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Holy transmedia! - the many faces of Batman in 1960s Finland

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ABSTRACT

Superheroes exist in multiple narratives and storyworlds at the same time. Some of the stories and iterations are part of the character's canon, while different adaptations and alternative versions inhabit other timelines and fictional worlds. Using the concept of transmedia universe, this article explores how fan-made and corporate-made adaptations of the character of Batman occupied the same universe and expanded the world inhabited by the character. Approaching the historical phenomenon of the 1960s Batmania from the point of view of adaptation studies, the article sheds light on local adaptations in a transmedia context.

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In 1966, Batman was everywhere in Finland. The American superhero character transcended national as well as media borders, as he was on Finnish television weekly, continued his adventures in a comic book, and appeared in promotional events around the country. Children could follow their new hero by sending letters or drawings to the comic book's letters page, buying official merchandise, or by asking their mothers to sew them a cape and cowl. The aim of this study is to analyse the 1960s Batmania in Finland using the concept of transmedia universe, as defined by scholars of contemporary culture Aino Koistinen, Raine Koskimaa & Tanja Välisalo. In their study focused on Battlestar Galactica, the writers define transmedia universe as a concept that encompasses all materials related to the core text, including official elements produced by the publisher as well as fan-made elements, and ranging from narrative instalments to podcasts, toys and fanart (Koistinen, Koskimaa, and Välisalo 2021, 3). In this article, I focus on exploring different Bat-narratives, artefacts, and activities that build the transmedia universe to which they belong.

Adaptation studies is another key starting point for my research. Its comparative methods are useful for studying a range of popular culture phenomena from a media studies point of view, as Liam Burke demonstrates (2022). Johannes Fehrle calls for new ways of studying adaptation and transmedia texts to better understand the relationships between media, their production, authorship, and audiences. According to Fehrle, forms of adaptation such as fan fiction are an example of the shifting relationships: fanfiction is produced by fans of a cultural text, and both the original creator of the characters and the world they inhabit, as well as the writer of the fanfic can be considered as authors (Fehrle

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2019, 9.). Focusing on the Finnish marketing campaign for a Batman soft drink, and children's drawings of Batman in the Finnish *Batman* (Batman – Lepakkomies 1966–1969) comic book from 1966 to 1968, I investigate how the new interpretations and official portrayals of the character of Batman blend in my research material, expanding the possibilities and audiences of the character. The different versions of Batman create an intertext into which audiences position themselves and their interpretations (Meehan 1991, 48–49). Analysing the advertisements and the children's drawings as adaptations, I show how fan-made and corporate-made adaptations expanded Batman's transmedia universe in the 1960s Finland, and ask what is the relationship between local adaptations of global popular culture and the transmedia universe they belong to.

Batman in Finland

Finland saw *Batman's* (Batman 1966–1968) premiere on television only seven months after its first episode had aired in the U.S.A., and it quickly became popular among children who loved the exciting action. The show was followed by a range of licenced products as toy makers, advertisers and marketing professionals realized the potential of children's new favourite characters. The Finnish *Batman* comic book, launched later in 1966, was a platform for a newly established Batman fan club, publishing the young readers' letters, drawings as well as photos. Images of Batman and Robin were used in the production of various consumer products, and the characters promoted for example a new soft drink released in the Finnish market. Encouraged by the comic book's editor to be featured in the monthly magazine, Batman and Robin's adventures inspired the young audience to write, draw and imitate their heroes by dressing up and playing.

When analysing the Finnish 1960s adaptations of Batman and their relationship to the larger transmedia universe, some aspects related to geography and the Finnish society have to be considered. In the 1950s and 1960s, Finland was situated on the border between east and west. Sharing a border with the Soviet Union meant that before domestic TV broadcasts started, Finns with a television at home could receive Soviet transmissions from Tallinn. As there was an eagerness to tie Finland to the western world, Finnish TV broadcasting was modelled after the British B.B.C., while the broadcasting system was bought from the U.S.A. (Kortti 2003, 200–201.). In the Cold War decades, broadcast media in Europe circulated from West to East, but also the other way around as is exemplified by the transnational movement of the East German children's show *Unser Sandmännchen* (*Sandman*), which was exported to Finland, Sweden, and other Western countries (Cronqvist 2020, 380). At the same time as the *Sandman* travelled around the world and even to space, crossing the East-West-border (Cronqvist 2020, 379), other products of popular culture including comics, such as the *Batman* comic strip and *Donald Duck*, magazines such as *Readers' Digest*, films, and TV were advancing the American dream and helping to turn Europeans into consumers. In the 1960s, many American products were available in Finland (e.g. Frisk 2019, 29; Kortti 2003, 204–205; Kortti 2007, 90; Toivonen, n.d.). By the mid-1960s, the Finnish audience was used to American TV programming as American telefilms and serials had been broadcast on Finnish TV since 1959 (Keinonen 2012, 184–185). Serials such as *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin*, *Highway Patrol* and *Wagon Train* had become popular in Finland, and there was an existing audience for American television (Keinonen 2011, 187–192).

