adaptations of comic books and other cultural commodities are processes of adjusting foreign concepts to meet the domestic cultural industry's expectations (Gabilliet 2013, 222), and Żaglewski shows that, despite being a global popular culture product, superhero comics are altered as they are adapted to a new cultural setting. In my research, the focus is on translated comics instead of reimagined versions of familiar characters. I analyse the practices of adaptation, paying attention to how the Finnish editor not only 'cut and pasted' (as I have named the practice in Article 1) the American comics in the Finnish comics books, but also how the changes were communicated to the readers. This complements the existing knowledge of the transnational creation and publishing of superhero comics.

In a recent study of *The Phantom*, 'an American literary creation with a protagonist of British heritage set in an exotic African jungle' (Aman 2020, 7), Robert Aman shows how the comic, which has been popular in Sweden since the 1940s, has been adapted for the Swedish audience. A Swedish team of writers, known as 'Team Fantomen', produced new plots and storylines and ultimately altered the whole character of The Phantom for the cultural context of social-

democratic Sweden (Aman 2020, 9). In addition to writing their own stories, Team Fantomen engaged in adaptation practices, such as changing dialogue and adding speech bubbles to panels, with the purpose of making *The Phantom* more suitable for the new audience. Aman analyses and compares the stories, images and dialogue in the American comics to the ones published in Sweden and concludes that there were significant differences. In a Swedish adaptation of a *Phantom* comic analysed by Aman, the dialogue and captions were changed so that the comic's tone became critical of colonialism, in contrast to the original text. (Ibid, 45–48.) I investigate the Finnish superhero publications with a similar method to this, comparing the American comics and the Finnish adaptations in order to find and name the practices used in the transnational adaptation of the comics.

As my introduction to previous research shows, the transnational movement of comics has been analysed from different perspectives, including the movement of the comics' creators and the comics themselves. My study of the transnational adaptation practices of superhero comics focuses on the movement of the comics themselves, concentrating on the national production process. This aspect in the transnational movement of superhero comics has not been studied in detail previously.

2.3   Translated comics in Finland

Finland has a strong and well-organised comics scene today. The comics community is vibrant, with artists and writers making comics about different topics and in different styles. There are publishers dedicated especially to comics, but larger publishing houses also regularly produce comics albums and long-form comics. To support work with less commercial potential, artists have the possibility to apply for funding from the state, as well as from private foundations, for creative work. At first, however, the Finnish comics scene relied on international imports from elsewhere in Europe, as well as from the USA. As early as in 1857, the first comic strip, a version of Swiss Rodolphe Töpffer's *Monsieur Cryptogame,* was published in Finland (Valta 2009).

The publication history of *Monsieur Cryptogame* and the Finnish version, *Herra Koipeliini*, is transnational. Töpffer created *Monsieur Cryptogame* around 1827, and at first, it spread between people from hand to hand. In 1843, *Monsieur Cryptogame* was published in a Parisian magazine and started spreading from country to country. Trademarks or creative rights did not yet exist, and many of Töpffer's comics were published in several countries in various formats and with varying information about their creator. (Valta 2017, 69–73.) For example, in Germany, a new version of the comic was made for children. The character of Mr Cryptogame was renamed Herrn Steckelbein, Töpffer's images were rearranged and the original texts were replaced

by new ones. (Ibid, 73–74.) The Finnish *Herra Koipeliini* was published in four parts between 1859 and 1862 in the publication series *Lukemisia kansalle*. It was translated from Swedish and Danish versions, which were translations of the German version meant for children (ibid, 76). *Herra Koipeliini*, the very first comic-like publication in Finland, is in many ways similar to the twentieth century publications investigated in this dissertation. The original work was popular in several countries across Europe, and the Finnish version was printed in collaboration with publishers from other Nordic countries to save costs. *Herra Koipeliini* was a very liberal adaptation of the original work, and the information given to readers about the original publication and changes made to it was limited. (Valta 2017.)

The first American comics were published in Finland in 1904 in *Amerikalainen kuvakirja* (The American picture book), and starting from the late 1920s, comic strips from the USA began their circulation in Finnish newspapers (Kaukoranta & Kemppinen 1972, 173). Superheroes were first introduced in Finland in the 1940s when the evening newspaper *Ilta-Sanomat* started to publish Batman as a comic strip in 1945. The first Finnish comic book, aptly titled *Sarjakuvalehti* (comic book), debuted in 1949 and published Superman's adventures for six years. Before *Sarjakuvalehti*, comics had been published in Finland as albums or as strips in newspapers, children's magazines, humour magazines and other types of magazines. The launching of a publication dedicated to comics alone meant a shift in the target audience. Instead of the adult readers of newspapers, comic books were clearly targeted towards children and adolescents. (Kauranen 2008, 97.) Disney's *Donald Duck* launched in Finland in 1951 as *Aku Ankka*, and it cemented the popularity of American comic books in Finland, quickly gaining massive popularity (Suominen & Harviainen 2018, 385).

The 1960s saw an increase in American superhero comics in Finland, as *Ihmesarja* (featuring Marvel's comics such as *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Fantastic Four* and *The Incredible Hulk*), *Teräsmiehen poika* (*Superboy*, literally 'son of Superman') and *Teräsmies* (*Superman*) appeared in the Finnish market (see Table 2). However, it was through television that Finland truly entered the age of the superhero when *Batman* was first broadcast in 1966.

In the late 1960s, Finnish television consisted of two channels, both owned by the public-service Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yleisradio, abbreviated as Yle). The commercial television company Mainos-TV (Commercial TV) broadcast its programmes, including *Batman* and several other shows imported from the USA, on the channels owned by Yle. (Kortti 2003, 32–33.) In the 1950s and 1960s, many foreign comics published in Finland were connected to TV serials of the time. *Ben*

Casey, Davy Crockett, *Huckleberry Hound* and *Space Family Robinson*[1] all had their own comic books in Finland, as did many others. In addition to these, there were three publications dedicated to comic adaptations of different TV serials: *TV-Sarja* (*T.V. Picture Stories*), *TV-Seikkailut* (*Four Color*) and *TV:n Tähtisarjat* (*Four Color*).[2] Batman's adventures were published in a monthly comic book with a circulation of around 70,000 at its highest (Toivonen n.d.). A total of 32 issues of the *Batman* comic book came out between 1966 and 1969, but its popularity faded shortly after the TV show was taken off the air in 1967.

Superhero comic books were scarce in Finland in the 1970s. Some short-lived attempts at superhero publishing, such as *Kostajat* (*The Avengers*, 1975–1976) and *Salama* (*The Flash*, 1971–1972) were made in the first half of the 1970s. *Kung Fu*, a title dedicated to Marvel's martial arts comics, was published in the mid-1970s, occasionally featuring characters such as Iron Fist and Captain America. *Sarjakuvalehti* carried horror-/thriller-themed comics in the mid-1970s, including *Ghost Rider*, and a thicker pocketbook including superhero stories titled *Sarjakirja* was published in the 1970s, with approximately one or two books coming out per year. Towards the end of the decade, Batman was revived as *Lepakkomies* (1977–1978) and Superman's title, *Teräsmies* (1977–1991), coincided with the success of the films *Superman* (1978) and *Superman II* (1980). *Teräsmies* was published throughout the 1980s, and it was followed by other prolific superhero comic books.

The 1980s saw a revival of superhero comics in Finland. The Swedish publishing house Semic started to publish *Hämähäkkimies* in 1980. *Hulk* and *Ihmeleloset* (*The Fantastic Four*) were shortly published between 1982 and 1984 by smaller publishers until Semic acquired the rights to all Marvel comics in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark. After the success of *Hämähäkkimies*, Semic begun publishing *Hulk* and *Ryhmä-X* in 1984. While *Hulk* was short-lived, *Ryhmä-X,* the Finnish version of *The Uncanny X-Men* and later featuring Marvel's other X-themed superhero groups as well, was the only other superhero comic book besides *Hämähäkkimies* published throughout the 1980s and until 1996. *MARVEL*, collecting different Marvel superheroes under one title, ran during 1988–1996. *Teräsmies* continued until 1991 when it was discontinued, and *Batman* was once again revived during 1987–1991. Additionally, different specials and annuals were published across the decade with both Marvel's and DC's heroes, including annuals

[1] *Ben Casey*, published in 1964 by Sarjakustannus Oy, *Davy Crockett* (1956–1957, Valokirjat, 1957–1960 Timantti), *Hakki-Koira* (1964–1965, A-lehdet) and *Matkalla avaruuteen* (1967–1969, Kuvajulkaisut)
[2] *TV-Sarja*, published during 1960–1962 by Kustannus Oy Pecos Bill and in 1962–1963 by Sarjakustannus (*T.V. Picture Stories*), *TV Seikkailut* (1962–1963 Kuvajulkaisut, *Four Color*) and *TV:n Tähtisarjat* (1961–1962, Tähti-sarjat, *Four Color*)

for the continuously published comics as well as one-offs. All the published titles, the years of publication and names of the publishers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.   Superhero comic books published in Finland since 1949[3]

The name of the Finnish comic book, the years it was published, the publisher	Source material
Sarjakuvalehti (Comic Book), **1949–1963, Valiolehdet**	Several different sources: *Superman, Captain Marvel* (DC), *The Shadow*
Teräsmiehen poika, 1961–1969, Kirja-mono Oy	*Superboy*
Teräsmies, 1965–1969 Kirja-Mono Oy, 1969–1970, Kuvajulkaisut	*Superman*
Batman, 1966–1969, Sarjakustannus Oy, 1969–1970, Kuvajulkaisut Oy	*Detective Comics, Batman*
Teräspoika, **1969–1970, Kuvajulkaisut Oy**	*Superboy*, *Adventure Comics*
Salama, **1971–1972, Williams**	*The Flash*
Ihmesarja, **1967–1970, Kuvajulkaisut Oy**	*The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Fantastic Four*
Jätti, **1969–1970, Kuvajulkaisut Oy**	*Adventure Comics*, *Aquaman*, *Batman*, *Justice League of America*, *Superman, Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen*, *World's Finest Comics*
Kung Fu, **1974–1977, Semic**	*The Deadly Hands of Kung Fu*
Kostajat, **1975–1976, Tapter Oy**	*The Avengers*
Batman, **1977–1978, Semic**	*Batman*
Teräsmies, **1977–1991, Semic**	*Superman*, *The Adventures of Superman*

[3]Marvel-lehdet Suomessa n.d.; DC-lehdet Suomessa n.d.; Batman Suomessa n.d.; Suomessa julkaistut sarjakuvat 1858–2021 n.d.; Moogin sarjakuva-arkisto n.d.

***Hämähäkkimies,* 1980–1998, Semic, 1998–, Egmont**	*The Amazing Spider-Man, Amazing Spider-Man Annual, Fantastic Four, Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man, Marvel Fanfare, Marvel Knights: Spider-Man, Marvel Team-Up, Peter Parker: Spider-Man, Peter Parker the Spectacular Spider-Man, Sensational Spider-Man, Spectacular Spider-Man, Spider-Man, Spider-Man: Chapter One, Spider-Man Unlimited, Spider-Man vs. Wolverine, Superior Spider-Man, Web of Spider-Man*
***Flash Gordon – Iskevä Salama,* 1981, Lehtimiehet Oy**	*Flash Gordon*
***Vihreä Mies Hulk,* 1981–1982, Oy Lukemisto Urkki Lektyr Ab, 1982, Oy Lukemisto Omnia Ab, 1983, Mail-Man Ky**	*Fantastic Four, The Incredible Hulk*
***Ihmeneloset,* 1982, Oy Lukemisto Omnia Ab, 1983–1984, Mail-Man Ky**	*The Fantastic Four*
***Ryhmä-X,* 1984–1996, Semic**	*Avengers, Avengers Annual, Cable, Classic X-Men, Excalibur, Excalibur Special Edition, Giant Sized X-Men, Marvel Fanfare, Marvel Team-Up, New Mutants, New Mutants Annual, The New Mutants Special Edition, Solo Avengers, Spider-Woman, The Uncanny X-Men, What if?, Wolverine, X-Factor, X-Force, X-Men, X-Men Annual, X-Men Unlimited, X-Men vs. Avengers, X-Men vs. Fantastic Four*
***Hulk,* 1984–1985, Semic**	*Avengers, Captain America, The Incredible Hulk, Iron Man, Marvel Team-Up*
***Batman,* 1987–1991, Semic, 1994–1997, Semic**	*Batman Versus Predator, The Batman Adventures, The Batman & Robin Adventures*
***Marvel,* 1988–1996, Semic**	*Alpha Flight, The Amazing Spider-Man, Cable, Captain America, Daredevil, Dethlok, Fantastic Four, Generation X, Ghost Rider, The Incredible Hulk, Iron Man, Longshot, Marshal Law, The Mighty Thor, Namor the Sub-Mariner, The New Mutants, Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., The Punisher, The Uncanny X-Men, Venom, What The--?!, X-Factor*
***Sarjakuvalehti,* 1990–1996, Semic**	*Cable, Captain America, Captain America & The Punisher: Blood & Glory, Classic X-Men, Daredevil, Daredevil: The Man Without Fear, Deadpool, Ghost Rider, Ghost Rider & Blaze: Spirits of Vengeance, Marvel Comics Presents, Phoenix: The Untold Story, The Punisher, The Punisher War Journal, The Punisher War Zone, The Punisher: Year One, Sabretooth, Weapon-X, What if?, Wolverine, Wolverine & Nick Fury: Scorpio Connection*
***Mega-Marvel,* 1997–1999, Semic, 2000–2002, Egmont**	*The Amazing Scarlet Spider, The Amazing Spider-Man, The Amazing X-Men, The Astonishing X-Men, The Avengers, Captain America, Contest of Champions II, Fantastic Four, Gambit, Heroes Reborn: The Return, The Incredible Hulk, Iron Man, Marvel Comics Presents, Onslaught: Marvel Universe, The Punisher, Sabretooth Special, Scarlet Spider, The Sensational Spider-Man, The Spectacular Scarlet Spider, The Spectacular Spider-Man, Spider-Girl, Spider-Man, Spider-Man 2099 Meets Spider-Man, Spider-Man: Hob-Goblin Lives, Spider-Man: The Lost Years, Spider-Man Team-Up, Thor,*

	Ultimate Spider-Man, *The Uncanny X-Men*, *Venom: Along Came a Spider*, *Venom: Sinner Takes All!*, *Venom: Tooth and Claw*, *Web of Scarlet Spider*, *Wolverine*, *Wolverine and Gambit: Victims*, *Wolverine: Days of Future Past*, *X-Men*, *X-Men Omega*, *X-Men Prime*
Ryhmä-X/X-Men, 2001–2013, Egmont	*Astonishing X-Men*, *Magneto Rex*, *New X-Men*, *The Uncanny X-Men*, *Wolverine*, *X-Men*, *X-Men: The Search for Cyclops*, *X-Treme X-Men*
***Wolverine,* 2001–2002, Egmont**	*Hulk*, *Wolverine*, *Wolverine: Doombringer*
***Mega, 2003–2006,* Egmont**	*The Avengers: Finale*, *Batman*, *Daredevil*, *House of M*, *Hulk/Wolverine: Six Hours*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *The New Avengers*, *Secret War*, *Supreme Power*, *Startling Stories: Banner*, *The Ultimates*, *Ultimate Fantastic Four*, *Ultimate Six*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Ultimate X-Men*, *Wolverine/The Punisher: Revelation*

3   The theoretical framework and key concepts

In this chapter, I present the key concepts and theoretical background of my study. I begin by defining how I understand adaptation in this research and by discussing the relationship between translation and adaptation in previous research on translated comics. I build my theoretical framework on the discussions of adaptation studies and translation studies since both fields regularly use a comparative mode of analysis. Then, I outline what I mean by describing the comics in my research material as transnational adaptations. I finish this chapter with a definition of transmedia, a key concept in the research of popular culture that spans several media.

Adaptation scholar Linda Hutcheon defines adaptations as recognised re-workings of original texts that do not fully replicate the original (Hutcheon 2006, 16). According to Hutcheon and Julie Sanders (2006), adaptations are always interpretations of existing works, include an element of recreation and reimagining, and are built on intertextual relationships. Following Hutcheon and Sanders, I define adaptation as a creative process where a cultural text is rewritten or reorganised for a new audience. *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* are recognised reworkings of the original texts in the sense that they are not the same as their American counterparts. While the Finnish readers at the time were not familiar with all the ways in which the comic books had been adapted, they knew that some changes had been made because the comics were translated into a new language. When I call the Finnish superhero publications adaptations, the definition encompasses the whole comic book, including the adaptation process with the editor's omissions and additions, his justifications on the letters pages and the content created by the audiences of *Hämähäkkimies*, *Ryhmä-X* and *Batman*.

3.1   Comics, translation and adaptation

In line with Katja Krebs, I understand adaptation studies and translation studies as interdisciplinary fields, discussing the construction of cultures through acts of rewriting. Both fields recognise and address the collaborative nature of rewriting

practices, as well as the questions of authorship that follow from these collaborations. (Krebs 2014, 42–43.) Despite their similarities, adaptation and translation (and the use of these concepts in research) have some significant differences as well, as João Azenha and Marcelo Moreira have pointed out (2012). In this section, I present previous discussions on the relationship between translation and adaptation, explaining my choice of concepts and theories. I then move on to research regarding the translation of comics and how the concept of adaptation has been used in that context. In previous research on comics and translation, domestication and localisation have been used to describe a variety of changes made to comics when they have been published in different languages and cultural contexts.[4] I position myself in this discussion before moving on to the topic of transnational adaptation in the next section.

In translation studies, the understanding of the difference between adaptation and translation is varied, and absolute definitions of the concepts are not available (Raw 2017, 495). According to translation scholars Hugo Vandal-Sirois and Georges L. Bastin, adaptation is a necessary part of the translation process, and its purpose is to facilitate the reception of translated texts and make them relevant to the target culture (Vandal-Sirois & Bastin 2014, 25, 29). Translated texts are adapted as they cross cultural and national boundaries, and even when media products travel globally today, differences in location and cultural context affect the audiences' processes of reception and meaning making (Kustritz 2015, 29). Vandal-Sirois and Bastin state that adaptation is needed in translation to restore the 'communicational balance that would be broken by the process of translation' (Vandal-Sirois & Bastin 2014, 25). They give examples from translated advertisements where the translators have used adaptation as a strategy to make the advertised messages relevant for the target culture. In this process, adaptation is seen as the translator's ability to 'facilitate the reception, or enhance the efficiency, of a given communication in a specific context' (Vandal-Sirois & Bastin 2014, 29). Based on Vandal-Sirois and Bastin's research, one way of understanding adaptation in translation studies is to see it as a tool for making better translations or conveying a certain message more efficiently.

Approaching the relationship between adaptation and translation through fidelity (Azenha & Moreira 2012, 67) is another way to conceptualise the differences and similarities between the concepts. A distinction based on fidelity is common,

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[4] Besides translation from one language to another, the concept of translation is known, for example, in sociology where it has been conceptualised 'as a complex process of negotiation during which meanings, claims and interests change and gain ground' (Wæraas & Nielsen 2016, 237). Translation has a political meaning due to it involving a pursuit of interests or specific interpretations, as well as a semiotic meaning since translation concerns the 'transformation of meaning that occurs during the movement of the object [meanings, claims and interests] in question' (ibid, 237).

especially in popular discourse. In the popular understanding, adaptation is viewed as the creation of a new version of an existing text or work, a creative process that offers a new point of view or interpretation of the source material. Translation, in contrast, is viewed as the translation of natural language, and therefore an attempt to preserve the source text's nuances. (see, e.g. Krebs 2014, 43; Oittinen 2000, 77.) According to the functionalist theory of translation, however, this is a false dichotomy as the translator is free to alter a text to fit it to the norms of that text type in the target language. Functionalist translation is targeted towards domestication or making the text function in the new setting. (Bryan 2021, 129.) Domestication in translation is a strategy wherein foreign aspects of the text (for example, foreign idioms or cultural references) are altered to make it more easily approachable to the new audience (Koskinen 2012, 14–15). Adaptation, on the other hand, can mean a more fundamental change. Adaptations 'take place on the cultural or pragmatic levels at least as much as on the linguistic or textual level.' (Vandal-Sirois & Bastin 2014, 26.) The research of Vandal-Sirois and Bastin, on the one hand, and Krebs, Oittinen and Bryan, on the other, show that in translation studies, the distinction between translation and adaptation is open for interpretation.

The concept of domestication in translation complicates the relationship between translation and adaptation. Domestication and adaptation are used in similar contexts in translation studies as both describe an attempt to make a translated text easily understandable to readers. Casey Brienza, however, understands domestication in a broader sense. Brienza calls the transnational process of licensing, re-lettering and adapting Japanese manga for the American market domestication. Domestication, as defined by Brienza, contains the idea that being published in another language might affect the production of the cultural object in its initial stage. (Brienza 2016, 17–18.) While Brienza's understanding of domestication covers a number of the changes made in *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X*, it does not describe, for example, the extensive cutting and pasting or the condensing of storylines that are done by the Finnish editor. Therefore, it is not a suitable concept for the scope of this research.

Although not all comics that are translated to other languages are changed as much as the comics in my research material, the translation of comics usually includes some changes in the images or panel layout as well. Comics are a multimodal medium comprised of both textual and pictorial elements, and thus, sometimes either the text or the images need to be altered to make the translation understandable. According to translation scholars specialised on the topic, it is not enough to only consider the translation of the natural language in comics (such as the language in the dialogue or description boxes). In a pioneering work in the study of comics translation, Klaus Kaindl (1999) outlines a typology of the translation

processes for the different elements in comics. Kaindl's six categories[5] include both the textual and pictorial elements, and they describe the relationship between the source and target languages. (Kaindl 1999, 275–283.) After Kaindl's article, other translation scholars writing about comics have shared his view that, in comics, the natural language is not the only part that is translated, and therefore, other changes in the product should not be overlooked when analysing comics translations (Kaindl 1999, 265; Zanettin 2008; see also Borodo 2014; Viren 2015). As Michał Borodo demonstrates, the multifaceted interplay between words and images in comics allows for many interpretations and translations of the texts that encompass the images. Textual elements can provide additional context to the images, describe what is already shown in image form or present further possibilities for interpretation. (Borodo 2014, 23, 31–34.) The relationship between the text and images can be altered either intentionally or unintentionally in translation.

Translation scholar Federico Zanettin understands translation in a broad sense as he sees reprints and remakes of comics as translations, although these types of reissues are mostly published within one language. According to Zanettin, reprints (whether published in the same language or country, or in new cultural environments) include translations of different semiotic systems. These include drawing or writing parts of the story again for a reprint; changing the page size, font and reading direction; and changing a colour print to black and white. (Zanettin 2008, 11–12.) Zanettin has used the concept of localisation – which usually refers to the translation of mobile apps, digital games, software and other technologies – to describe both the textual translation and altering of images in translated comics (Zanettin 2014). Zanettin's use of the term combines the translation of the natural language and changes that he calls 'visual adaptation'. Visual adaptation refers to changing the publication format, layout and pictures in comics. (Zanettin 2014). For Zanettin, visual adaptation and translation are part of localisation, which is a translation strategy for making the comics linguistically, technically and culturally appropriate for the target audience (Zanettin 2014).

However, even when taking into account the retouching of images or the relationship between text and images in the panels, as is the case in Borodo's study,

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[5] Kaindl borrows the typology from Dirk Delabastita's analysis of film translations. The categories are repetitio, where the 'source language, typography or picture elements are taken over in their identical form'; *deletio*, the removal of text or images from the translation; *detractio*, the cutting of some parts of textual or pictorial elements, such as the censoring of weapons; *adiectio*, where material is added to the translation to supplement the original, for example, translations in the form of subtitles; *transmutatio*, where the order of the text or images is changed in the translation, such as is the case in many translations of manga; and *substitutio*, where original material is replaced with 'more or less equivalent' material in the translation. (Kaindl 1999, 275–283.)

or when accounting for the retouching of images or layout, as is the case in Zanettin's work, the analysis is mainly focused on the content of the stories and how their messages are conveyed to readers. This is why I have come to understand translation as emanating from the source text, making its meanings and themes understandable in a different language, which in my research is directly related to the stories themselves. Thus, in this research translation is more tightly concerned with conveying a story; for example, it is concerned with making foreign references understandable to the new audience through domestication of the translation (Koskinen 2012, 14–15) or replacing the original title page of the comic book with one in the target language. However, changes such as altering the images or condensing a story are examples of Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptations as new versions of original texts that do not fully replicate the original (Hutcheon 2006, 16). Following Vandal-Sirois and Bastin's claim that adaptations take place on the linguistic level as well as the cultural level (Vandal-Sirois & Bastin 2014, 26), adaptation, in my research, takes into account the surrounding production conditions on a larger scale; it encompasses the whole comic book, including the editor's omissions and additions, his justifications on the letters pages and the content created by the audiences of *Hämähäkkimies*, *Ryhmä-X* and *Batman*.

Similarly to my research, Peter Cullen Bryan ponders the question of whether to conceptualise the changes made in transnational publishing processes as translation or adaptation when exploring the German version of Donald Duck. After the Second World War, in the *Micky Maus* comic book published in Germany, the stories were altered as the translator domesticated character names, cultural references and onomatopoeic expressions (Bryan 2021, 130). According to Bryan, the German translations 'function as adaptation: Fuchs [the translator] retains some elements of content, but readily changes others' (Bryan 2021, 133). In her translations, Fuchs not only changed the names of the characters, but their personalities were subtly altered as well as Fuchs made Donald Duck German (ibid. 126). Fuchs made changes in *Micky Maus* that were similar to the changes that Mail-Man and the other editors made in the Finnish *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X*. While Bryan primarily sees *Micky Maus* as a translation, I consider the changes made in my research material as adaptations. While the Finnish versions do not always recreate the atmosphere, style, theme and plot of the original text, the editor's work facilitates the reception and enhances the efficiency of the communication, according to Vandal-Sirois and Bastin's description of adaptation's role in translation (Vandal-Sirois & Bastin 2014, 29).

I define the production of the Finnish comics in my research material as adaptation. In the field of translation studies, adaptation is needed to facilitate the reception and understanding of the text in the new context. In adaptation studies, adaptation is seen as a process where the adapter filters a story through their own

interests and talents (Hutcheon 2006, 18). In my research material, the Finnish editor facilitates the reception of the comics in the new context as the comics are chosen, cut and translated, and also as he answers the readers' questions on the letters pages. At the same time as his work makes it easier for the Finnish readers to follow the comics' storylines, he filters the Finnish publications through his own interests and talents, which is why I interpret the comic books, letters pages and advertising material primarily in the framework of adaptation studies.

In the next section, I define the concept of transnational adaptation and further discuss adaptation form the point of view of adaptation studies.

3.2   Transnational adaptation

Within media studies, an adaptation often means a film or TV adaptation of literature or a videogame adapted from a film and the focus is, for example, on the different affordances or qualities of each medium in conveying the story (see, for example, Newell 2021). Adaptation can also take place within a single medium, such as in the case of my research. Liam Burke demands better and more varied use of the comparative methodology of adaptation studies in media studies in general, instead of focusing on comparing adaptations in different media (Burke 2022, 84). Adaptation studies could be used to look at medium specificity or intertextuality in a broader sense. This means questions such as how different topics or themes are represented in different media or how intertextuality seems to permeate media culture. Media scholar Henry Jenkins has written that transmedia storytelling has a 'purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience' (Jenkins 2007), while adaptations 'simply move content from one medium to another' (Jenkins 2009). Jenkins' intention is to clarify what he means with his concept of transmedia storytelling and separate it from adaptation, and he refers, in a rather simplified way, to adaptation as a transpositional practice, which is a typical focus in media studies (see, e.g. Burke 2022, 85). Rather than 'moving content from one medium to another', adaptation includes editorial practices as a cultural text is compressed or shortened and sometimes also amplified or expanded (Sanders 2006, 18–19).

For some theorists, adaptation is a part of intertextuality, where a clear starting point or a source text is impossible to pinpoint as adaptations are recycled and transformed over and over again (Roche, Schmitt-Pitiot & Mitaine 2018, 15). For example, who count as the author(s) of an adapted text? Is it the creator of the original or is it the adapter, or is it both? What is the original text in an intertextual web of adaptations? When fans make their own content that is related to their favourite text, do they turn from audience to producer? Although recognising the

usefulness of adaptation studies' comparative methodology, Johannes Fehrle suggests that adaptation studies should move further from comparisons based on textual analysis and pay more attention to the contexts of the creation, distribution and reception of adapted texts (Fehrle 2019, 9, 15). Focusing on adaptation as a part of the development of franchised entertainment is especially relevant in the current media culture where transmedia storytelling is favoured (see, e.g. Parody 2011), but similar themes are present in the early superhero adaptations of the 1960s, as well as in the Finnish Marvel comics of the 1980s and 1990s.

Research on television formats, which has gained interest in media studies since the 1990s, can be useful when considering adaptation within a single medium and the creative approach it requires. The adaptation of a television format is an 'interactive process including negotiation among different television cultures' (Keinonen 2016, 1), taking into account the levels of production, text and reception of the programme. The adaptation of television formats requires creativity and authorship (ibid., 2), and local agents have an important role in the adaptation process (Moran 2009, 43). The adaptation of television formats is similar to what Eva Hemmungs Wirtén (1998) describes as transediting. In her study, transediting means the local production processes of a global product as she analyses the editors' and translators' roles in the production of Swedish editions of Harlequin romance novels. The editors select the stories that are to be published in the Nordic countries, decide whether character names should be changed if they sound 'too foreign', choose new titles for the novels and edit out some content that might not fit the presumed audience. (Hemmungs Wirtén 1998, 121–126.) These changes are examples of adjusting foreign elements into the local culture's expectations in a transnational adaptation process.

While I analyse national versions of superhero comics and their production process, I recognise that the boundaries between domestic and foreign cultural influences are not always clear (Kraidy 2005, 6–7). The Finnish adaptations have been created in a specific national media landscape, which has been shaped by global, regional and local influences. Such media texts "reflect the existence of a variety of historical, economic, and cultural forces whose enmeshments with one another are as manifest at the local, national, and regional levels as they are visible globally" (ibid, 7). I have explored the Finnish context of production in each research article, including the collaboration with other Nordic countries, the agency of the Finnish editor and the availability of American popular culture in Finland.

As I described in the previous chapter, superhero comics are transnational both in the sense of being available in many languages and countries, and in the sense that there are superhero creators and characters of different nationalities and backgrounds. Producers are interested in spreading their work in the global market, while audiences are interested in reading local iterations of American heroes.

Superhero comics can be thought of as textual and cultural objects that flow 'between the globally recognisable patterns and locally required adjustments and/or inspirations which reciprocally shape the American icons' (Żaglewski 2021, 575–576). My research topic, the Finnish versions of American comics, could be seen as a study of the international spread of American superheroes. It is my focus on the border crossing that makes my approach transnational rather than international. Although the Finnish adaptations are not complete retellings of existing characters' stories, such as the manga versions of *Spider-Man* in Daniel Stein's research (2013, 131), the Finnish versions in my study have been adapted in many ways to facilitate their flow from one cultural landscape to another, and the adaptation process is where they become transnational.

The concept of transnational refers to the mobility of various things – such as cultural texts, finances and people – across national, geographical, cultural and linguistic borders (Lee 2014, 195). It signifies the complexity of cultural globalisation and emphasises the movement of cultural and media products across borders in different directions (Appadurai 1996, 33), as for example, Hye-Kyung Lee (2014) shows in her research on transnational cultural fandom and as Casey Brienza (2016) shows in her study of Japanese manga in America. As Daniel Stein, Shane Denson and Christina Meyer write, the concept of transnational relates to a diverse group of actors exchanging ideas and interacting with each other (Stein, Denson & Meyer 2013, 16). Writing about South Korean K-Pop and Japanese manga and anime, cultural policy scholar Hye-Kyung Lee describes the role of fan communities as mediators in the transnational movement of these cultural phenomena, citing translation, cultural footnoting and editing as key factors in the process. (Lee 2014, 198.) In my research, I focus on analysing the processes of editing and domesticating the comics, but also on how the editor provided cultural context for the readers and on the audiences' interpretations of the superhero characters. The combination of analysing the editing process, the editor's role as a facilitator and the audiences' involvement shows how the American comics crossed linguistic, national and cultural borders into Finland and gave the Finnish readers a specific version of the Marvel universe. The corporate exchange of licenced material – for example, the comics, the work of the editor on the letters pages of *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X*, the marketing campaign for Batman soda and the drawings sent to the *Batman* comic book by its readers – is part of the transnational adaptation of superhero comics in Finland.

Sociologist Casey Brienza examines transnational comics publishing in the Japanese and American manga scenes. For Brienza, who uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the cultural field in her analysis, the formation of a transnational cultural field is the key to the flow of cultural products from one national field to another. Brienza describes the transnational field as something that overlaps with the national

cultural fields that influence it but is nonetheless distinct from them. The national fields can be influenced by the existence of the transnational field, but this does not necessarily happen. (Brienza 2016, 29–33.) According to Brienza, the transnational cultural field that publishes Japanese comic books in the USA functions independently and has replaced the distinct national fields. Her main argument is that, despite a popular phrase in the early 2000s, manga did not 'invade' America like an independent subject with agency might. Instead, the work of several people working in several stages of the publishing process made the transnational publishing of manga possible. (Brienza 2016, 16–17.) Brienza calls this process domestication (2016, 9), and for her, it encompasses all the stages of producing manga in the USA. In Brienza's study, domestication includes translation of the natural language, clearing out repetitive text and censoring sensitive themes; retouching the images to replace the original's onomatopoeia with westernised sound effects, remove or cover up provocative imagery and change the lettering; and finally, the marketing of the product to a new audience. (Brienza 2016, 114–128.) While her research, based on interviews with American professionals, gives a comprehensive account of the production process, I have chosen a slightly different angle when analysing the types of creative and transformative processes found in the comics in my research material.

Analysed in depth in Article 1, issue 5/1990 of *Ryhmä-X* exemplifies why I talk about the Finnish superhero comics as adaptations instead of domestication in the sense that Brienza uses the term. This single Finnish comic book was pieced together from two different titles, and from five different issues: *X-Factor* #10, #12 and #13 and *Thor* #373 and #374. Of these original issues, only certain pages and panels advancing the main plot were chosen, and sub-plots featuring character development or events not directly related to the main plot were left out. For example, two consecutive pages in the *Ryhmä-X* 5/1990 comic book were originally published in different titles and issues (page 22 of *X-Factor* #10 and page 21 of *Thor* #373), and the pages were not even produced by the same artistic team. As I show in Article 2, the Finnish editors did not usually mention the original issues of the material they published; instead, they used the letters page to explain complicated plots and new characters. The changes made by the Finnish editor could be described with Brienza's definition of domestication. However, I have chosen to conceptualise them as adaptations to highlight the creative aspect of the editor's work. The editor of the comics in my study transformed the pace and advancement of the comics' storylines, edited out character development, and rearranged pages and panels from different comic books to provide a new version of the text. The pieces cut from different comic books were presented in Finland as a single issue, which was further confirmed by the editor not mentioning any of the cutting or reorganising that took place.

These examples from different areas of popular culture highlight, on the one hand, that adaptation can be done within a single medium and does not always

include a change from one medium to another. On the other hand, these cases show that the crossing of national and linguistic borders often requires adaptation, whether it means the omission or localisation of specific cultural references or the addition of familiar elements to fit the taste of the new audience. This is why I have chosen the concept of transnational adaptation to describe the comics I analyse. In the following, I look at one more concept that is essential to my analysis of the Finnish adaptations of superhero comics, transmedia. I specifically define transmedia in relation to adaptation as adaptation is the central concept used throughout my study.

3.3   Adaptation and transmedia

While the first three articles in this dissertation focus on analysing strategies of adaptation, the final article's focus is on different Batman narratives, artefacts and activities existing simultaneously as parts of the same Batman universe in 1960s Finland. I analyse these adaptations through the concept of a transmedia universe, as defined by scholars of contemporary culture Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, Raine Koskimaa and Tanja Välisalo (2021) in their study focused on *Battlestar Galactica*. Transmedia universe is a concept that encompasses all materials related to a core text, including elements produced by the official publisher as well as fan-made elements and ranging from narrative instalments to podcasts, toys and fan art. Koistinen, Koskimaa and Välisalo build on existing conceptualisations of transmedia storytelling and transmedial worlds, and their concept includes aspects that have been missing from previous theorisations. (Koistinen, Koskimaa & Välisalo 2021, 2–3.)

The transmedia perspective introduced in the fourth article requires different kinds on inquiry related to the research material. According to Johannes Fehrle, researchers must find new ways of examining adaptation and transmedia texts so that we can better understand the relationships between media, their production, authorship and audiences as they are shifting. Forms of adaptation, such as fanfiction, are examples of the shifting relationships: fanfiction is produced by the fans of a cultural text, and both the original creator of the characters and the world they inhabit and the writer of the fanfic can be considered as the authors. (Fehrle 2019, 9.) I focus on exploring the relationship between local adaptations of popular culture and the transmedia universe to which they belong and which they build. The new interpretations and official portrayals of the character of Batman blend in my research material, expanding the possibilities and audiences of the character.

Definitions of transmedia start from Marsha Kinder's analysis of how TV programmes and toys targeted to children form a network of transmedia intertextuality (Kinder 1991, 1). She associates the transmedial connections between television, films, advertising and products (such as toys) with preparing the audience

of (mostly) children for 'full participation in […] interactive multimedia', linking interactivity with consumerism (ibid, 6). In 2006, Henry Jenkins included storytelling in his definition of transmedia. He refers to transmedia storytelling as a narrative which 'unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole' (Jenkins 2006a, 95–96). According to this definition, each instalment of transmedia storytelling moves the story forward in some way or develops its characters. However, as Koistinen, Koskimaa and Välisalo discuss in their research, transmediality also includes elements that do not necessarily make a unique contribution to a story, but rather contribute to the building of the transmedia world (Koistinen, Koskimaa & Välisalo 2021, 2, 11). Many transmedial worlds do not live up to Jenkins' definition, wherein a unified story is central, as the phenomenon of transmedia is more complex than that. Transmedia texts have other functions and contexts of production that go beyond constructing a unified storyworld, such as commercial expectations. (Ibid, 5.) The idea of the transmedia universe extends the understanding of transmediality to include different versions of a story or character which can sometimes be in conflict with the unified narrative. While in Kinder's definition, transmedia included toys, TV series and advertising, transmedia universe also includes fan-made art, websites, cosplay and podcasts related to the transmedia content.

Besides transmedia, recurring character narrative is another concept for discussing characters that feature in several instalments (Strong 2020, 110). This means that different versions of characters such as Batman can exist simultaneously in several media or in separate instances within the same medium without each of them advancing the same story. Like Sherlock Holmes, Miss Marple or Aragorn, superheroes appear in several different instalments both within a single medium and in multiple media. Familiarity is one of the key affordances of recurring character fiction (Strong 2020, 131), and adaptations of recurring character narratives are frequently made. Strong categorises recurring character adaptations in order to better understand the interplay between recurring character narratives and their adaptations. He divides adaptations into ten categories according to whether they are made by a single team or by several different people over time, whether the adaptations happen in the same timeline as the original text, whether the adaptation brings changes to the original storyline of the character and whether the adaptation is a separate text with no continuity. (Strong 2020, 110–111.)

Recurring character narrative is a good concept for describing how a character can appear in several instances without it having to advance a larger storyline, as it must in Jenkins' concept of transmedia storytelling. However, it is focused on narrative and thus excludes non-narrative appearances by characters, such as drawings, photographs or merchandise. In addition to this, most superheroes belong to most (if not all) of Strong's categories as they already exist in multiple networks

of transmedia and adaptation. Some superhero characters are adapted multiple times by different adapters, and the characters can recur in several different instalments and forms, which are usually only helmed by a specific creative team for a certain time period. The characters usually have many incarnations simultaneously and are often resurrected or rebooted because they have proved popular in another media or instalment, such as Catwoman's disappearance from the pages of *Batman* comics in 1954, only to be revived on TV in 1966. This is why the concepts of transmediality and transmedia universe are useful for thinking about characters such as Batman here. The core text, as Koistinen, Koskimaa and Välisalo call it (2021, 3), of Batman's transmedia universe is the character of Batman, his origin story of being orphaned as a child and his double life as Bruce Wayne and Batman. Batman's transmedia universe includes not only his various incarnations in comics, TV and film, but also fan art, toys and other commodities related to the character. According to my analysis, despite their differences, the marketing campaign and children's drawings all represent the same character, marked by a few basic components, such as Batman's name, the cape and the cowl, and a certain code of conduct. The local adaptations contribute to the construction of a transnational transmedia character.

The concept of transmedia describes products or phenomena of popular culture that can be accessed through multiple instalments produced for multiple media platforms. Each instalment extends the world inhabited by the transmedia characters. Some scholars emphasise a unified story constructed through the different texts, highlighting the narrative elements of transmedia texts (e.g. Jenkins 2006a). In my research, I explore non-narrative elements, such as fan art and advertising, as part of a transmedia universe. The concept of the transmedia universe helps me to understand Finnish versions of popular culture characters as part of a transmedia phenomenon.

4   The methodologies of adaptation studies

In this chapter, I focus on the methodology of my research. I start with a description of the methodologies of adaptation studies and clarify how I constructed my own comparative approach. I then proceed to describe the research materials and methods of each research article in more detail. I finish the chapter with some ethical considerations.

The focus of adaptation studies has shifted from what is often called 'fidelity criticism' of its early days, where an original version is compared with its adaptation, towards broader questions of mediality and media borders (see, e.g. Fehrle 2019). These broader topics include, for example, the qualities of characters that are at the centre of numerous adaptations (see, e.g. Strong 2020), the ideological dimension of adaptation (such as changes in the political message of an adapted text) and the different intertextual relationships adaptations have to other texts (Roche, Schmitt-Pitiot & Mitaine 2018, 12–18). Although fidelity criticism is no longer at the centre of adaptation studies, this does not mean that the comparative approach of adaptation studies is outdated (Burke 2022, 84; Fehrle 2019, 9; Roche, Schmitt-Pitiot & Mitaine 2018, 12–13). While adaptation studies of the past was interested in how well a certain adaptation managed to transpose a story to a new medium, many of today's adaptation scholars are interested in the complex relations involved in adaptation processes, such as the relations between author, adapter, producer, text and audiences (Fehrle 2019, 8; Jenkins 2006a, 2–3). In this thesis, I apply a comparative analysis to see what has been omitted, added or otherwise changed in the Finnish adaptation and to analyse why the omissions, additions and other changes have been made. Comparing texts in order to investigate changes, relationships between texts and media-specific conventions is the starting point for analysing adaptations, even if the analysis then focuses on, for example, the contexts of production or the reception of the adaptation. I use concepts from media studies, comics studies and fan studies to ask questions about production processes, comics narration and audience engagement. Instead of aiming to identify whether the adaptations in my research material are 'good' or 'bad', I investigate the methods and processes of adaptation

itself (Sanders 2006, 18–20) in order to show how the comics were changed and rearranged in the local production process.

In fact, Simone Murray (2011, 4) has called for a sociology of adaptation in order to take a step further from textual analysis and ask how adaptations are produced, how the production mechanisms influence the kinds of adaptations that are produced, how audiences become aware of adapted properties and if the success of an adaptation impacts on industry stakeholders, how it does so. Combining a comparative approach of reading the American and Finnish Marvel comics side by side with a more sociological approach has enabled me to ask questions about the strategies of adaptation used by Finnish editors, how the adaptations were mediated and explained to Finnish audiences and how the practices of adaptation altered the narrative strategies. Furthermore, taking a step further from textual analysis has allowed me to consider materials made by fans and advertisers as adaptations of a superhero character. For Murray, adaptations are not interesting simply because of their ideological encodings, they are also interesting because they tell us something about their production contexts (Murray 2011, 5).

I chose the two longest-running Finnish Marvel comic books, *Ryhmä-X* and *Hämähäkkimies,* for examination in the first three articles because of their longevity and popularity, while having a different corpus in the fourth article allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the history of superheroes in Finland. In Articles 1, 2 and 3, the aim is to recognise and analyse the adaptation strategies used by the editor of Finnish Marvel comics in the 1980s and 1990s. Each article emphasises different aspects of transnational adaptation and comics publishing, and each article's focus is on a specific part of the research material. After having read all the volumes of *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* published between 1980 and 1995, I focus on a smaller selection of material for each article.

Since the purpose of articles 1–3 is to identify and analyse practices of adaptation and their impact on the Finnish versions, a comparison with the original comic books is necessary. Comics formats are specific to the particular cultures they hail from (Borodo 2014, 26), and details of the format in which comics are published affect how the page and panel layouts look, as well as the narration of the comic. In American superhero comics, the panels and their layout patterns are designed to fit the American comic book length and format of thirty-two pages that measure in 17 x 26 cm (Rota 2008, 81, 83). This means that if the translated version is published in a different size or if the number of pages is different from the original, the panels and their relationships have to be scaled accordingly.

Comic books are commodities that the readers experience as a whole, and in addition to the comics stories, they often contain letters pages and advertisements (Gordon 2012, 157–158). As discussed in Article 3, comic books' covers and letters pages can be considered as paratexts that guide readers into the story. They are a part

of the experience of reading the comic book, whether the reader chooses to delve into them or not. For example, *Ryhmä-X* 4/1995 starts with the letters page, where the editor reveals a big plot point from the issue at hand. In this case, the reading experience will be very different for a reader who reads the letters page first, and one who does not read it. (Article 3, page 8.) Advertisements are another part of the comic book that can pause the reading experience. Advertisements for products such as games, candy or toys are typically placed both on the inner sleeves of the American comic books and mid-story. Finnish comic books, on the other hand, only feature advertisements on the inner sleeves, and if there are extra pages, they are frequently used for a letters column. As my research is focused on changes in the stories, such as omitting pages or panels and the domestication of the translation, it is important to note the material differences because they are connected to how the adapted text is read and interpreted (Borodo 2014, 26). For example, two-page panels, a specific visual device often used in superhero comics, require a certain placement of pages. As a two-page panel features two facing pages intended for being read together (Gavaler 2018, 206), those two pages must be placed facing each other in republications and adaptations as well. Since the number of pages in the Finnish superhero comic books is different than in the American comics, adding or omitting pages is sometimes necessary for the two-page panel placement to remain intact. The material details of the comic books set the framework for adaptation as the American material must be fitted into the Finnish comic book format.

In the following sections, I present the research materials and methodologies used in each research article.

4.1   Article 1: The comparative method in adaptation studies

For Article 1, I selected three volumes of *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* for analysis, using online republications of the American originals to track changes. My analysis starts from 1984, the first year of publication of *Ryhmä-X*. Since only three issues of the comic book came out in 1984, the 1985 volume is also included in my research. In this way, I can analyse how the new heroes were introduced to the Finnish audience. I have chosen the 1990 volume as the second volume as it falls halfway between 1984 and 1995, and 1995 as the third volume as it is the last full year when the long-time editor of Marvel comics in Finland edited both *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X*. In addition to finding out how the new heroes and stories were introduced to the audience, the eleven-year timeframe allows for an investigation of any possible changes in the adaptation strategies. Although this is not the primary focus of the article, my research shows that the strategy of 'only

including important information' continues throughout the decade, and there is no visible trend of fewer alterations towards the end of the eleven-year period.

After forming the corpus of research material, the first step was to identify the original comic books from which each Finnish issue originates in order to note any omissions, additions and other differences between the American original and the adaptation. One single Finnish issue consists of more pages than one American comic book, and the editor only occasionally included specific information on the source material. Using the directory 'Marvel-lehdet Suomessa' (Marvel-lehdet Suomessa, n.d.) I have managed to find most of the information regarding the original publications.

I accessed the volumes 1984/1985, 1990 and 1995 of *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* through the library of the University of Turku. I used the Marvel Unlimited online platform's archives of digital comics for accessing the original versions of the comic books and stories. Using digitally republished versions of original comic books has its limitations, mainly considering the comic book as an artefact, but since my interest in this article is specifically in the adaptation of the comics stories, the usability and volume of Marvel's digital archives has proven satisfactory for my research.

By comparing the Finnish adaptations and the digital versions of the original comics, I can see that a vast amount of original material has been left out from the Finnish publications. Some American comic book issues and titles have simply not been published at all, while other issues have been published partly, with sections or pages left unpublished. My next step was making note of the omissions and analysing their purpose. I started with counting the number of omitted pages in both *Ryhmä-X* and *Hämähäkkimies*. This provided a certain perspective on the phenomenon and allowed me to see if there was a pattern in the number of omissions.

The method of comparing a translated version of a comic book to the one published in the original language is a translation studies method, as well as an adaptation studies method (see, e.g. Fehrle 2019, 9; Roche, Schmitt-Pitiot & Mitaine 2018, 12–13). In addition to noting the omissions and additions of panels and pages, I compared the Finnish translations with the original English text. In translation studies, Michał Borodo (2014), Sarah Viren (2015) and Federico Zanettin (2014) (among others) have compared comics from different language and culture areas. Comparing the Finnish translation and the original works, I look at the textual elements themselves and at the interplay of text and images.

4.2   Article 2: A fan studies perspective

In Article 2, the research material consists of the letters pages in *Hämähäkkimies* issues 8/1980–5/1983 and 11/1984–5/1997 (a total of 485 pages) and in *Ryhmä-X*

1/1984–12/1992 and 2/1994–8/1996 (a total of 287 pages). Since I am specifically interested in the agency and role of the long-time editor, Mail-Man, the research material of this article includes all the published letters, Mail-Man's answers to them and the opening words to each column. The gaps in both comic books' runs are due to another editor being in charge of the letters pages during those times. While Article 1 focuses on recognising and naming the adaptation strategies used by the Finnish editor, Article 2's focus is on investigating how he used the letters pages to justify the editorial choices and communicate with the readers.

My research started by reading through the letters pages, concentrating on the style and register. This includes the kind of language used by readers and Mail-Man; the form and length of the letters; and the content and topics of the letters and answers. The article is based on a fan studies perspective, and the results highlight the importance of audience engagement and gatekeeping, as well as gate opening. Will Brooker (2000), Matthew J. Pustz (2007) and Ian Gordon (2012) have previously studied the letters pages in superhero comic books. In Brooker's study, the importance of letters pages in creating the superhero fandom in the 1960s becomes evident as he maps out the history of comics fans' engagement with the creators (Brooker 2000, 250–253). According to Pustz, letters pages help readers to understand the stories through reading about how others have interpreted them, as well as through giving the readers information about future events (Pustz 2007, 163– 164). In today's transnational cultural fandom, fans themselves can be gatekeepers and gate openers, choosing, mediating, circulating and promoting cultural texts outside the texts' country of origin (Lee 2014, 201). Before online platforms and digital publishing, the role of letters pages was crucial in expanding the fandom and mediating the reading experience.

The readers' letters range from short questions and comments on specific stories to long analyses of artists' styles and the quality of storytelling. Typical questions that were chosen to be published concerned newly introduced characters and their history, requests to explain stories that the letter's writer has not read and future publication plans. Most letters are signed with a pen name, and the age or gender of the writers is usually not revealed. Generally, the letter writers give praise to Marvel and Mail-Man, but there are critical voices as well. Usually, the critique is directed towards storylines that the letter writer has not enjoyed, and sometimes, the writers complain that stories that they wish to read have not been published in Finland.

Article 2 ties the transnational adaptation process to audience studies, showing the importance of a national media culture, even in the times of growing global fan cultures (Nikunen 2014). As discussed in Chapter 3, the cultural context of the comics changes as they are adapted, which affects how the audiences receive and understand them (Kustritz 2015, 29). The letters pages and the emerging Finnish fan culture act as mediators as the comics and their characters cross borders from the

USA to Finland. Studying fannish sites, such as the letters pages where the readers can exchange their views regarding the comics, offers insight into their transnational adaptation.

4.3   Article 3: Comparing publishing formats

After analysing the broader framework of the Finnish Marvel adaptations in the first two articles, the third article focuses on an event storyline originally spread over six separate comic book titles and issues, published in Finland in four comic books. The aim is to show how superhero storylines are reimagined in a specific national context by analysing the event 'Fatal Attractions' and its Finnish version 'Kohtalokas vetovoima'. In addition to the story, the research material includes paratextual elements such as the covers and letters pages.

Comic book event is a concept used by the comic book industry, as well as scholars and fans, and it refers to a story spanning over several different titles and issues (Kaveney 2008, 176). Such events are a part of American comic book culture, where several comic books come out weekly and one way to boost sales is to tie the plots of several different heroes together, encouraging readers to buy more comics. 'Fatal Attractions' was originally published in *X-Factor* #92, *X-Force* #25, *The Uncanny X-Men* #304, *X-Men* #25, *Wolverine* #75 and *Excalibur* #71, between July and November 1993. Each issue contains one part of the event's storyline, a total of 246 pages of comics (excluding advertisements and covers). The Finnish adaptation, 'Kohtalokas vetovoima', was published as 171 pages in total, published in March, April and May 1995 in issues 3–5/1995 of *Ryhmä-X* and issue 5/1995 of *Sarjakuvalehti*.

As with Article 1, the first stage of analysis was to compare the Finnish adaptation with the digitally published version of the original comic to note any omissions, as well as any other differences. I especially paid attention to what parts were omitted and how the omissions affect the storyline. In addition to omissions, a short section was added to the Finnish adaptation from a comic book that does not belong to the original event. I analyse the added scene as a paratext along with the comic books' covers and the Finnish letters pages as they are used to frame the storyline to the new audience. I conclude that the storyline lost several of its features as an event as it was adapted in Finland, including it being a 30th anniversary celebration of Marvel's X-Men. With its omissions and focus on advancing the ongoing plotlines of Marvel's mutants, the storyline is adjusted to a new audience in a new cultural setting where world building and character development, as well as publication formats such as the event, are not valued as much as they are in the cultural industry they come from.

4.4   Article 4: Historical analysis

The final article of this thesis focuses on an earlier superhero phenomenon in Finland, the 1960s' Batmania. Through an analysis of children's drawings published on the letters pages of the *Batman* comic book in Finland in 1966 and 1967, as well as the Finnish advertising and marketing campaigns for Batman-related products, I investigate the relationship between transmedia characters and adaptation.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the relationship of the local adaptations of transnational characters and their transmedia universe by analysing different versions of Batman. The article's research material consists of readers' drawings published on the letters pages of the Finnish *Batman* comic book in 1966–1968, advertisements published in *Helsingin Sanomat* during 1966–1968, a marketing film for the Batman soft drink produced by a Finnish brewery (Mallasjuoma), and retrospectively published images of Batman-related products in the essay collection *Batman aukene!* (1988). I analyse the drawings and advertisements as adaptations and recognise the intertextual network to which they belong. According to Liam Burke (2021, 95), looking at adaptations' relationships to each other in a wider cultural context can help build a more rounded understanding of vernacular adaptation. In this article, analysing the adaptations' intertextuality helps me understand how the fan-made and corporate-made versions participate in building a transmedia universe.

I collected all 61 drawings published on the letters pages of *Batman* during its run in the 1960s. I analyse the drawings, paying attention to the layout in the drawings, the depiction of the characters and the vehicles, gadgets and other objects pictured alongside characters. In these drawings, I focus on the details that are repeated in several images to analyse what features Batman consists of and what the different versions have in common.

As for the Batman-related marketing material, I gathered newspaper advertisements for licenced Batman products from *Helsingin Sanomat*, the largest newspaper in Finland, using their digital archives. From the search results, I collected both advertisements for merchandise and articles related to the TV series published in the newspaper during 1966–1968. I also gathered images of merchandise, pictures taken at promotional events for the Batman soda and photographs of children dressed in Batman costumes that have been published in the *Batman aukene!* essay collection and exhibition catalogue. Published in 1988 by a collective called 'Bat-instituutti' ('The Bat Institute'), the collection includes essays on the character of Batman and Batmania in Finland, as well as pictures of the 1960s Batman merchandise and fans. In addition to the collection of essays, the writers organised an exhibition with the same title. The images in the exhibition catalogue further detail the 1960s' Batmania in Finland.

I pay attention to the types of merchandise advertised in *Helsingin Sanomat* and look at how Batman products are visible in the photographs. This material provides a background for my analysis of the audio-visual Batman soft drink advertisement, which I analyse by looking closely. Similarly, I look closely at photographs taken at promotional events for the Batman soft drink. I use the print advertisements and photographs to further illustrate how local adaptations build the transmedia universe inhabited by Batman, Robin and other characters from Gotham. The drawings, photos and the advertising film reveal different aspects of Finnish Batman adaptations.

4.5   Ethical considerations

My research material consists of comic books and other material that were published several decades ago. They are products that have been published and circulated for a wide audience and using them as research material does not require specific ethical considerations. The articles also focus on the editor of the letters pages in the Finnish Marvel comics and his role in the adaptation process. The editor answered readers' letters using the pseudonym Mail-Man. Although I mention his actual name in Article 2, I am not analysing him as a person but rather a character constructed through his writings on the letters pages. I also refer to published letters from the readers of comics, using the pen names they used when they were published.

An important part of my research material consists of letters published on the comic books' letters pages. Analysing and referencing adult readers' letters published in comic books warrants no great ethical risks, but analysing letters and drawings sent by children means that I must consider these issues. The material analysed in Article 4 is largely produced by children, and most drawings include the name, age and hometown of the young Batman fans who made them. One of the main ethical concerns in childhood studies is that the adult researcher must aim to protect the children who are being studied (Vehkalahti 2010, 141). Central questions revolve around how to treat the research material, how to write about the research subjects and how to report the findings to an audience (ibid., 145). As a researcher, I must respect the rules of ethical conduct when I present my results, and at the same time, I must describe my analysis in detail and refer to the research material so that the readers can follow my argumentation (ibid, 151). I have decided to refer to the children whose drawings were published in the Finnish Batman comic book only by their first names to protect their anonymity. In most cases their last names and other information have already been published in comic books with nationwide circulation, which means that their identities cannot be wholly protected. In addition to this, they are of course no longer children since the material was published in the 1960s.

My research does not warrant any severe ethical considerations, but as a scholar informed by the cultural studies tradition, I wish to position myself as a researcher. As is the case with so many other comics scholars and superhero experts, I was a fan before I became a researcher. This means that when I analyse the research material, search for clues and build my argument, I feel passionate about the material in more than one sense. Self-proclaimed aca-fans, meaning academics writing about topics that they are themselves fans of, have pondered the shame related to fandoms and writing about them (see, e.g. Larsen & Zubernis 2012, 1, 6; Jenkins 2006b, 70). This shame can be related to the fannish object, to fannish practices or to studying something as 'trivial' as fans and fandoms. If academics writing about fandoms sometimes feel cautious about being open about their object of interest, the same applies to the fans who are being studied. Cécile Cristofari and Matthieu J. Guitton emphasise the importance of using pseudonyms when writing about fans and, in addition to this, highlight that no clues about the pseudonyms' identity should be available (Cristofari & Guitton 2017, 723). While I have not given new pseudonyms to the people whose letters or drawings I analyse, I only use the pen names they have given themselves or their first names. Even though the fans can be identified by anyone reading the same comic books, this is not a problem since the letter writers have already accepted that their pseudonyms or even full names have been printed in a published comic book several decades ago.

As Cristofari and Guitton write, aca-fans are a major source of academic research on fans and fan communities, and their role in the structuring of knowledge about fandoms, as well as their position among fans, should be considered from an ethical perspective (2017, 714–715). A scholar who is simultaneously a fan, such as myself, is a member of both the academic community and the fan community and can be thought of as having a transitional position. Through aca-fans, the knowledge is transmitted from the fan community to the academic community, and sometimes also the other way around. (Cristofari & Guitton 2017, 718.) Cristofari and Guitton point out that aca-fans should be aware of their contribution to the representation of their research topic and of fan communities in general (ibid. 726). In this research, I present no value judgements regarding whether the stories, adaptations, drawings or letters to the editor are good, bad, boring or exciting. If anything, my own interest in the research material has helped me to stay focused and interested in the analysis of old comic books throughout the years this project has taken.

5 Findings

In this chapter, I present the main findings in my research articles and the thesis as a whole. I divide my results into three thematic sections in which I go through the findings as they were discussed in the articles and make connections to the main research question of the thesis. The first section focuses on the practices of adapting Marvel's comics for the Finnish audience. In the second section, I further show how the choices made by the editor were reflected in the storytelling. In the third section, I present my findings about fan art and advertising as adaptation.

In Section 5.1, I present the Finnish editor's practices of adaptation and name them. My understanding of the Finnish comic books as transnational adaptations is built on the discovery of these practices and the theoretical discussions that I begin in the first article. Choosing the stories for publication, editing the stories for the Finnish publication format by cutting and pasting, and using domestication as a translation strategy are all parts of the process that helps the comics cross cultural, national and linguistic borders and become transnational.

My findings show that the role of local agents – editors, publishers, readers or marketing professionals – was significant in transnational comics publishing in the late twentieth century. Building on my discovery of the adaptation practices, I show how the choices made by the editor were reflected in the storytelling in Section 5.2. While comics adaptation conventionally refers to adapting a story, my expanded understanding of the transnational adaptation process includes the comic book's letters pages and advertising. The role of letters pages in comic books has been studied before (e.g. Brooker 2000; Gordon 2012; Pustz 2007), but letters pages have not been investigated from the point of view of adaptation studies before. My findings regarding how the letters pages became an integral part of the adaptation when the editor used them for facilitating the reading experience and filling in gaps in the stories expand the scope of adaptation studies.

In Section 5.3, I venture even further into what can be conceptualised as transnational adaptation as I go over my findings related to fan art and advertising. My research shows the importance of audiences in the adaptation process of superhero comics. In the 1960s, advertisers and audiences produced Finnish versions

of Batman. These versions mix existing traits of the character with local additions and expand Batman's transmedia universe.

5.1   Adaptation strategies as practices

As described in Chapter 3, adaptation is a creative process wherein a cultural text is re-written or re-organised for a new audience. It requires editing and creativity as the text is made more palatable for the audience in the new setting. According to my research, the editorial process of Marvel comics in Finland consists of selecting stories for publication, cutting and pasting them for the Finnish comic book format and translating the language. While I use the concept of strategy in Article 1, I have come to the conclusion that the concept of practice better describes the work of the editor. The editor's work is practical and tied to a certain place and time, and in my research, I make his work visible through carefully reading and analysing the Finnish and American comic books comparatively. The practices are detectable in the *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* comic books in my research material, and they are essential to how the comics cross cultural and linguistic borders, becoming transnational products of popular culture. In Article 1, I conceptualise the practices as strategies, outlining and naming them as selection, cutting and pasting and domestication of translation. In Article 3, I investigate a case where the practices are used to adapt a multi-part storyline for a new audience. I present the results from Articles 1 and 3 together before looking more closely into the specificities of adapting an event storyline in the next section.

The first strategy of adaptation that I have detected, the selection of material, is crucial in determining the storylines and character development of *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* because both comic books consist of material published in several different original titles. In the 1980s and 1990s, the typical Finnish comic book issue was between 48 and 68 pages long, while the American originals were usually 32 pages long. Each Finnish issue was pieced together from material gathered from two to four American comic book issues, and typically, the more original issues the Finnish version was comprised of, the more pages from the comics that had originally been published had to be omitted. During the years under investigation in Article 1, *Ryhmä-X* contained material from nineteen different titles and *Hämähäkkimies* was pieced together from eleven separate titles. The first volume of *Ryhmä-X* in my research material, spanning 1984–1985, was the most fragmentary. From the original American comic book issues that the material for the Finnish adaptation was selected, 134 pages were omitted from the 946 pages found in the original issues. In 1990, 65 pages were omitted from the original 517, while in 1995 only 19 pages out of the original 835 were cut. With *Hämähäkkimies*, however, the

trend was not similar. In the 1984 volume, 49 pages out of 529 were omitted, and 80 out of 720 pages in the 1995 volume were cut. In 1990, however, only 31 pages from the original 695 were cut, and some pages were also added in the Finnish adaptations.

Practices related to reorganising the vast source material continue after selecting which stories to publish. Based on comparing the American and Finnish comic books side by side, I call the second strategy cutting and pasting. The cutting and pasting strategy includes four sub-categories, named (i) leaving out original title pages and recaps; (ii) only including 'important information'; (iii) leaving out fillers – short stories that are featured at the end of the original comic book; and (iv) addition. All the sub-categories except for one focus on condensing the original material.

The use of omissions as a strategy to streamline plots also becomes visible in my analysis of a longer storyline featuring dozens of characters. The comic book event 'Fatal Attractions' (1993) was published in Finnish as 'Kohtalokas vetovoima' (1995), and several changes were made throughout the event to adapt it to the Finnish publishing industry and audience. The event was originally published in six parts, each part in a different Marvel comics title, but the Finnish adaptation left out the entire final chapter (i.e. the final comic book), as well as the majority of the first chapter (i.e. the first comic book). In addition to the larger omissions, single pages were also cut from different parts of the storyline. On the other hand, some additional pages were inserted at the beginning of the story. In the case of adapting 'Fatal Attractions' for Finnish readers, only including important information and adding pages or panels were major parts of the Finnish version of the event. In the adaptation, a complicated storyline with a multitude of important characters and sub-plots was condensed, leading to a filtered storyline, interpreted for a new audience that was presumed to not be familiar with each character and setting. Through the use of selection, and cutting and pasting as adaptation strategies, 'Kohtalokas vetovoima' retains some elements of the original event while others are changed.

The strategy of only including important information is, in a way, a premise for all adaptations. Adaptations differ from their source on the textual level and so do their contexts of creation and reception (e.g. Hutcheon 2006; Azenha & Moreira 2012). However, some amount of 'important information' must be preserved in order for the text to be an adaptation instead of a completely new creation. In the case of 'Kohtalokas vetovoima', 'only including important information' means both omitting and adding material. While dozens of pages were omitted from the original event storyline when it was published in Finland, the editor added a scene before the storyline's beginning to provide information to the readers. The event storyline features a character whose past had not been explored in the Finnish *Ryhmä-X* comics, and to facilitate the audience's reading experience, a short passage where the character's past is discussed was added. The passage functions in a paratextual way preparing the readers for what is about to follow.

As with the 'Kohtalokas vetovoima' case, most omissions in *Ryhmä-X* and *Hämähäkkimies* in the 1980s and 1990s streamline the plots. Leaving out title pages and recaps eliminates repetition since each Finnish comic book contains material from at least two original comic book issues. This practice especially shows in the 1984 volume of *Hämähäkkimies* since each issue was constructed from approximately one whole and one half of an American comic book, and the next instalment of the story begins right after the previous one ends. There was no need for a summary of previous events as they were published between the same covers. In addition to leaving out title pages and recaps, the Finnish editor has also chosen to leave out so-called 'fillers', short stories of five to twelve pages placed at the end of an American comic book. This strategy was used in *Hämähäkkimies,* both in the 1980s and 1990s, and again the omissions serve the purpose of focusing on the main plot. The filler stories omitted from the Finnish publications do not advance the ongoing plot, and all of them have a different theme, in some cases even a different style, to the continuous storyline.

Selection, and cutting and pasting resulted in action-driven stories with less character development than in the original American comic books. In the American superhero comics scene of the 1980s and 1990s, Marvel's titles formed a large continuity where the stories were carried on from one title and issue to another. The dozens of titles were mainly distributed through a network of specialty shops or newsstands, and one purpose of creating stories that cross over from one title to another was to encourage the audience to buy more comics. In Finland, on the contrary, there were only a couple of superhero titles, and while they were sold at newsstands, many readers had a subscription and the comic books were delivered to their homes. As secondary plots were omitted along with many crossover stories, the Marvel universe remained significantly smaller for the Finnish audience compared with its size for the readers of the American comics. Inner monologues have been omitted, as have dialogues focused on relationships and scenes showing characters in between action sequences. The example I describe in Chapter 3, where pages and panels from several different comic book titles and issues were combined into one Finnish issue of *Ryhmä-X*, shows how the focus on action works. By removing scenes where relationships between characters or character development are at the centre and instead adding action sequences from another comic book, the Finnish editor concentrated on advancing the plot and action. Analysing these types of changes allows me to better understand the differences in the contexts of creation, distribution and reception (Fehrle 2019, 15) between the American and Finnish comics industry. The contexts of creation and distribution are very different in these countries, which also makes the contexts of reception different. The Finnish readers were dependent on the editor's choice of stories and titles, whereas in the USA,

audiences had a bigger selection of titles that were marketed to them in each issue and at comic book shops.

The third strategy of adaptation used by the Finnish editor of Marvel comics is the domestication of the translation. In this context, I use the term domestication to refer to a concept of translation studies where domestication refers to a translation strategy that aims to bring the translated text close to the reader (see, e.g. Koskinen 2012, 14–15). As Gabilliet writes, transnational adaptations of cultural commodities are processes of adjusting foreign concepts into the domestic cultural industry's expectations (Gabilliet 2013, 222), and language is a key factor in this. As a translation strategy, domestication makes the translated text easily understandable to the new audience by, for example, using idioms and metaphors from the target language instead of literally translating the idioms used in the original language and removing references that would be unfamiliar to the new audience (Koskinen 2012, 14–15). In *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X*, this strategy is visible in the removal of popular culture references, as well as other references to American culture. For example, in a storyline focusing on a rivalry between Spider-Man and a bounty hunter, all references to business and finance have been erased from the adaptation. This works in a similar way as the omissions of pages, filler stories or secondary plots: the character's personality is suppressed as her business-driven language is reduced to similar speech to that used by any of Spider-Man's other adversaries. Cultural references have also been changed to ones easily understandable to the Finnish audience, for example, a reference to *Star Trek* has been changed to a reference to *Star Wars* in *Ryhmä-X* 1/1985 and a poem by William Blake has been replaced with the Finnish lyrics of 'The Itsy Bitsy Spider' in *Hämähäkkimies* 9/1990. Further, details describing New York, the hometown of Spider-Man and many of his opponents, have been left out from several issues of *Hämähäkkimies*. Through the domestication of the translation, the comics are brought closer to the new readership, but some of the nuances of the milieu, characters and dialogue are lost in the process.

The findings presented in this section show that adaptation can include condensing the text as well as expanding the text. When a text is adapted for a new cultural setting, the elements that are linked to the context in which the text was originally published are altered as well. For example, there are differences in the size of the publication, the publishing frequency and the superhero comics culture in which several comic books are connected to each other. The Finnish editor omitted sections of the original comic books throughout the research material – for example, in the adaptation of the 'Fatal Attractions' storyline – but he simultaneously added some explanatory material that worked in a paratextual way, guiding the Finnish readers. The Finnish adaptations focused on providing important information regarding the plot and characters, and the elements tied to the American comic book industry were excluded from the adaptation.

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5.2 Expanding the idea of adaptation

In this section I expand my analysis of 'Fatal Attractions' from the previous section and describe how its form, the comic book event, was changed in the adaptation process. In addition to this, I analyse letters pages in *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* as part of the adaptation process. Adding the publication format and the letters pages to my analysis expands the idea of what adaptation can mean. I show that the letters pages, including the readers' letters as well as the editor's writings, are an important part of the adaptation of the comics' stories. My analysis of the adaptation of the event form of publishing shows how the differences in the comics publishing industry affect the adaptation process. This section continues to highlight the agency and importance of the Finnish editor in the shaping of the adaptations.

'Fatal Attractions' is a comic book event, defined by Roz Kaveney as a storyline designed to involve two or more comic book titles, featuring a narrative built so that all the issues need to be read in order to be able to follow it (Kaveney 2008, 176). Sometimes events are built around short-lived titles of their own, while for example, 'Fatal Attractions' is spread across six different titles, with each chapter of the story published in a different title. Whether published in a title specific to the event or over existing titles, events often serve commercial purposes as readers are persuaded to buy more comic books in order to read the entire story. Simultaneously, events can also deepen character development and expand the storyworld. When comics are adapted for publishing in another country, however, the same logic of increasing sales by publishing event storylines does not always apply, and the publications are restricted by a different number of titles, page volume and smaller circulation.

The original publication of 'Fatal Attractions' in the USA was marked as a spectacular event to celebrate 30 years of X-Men comics, which shows in the way the event was spread over each X-themed comic book title on the market at the time, as well as in the use of special covers that made each issue a collectible. In Finland, on the other hand, there was only one X-themed title and no tradition of comic book events.

'Kohtalokas vetovoima' exemplifies the significance of the context of the cultural industry in transnational adaptation, but simultaneously, it highlights the role of paratexts in the construction of the Finnish adaptation. Paratexts, as defined by Jonathan Gray (2010, 23), fill space and negotiate relationships between the text, its audiences and the industry that produced the text. Some paratexts are produced by the cultural industry, including, for example, comic book covers and letters pages, but audiences also produce paratexts, such as fanfiction and fan art. In particular, the covers 'condition our entrance to the text, telling us what to expect' (ibid., 25), and in the case of 'Fatal Attractions', the covers were a crucial part that made the original storyline an event. Each cover in the American publications featured the same design elements with the title of the event prominently visible, which signalled to the

readers that all six parts, published in different comic book titles, belong to the same narrative complex. On the other hand, in the Finnish adaptation the covers make no reference to the title of the event, and they do not share the original visual elements. This change shows the difference between the American publishing industry, where event storylines and collectible comic book covers were a part of comics culture, and the Finnish publishing industry, where they were not.

The 'Fatal Attractions' event lost part of its nature as an event storyline when it was published in Finland. First, the temporal distance between the original version, which was published to celebrate the anniversary of Marvel's X-Men, and the Finnish publication two years later, meant that the celebratory aspect was missing. Secondly, the lack of special qualities, such as a unified cover design, diminished the Finnish event's properties as a spectacle. Thirdly, the omissions described earlier, such as cutting the entire final chapter (i.e. comic book) of the event, led to a condensed version of the event's storyline. Action and plot were highlighted at the expense of character development and expanding the storyworld, which were key elements of the original event. The Finnish editor's practices of condensing and streamlining the plots are familiar throughout my research material.

In the adaptation process of Finnish Marvel comics, the role of the local editor was crucial. The same editor was responsible for the selection of stories, cutting and pasting, and translation in the early years of Finnish Marvel publications (Häkkinen 2013; Junni 2014). The editor's major role in the Finnish publishing process reflects the importance of the agency of individual producers in transnational exchange (Cronqvist 2020, 383). The editor, going by the pseudonym of Mail-Man, chose the stories that were published and even translated them in the 1980s, but it was his role on the letters pages that helped me understand how transnational adaptation encompasses the entire production of the comic book, not just the stories. The letters pages in *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* were used strategically in the construction of the Finnish adaptations, and I detail Mail-Man's role and the significance of the letters page in the adaptation process in Article 2.

The letters pages are part of the comic book, and they have a paratextual function. As mentioned above, paratexts negotiate the relationship between the producer and the audience of a cultural text, as well as between the reader and the text. Mail-Man was a key participant in these negotiations in Finnish Marvel comics. In Article 2, I describe three roles that Mail-Man occupied on the letters pages of the comic books: filling out gaps to facilitate the reading experience, defending editorial choices and educating readers into becoming fans. Due to the strategy of only including important information and focusing on major plotlines, a large amount of what was published in the American comics was never published in Finland. Mail-Man facilitated the reading process by writing editorial texts for the letters pages that explained and clarified storylines or characters that seemed unclear due to his

omissions from the originals in the Finnish adaptations. Answering the readers' questions – ranging from asking for clarification about past events or gaps in the storylines to inquiries about future publication plans – was also a part of this role of filling out gaps to create a smooth reading experience. The letters pages in *Hämähäkkimies* and *Ryhmä-X* in the 1980s and 1990s not only helped the readers to follow the complicated storylines but also helped to build and legitimise Mail-Man's status as the editor used the space for justifying his editorial choices.

Defending editorial choices was the second role occupied by Mail-Man on the letters pages. He made choices based on his own taste, frequently justifying the selection of material based on it being either well drawn and worth publishing or badly drawn and thus unfit for the Finnish readers. In addition to his own expertise, Mail-Man used the readers of the Finnish comic books as validation for his editorial choices. He referred to requests made in the letters, as well as the results of an annual readers' poll, in order to justify his editorial decisions.

Mail-Man's roles are all connected to each other. His third role is the role of gatekeeper to and educator of Finnish Marvel fandom; this comes forth as he answers readers' questions, educating them about the details of the Marvel Universe, and in the justifications of his editorial choices as he guides the readers' taste and teaches them what 'good art' is and what is 'poorly drawn'. In addition to educating the readers about the comics' characters, events and artists, he uses the platform to instruct readers to write better letters, praising those he deems especially well-written and thoughtful. He emphasises that the readers' age or the amount of money they have invested into their hobby does not matter, and everyone is entitled to their opinions.

By focusing on what happened to a very specific form of comic book publishing (the event storyline) in transnational adaptation and expanding my view further to include the role of local agents in the publication process, I found a new perspective on adaptation. My findings show the whole comic book as an adaptation, including the publishing format and paratexts such as the letters page. This expands the idea of adaptation from only considering strategies that concern the story itself. My research shows that the restricted number of pages, erasure of the celebratory element and lack of a unified look of the published comic books are part of the Finnish adaptation process of "Fatal Attractions". In the adaptation, the storyline lost its form as an event. This shows that besides changes in the stories and the domesticated translation, publishing formats alter adaptation as well. Because so many changes are made as the comic book stories are prepared for publication in a new culture, the role of a local expert is highlighted. The local editor's importance shows not only in choosing and editing the material that is included in the adaptation, but also in providing information about the stories and characters, reading instructions and guidance on fannish behaviour.

5.3 Advertising, merchandising and fan art as adaptation

The transnational adaptation of superhero comics includes changes to the stories, domestication of the translations and the altering of the publication format. The work of local agents shows in all stages as the transnational product is adapted and mediated to the new audience. In this section, I expand the idea of adapting characters further by including local creations inspired by transnational products of popular culture that are not produced by the publishers of superhero narratives. They do not necessarily recreate an existing form or story, but instead contribute to building a universe. Analysing Finnish advertisements for products related to Batman, such as a Batman soft drink, as well as drawings made by the young Finnish audience of *Batman*, I examine how certain aspects of the character of Batman were used in the local adaptations. In the previous section, I discussed paratexts that are produced by the publisher of the comics. In this section, I present my findings related to elements that are made by the audiences and advertisers of products related to Batman. The analysis of different kinds of local adaptations expands my understanding of transnational adaptation.

The *Batman* TV show inspired official adaptations and unofficial adaptations, and in my research, I investigate them as the building blocks of a transmedia universe (Koistinen, Koskimaa & Välisalo 2021). In the children's drawings published in the Finnish *Batman* comic book, Batman and Robin include features and traits of the characters as they were seen on TV and in the comics. One drawing, for example, recreates a scene from the comics, completed with the onomatopoeic expressions made famous by the TV show's fight scenes. Onomatopoeia is characteristic to the superhero genre in general (see, e.g. Gavaler 2018, 227) and is featured in the *Batman* comics. But in this particular case, it can be noted that the drawing in question specifically imitates the version of onomatopoeia seen on television. Other drawings portray the scene recurring in every episode of the televised *Batman*, where the Batmobile speeds through a forest towards Gotham City. Although the letters page is part of the comic book, it functions as a site for creative and fannish activities regarding Batman as seen in both the comic and the TV show.

As analysed in Article 4, the adaptations made by the Finnish audience can be placed somewhere between borrowing, a looser reworking of the source text and straightforward fidelity, following Dudley Andrew's taxonomy of adaptations (Andrew 1984, 98). In this instance, fidelity refers to a certain level of faithfulness that is important to audiences. For example, Batman in the drawings looks similar to how he looks in the comics or on TV in the sense that he carries symbols of the character, such as the cape and the bat symbol on the chest. While the drawings are faithful to the character's appearance, they are simultaneously inspired by two forms of source material and produce new interpretations of the character.

Another example of a local adaptation of Batman and Robin is the marketing campaign for a Batman soft drink. The popularity of Batman as a character means that licensed merchandise has been produced since the 1940s, and hundreds of products have been marketed with his name and logo (Brooker 2000, 35–36; Daniels 2014, 140–143; Onnela 1988; Välisalo 2010, 46–48). The Finnish campaign (1966–1968) was mainly modelled after the TV incarnation of the characters, and it recreated outfits, vehicles and other props seen on TV to market the soft drink. Batman and Robin arrived in different Finnish cities by helicopter, such as the opening of the Christmas shopping season in Helsinki in 1966, and they gave autographs and handed out licensed products. Employees of the advertising agency behind the campaign portrayed the characters, and the use of familiar props connected the campaign to the TV show.

The advertising campaign for the Batman soft drink was constructed in a way that suggested that Batman and Robin were not entirely fictional and existed simultaneously in the TV reality and the Finnish reality. An article published in the Batman comic book's issue 2/1967, where Batman and Robin's trip from Gotham City to Finland is described, exemplifies this. According to the article, the characters have arrived in Finland in order to inspect the printing facilities of the Finnish comic book, as well as the factory producing the Batman soft drink. The article is a mixture of a description of a meet and greet for Finnish fans of Batman and an interview with Batman and Robin. The Finnish versions of Batman and Robin that promote the soft drink and are interviewed in the comic book are presented as the same Batman and Robin as seen on TV and in the comics. According to my analysis, they belong to the same transnational transmedia universe.

As becomes clear from my research material, the character of Batman, rather than a certain story or even a specific version of Batman, is at the centre of the Finnish adaptations. The children's drawings are combinations of the TV Batman and comic Batman, and the advertising campaign is inspired by the TV show and spreads to the pages of the comic book. The newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* published advertisements for official Batman merchandise while also sharing instructions on how to make a Batman costume at home. The different versions all share a few basic elements that mark them as adaptations of the same character. Batman's costume consists of the cape, cowl and cuffs around the wrists, which function as his markers. Advertisements for the soft drink and other merchandise work to extend the character's audience and help to strengthen its brand, as well as the brand of the company behind it (Brown 2016, 122). The drawings published on the letters pages of *Batman* show the audience that there are other people reading the comic book, as well as giving an example of engaging with the characters.

My analysis of the different versions complements the understanding of transnational adaptations. The Finnish Batman and Robin who travelled around the

country are an example of how the public embraces local versions as large audiences greeted them at their appearances at local events. They also extend the idea of what global characters, such as superheroes, can be and do when, in addition to seeing Batman and Robin fighting villains on television and on the pages of a comic book, the audience can see the characters handing out their signature soft drink in person in their hometown. The Finnish versions of Batman investigated in this part of my study are adaptations of characters that have become transnational as they have crossed the cultural border between the USA and Finland. My analysis shows what kinds of elements the adaptations consist of and how the local versions complement the character of Batman and the transmedia universe he inhabits.

As a whole, the cases discussed in my research articles show that the role of local editors, translators and other agents was crucial for the Finnish adaptations. The advertising material and drawings sent to the letters pages of *Batman* are creative re-imaginings of the original American comics, TV show and characters. Similarly, the Finnish comic books were specifically made for the Finnish audience, and the local influence becomes visible through my analysis. I show in my research that adaptation encompasses more than the stories in the comic books. The letters pages in my research material function as a site for facilitating the reading experience, as well as for fannish engagement, both for the children who adapted Batman in their drawings in the 1960s and for the readers of Finnish Marvel comics in the 1980s and 1990s.

6   Conclusion

Throughout my research, the aim has been to investigate the practices of transnational adaptation connected to the publishing of superhero comics in Finland in the second half of the twentieth century. I have approached this from different perspectives in my research articles, focusing on the roles of the local editors, fans and even advertisers that have adapted superhero characters in various ways. Starting with a comparative reading of the American originals and the comics adapted for Finnish readers, I recognised and named the different practices of adaptation used by the Finnish editor. I used my findings to further examine what happens to the stories in adaptation, using an event storyline as an example. This proved to be a fruitful example as it displayed how the adaptation practices not only simplified the storyline as character development and how secondary storylines were left out of the Finnish publication, but also highlighting how the scarce local comic book market and publishing culture affected the adaptation.

While two of the articles focus on the practices of adapting the stories in the comics, the other two approach the phenomenon from a different point of view. By looking at the letters pages of Finnish superhero comic books, I investigated how local adaptations are constructed and legitimised, and how the readers engaged in fannish activities through the letters pages. Finally, I examined local adaptations, such as readers' drawings of Batman and an advertising campaign for a soft drink, as part of a transmedia universe.

A significant result of my study is that it sheds new light on the present day as well. It is hard to imagine that, today, a huge corporation such as Marvel, let alone Disney who currently owns Marvel, would allow their intellectual property to be altered in an adaptation process as much as it is transnationally adapted. In their book about Marvel Studios, Marvel's film production department – Martin Flanagan, Mike McKenny and Andy Livingstone (2016) – highlights the core values of Marvel as a company, including the balance between art and commerce, the creation of a shared universe and the stability of the organisation. With the term stability they refer to the company's control of its content and creators. Every aspect of production is overseen by the studio head, and this control has allowed Marvel to successfully let their artists be creative while simultaneously making profit. (Flanagan, McKenny

& Livingstone 2016, 71–72.) This kind of control leads to characters retaining their determining qualities throughout the decades and across media, resulting in reliable content. As superhero comics are these days usually translated using digital versions that have been prepared for the easier altering of each element (Zanettin 2019, 78), it has become possible to extend the same kind of control that Marvel uses for their film production to transnational comics publishing. At the same time, the appreciation of comics as a medium or as a form of art has changed in recent decades. Today, comics are a valued form of storytelling, and their creators are credited for their work. It seems unlikely that the work of comics creators nowadays would be cut and pasted in the way superhero comics were in Finland in the 1980s and 1990s

After the 1990s, the production of superhero comics in Finland has been affected by the popularity of superhero films. The *Ryhmä-X* comic, discontinued in 1996, was brought back in 2001. The new comic book was called *Ryhmä-X/X-Men*, and the new title highlights that, by the 2000s, the importance of the original name and branding was starting to replace local versions and domesticated translations. I searched for the publication information of *Ryhmä-X/X-Men* in two Finnish comics archive projects (Marvel-lehdet Suomessa n.d.; Sarjakuvat Suomessa 1858–2021 n.d.), and the search shows that while the new comic book was still comprised of stories published in different American publications, such as *Uncanny X-Men* and *X-Men*, pages or panels were no longer cut and the stories in the American comic book issues were published in their entirety. The titles of storylines were either not translated at all or they were partly translated in a similar fashion as the title of the comic book itself. For example, the title of the story 'Broken Mirrors (Beauty & The Beast Part 1)' was partially translated and published as 'Rikotut peilit (Beauty & The Beast Osa 1)' in *Ryhmä-X/X-Men* 3/2001. Similar strategies were in use in *Hämähäkkimies* as well, as, instead of cut and pasted stories, the complete stories contained in single American issues were published and the titles of the stories were often left in the original English language.

Despite the popularity of superhero characters, only one superhero comic book has stood the test of time in Finland: *Hämähäkkimies* is the only continuous comic book publication of its genre since 2013. I believe the popularity of *Hämähäkkimies* is still connected to how the Finnish editor made Spider-Man and his world familiar to the local readers. From its first year of publication in 1980, Mail-Man introduced characters and filled the gaps in the Finnish versions, making it easier to follow regardless of omissions. In addition to this, *Hämähäkkimies* is dedicated to the character of Spider-Man alone, which makes it easier to follow. In *Ryhmä-X* the large roster of characters and different teams combined with frequent crossovers made it hard to follow for casual readers, as well as for more devoted audiences, even with the help of Mail-Man and his successors.

As I show in this study, the domestication of the translation and the streamlining of complicated storylines encompassing several American comic book titles and issues were important parts of the Finnish adaptation process. Mail-Man used his expertise and creativity as he filtered the stories for the audience. An equally important part of the adapted comics were the letters pages where Mail-Man negotiated the adaptation process and mediated the stories to the readers. Adaptation studies has traditionally been interested in the adaptation of narratives from one medium to another, comparing how the different media afford themselves to telling the story. My research, focusing on adaptation within a single medium, shows the importance of the publication format and various paratextual elements for the adaptation process. This expands how we are used to thinking about adaptations of comics.

My analysis of the letters pages deepens the understanding of both how the change in contexts of production and the reception of adaptations affect the adapted text. In the USA, the context of the production of superhero comics in the 1980s and 1990s was a large market where publishers frequently launched new comics titles and heroes. In Finland, however, the market for superheroes was significantly smaller and uncertain, as there was no tradition of consistent superhero comics publishing. My study shows how this difference was mediated on the letters pages of the Finnish comic books. The letters pages and other paratexts bridge the distance between the American comics and the new versions, helping the readers understand the stories and characters.

Adaptations also provide new perspectives on well-known characters and stories, such as Batman. The concept of transmedia universe (Koistinen, Koskimaa & Välisalo 2021) allowed me to examine the Finnish adaptations of Batman as new interpretations of the character that coexist with the previous incarnations. This research helps us to understand the transnational and transmedial connections between adaptations that seem to be specifically local, such as the drawings made by Finnish fans of Batman.

Adaptation studies and translation studies use a similar comparative methodology and discuss the construction of cultures through acts of rewriting. (Krebs 2014, 42–43). Recent literature on adaptations has also emphasised that the boundaries between adaptation and transmedia are artificial and often meaningless (e.g. Fehrle 2019). As a multidisciplinary approach, building on theories of media and cultural studies, adaptation studies focuses on understanding the multifaceted relationships between texts, creators and audiences instead of focusing on categorising certain relationships between texts as adaptations. (Fehrle 2019.) Is then Jan Baetens' hypothesis '[t]hat every textual action is a form of adaptation' (Baetens 2018, 33) relevant? I do not think that this is the case, even though my research shows that adaptation can take place within a single medium and still use strategies

that alter the structure and narrative of the text. According to my study, a narrative form or a character can also be adapted, but although I have expanded the concept of adaptation in this way, it does not mean that every textual action is a form of adaptation.

As my understanding of the research material and of the Finnish editor's work has expanded and deepened during the course of this study, I have re-evaluated my conceptual choices, especially those related to the concepts of strategy and practice. In my research articles I write about strategies of adaptation, but in this summary section I use the concept of practice to describe the process of adaptation. In the course of my research I realised that my analysis focuses on not only editorial practices, but also on fannish practices of adaptation. Practice here describes the concrete acts of cutting and pasting the comics, translating the language and answering readers' letters on the letters page. At the same time, it also describes the fannish activities of writing letters and drawing pictures for the letters page. Thus, the concept of practice encompasses the different parts of adaptation that I have examined.

During the course of my research I exchanged ideas with many other comics scholars who had read superhero comics in their own language in the past. Similar practices of selecting and streamlining the stories for a new audience seem to have been used in different language areas. While superhero comics, films and characters are popular topics in comics studies in general, the specificities of their transnational spread have been at the centre of relatively few studies, although comics have widely crossed national borders and spread during the decades. There is room for future research – for example, in the Nordic countries – in order to learn about early superhero fandom, the role of local editors and the place of superheroes in the Nordic comics culture. Based on published interviews with Mail-Man, I know that the editors in different Nordic countries collaborated in making publishing plans, and it would be interesting to study archival material of this collaboration, such as plans, letters and contracts. This kind of research would deepen our understanding of the decision-making, negotiation and other tasks that shaped the Nordic superhero publications.

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