In her study, Marie Cronqvist uses archival sources from Germany and Sweden along with Swedish press material to trace the transnational journey of the Sandman character. Cronqvist shows how Sandman's arrival to Sweden was 'a complex combination of cultural diplomacy, media historical development and individual agency' (2020, 387). She highlights the agency of a local producer who produced *John Blund*, as *Unser Sandmännchen* was called in Sweden, while also capitalizing on licensed John Blund - products. Like Batman, Sandman was especially popular among children, and Cronqvist describes different products, such as candy, jigsaw puzzles, board games and bed linens, that were marketed with Sandman's name. (Cronqvist 2020, 384–385.) Instead of the local production process of the *Batman* TV series or comic book, the focus of my study is on the production of local versions or adaptations of the character.

As in Cronqvist's research, my study has a historical topic. I have looked for different archival sources, including advertisements for merchandise, photos of children dressed as characters from *Batman*, and descriptions of marketing events. The first part of my research material consists of the 1966–1969 volumes of the *Batman* comic book. I have accessed the volumes through the library at the University of Turku. As a legal depository library, it receives all Finnish printed products, excluding newspapers. Launched in the autumn of 1966 by Sarjakustannus Oy, at the height of its popularity *Batman* had a circulation of around 70,000 (Toivonen, n.d.). *Batman* was the first Finnish comic book dedicated exclusively to Batman. The character had been introduced to the Finnish audience through the *Lepakko* (*Batman*; literally 'The Bat') comic strip published in 1945–1949 by evening newspaper *Ilta-Sanomat*, which were later reprinted in a short-lived 1950 magazine titled *Lepakko*, whose, despite its name, focus was on short detective stories with *Batman* as a secondary feature (Toivonen, n.d.). Sarjakustannus Oy was a Finnish publishing house focused on comics, romantic and pulp literature. Between 1962 and 1968, it published comics tied to TV or film, such as *James Bond*, *Ben Casey*, and *Lassie*, as well as war comics and romance comics (Peltola, n.d.). Although the publishing activities of Sarjakustannus stopped in 1968, *Batman's* publication continued until 1969 by UK-Lehdet. Between 1966 and 1969, 32 issues of *Batman* were published in Finland.¹ Stories in the Finnish *Batman* were originally published in DC's *Batman* #169–205 (Feb 1965–Sep 1968) and *Detective Comics* #351–382 (May 1966–Dec 1968) (Toivonen, n.d.). My interest in the *Batman* comic book is in the letters pages, advertisements and sections dedicated to the 'Batman-Club'. As *Batman* was taken off air in 1967, the Batman-Club as well as the letters page were discontinued, as was the comic book itself shortly afterwards. Since my focus is on the Finnish adaptations of Batman, the material I collected is from Finnish sources. However, it was necessary to familiarize myself with the TV series in order to contextualize the Finnish versions, and I watched episodes of *Batman* on DVD.

The second part of my research material are advertisements related to Batman. The advertisements are mostly printed and published in the biggest national newspaper in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*, between 1966 and 1968. *Helsingin Sanomat* (*Helsingin Sanomat* 1899–) has an online archive called 'HS Aikakone', 'HS Time machine', where digitized issues of the newspaper can be browsed either by choosing specific dates, or by using a search term. My research material was gathered by using 'Batman' as a search term. I searched the archive for all mentions of Batman, which yielded 2850 search results. The results included every mention of the word

including cinema timetables for several Batman films published since the 1980s, TV programme information, as well as the *Batman* comic strip published in *Helsingin Sanomat*. As I am specifically interested in the 1960s Batmania, I browsed through the results to find mentions of the character between 1966 and 1968. Among the results were promotional material and information about the TV series, news of its launch as well as its discontinuation, and advertisements for various Batman merchandise. I saved the advertisements as screenshots for analysis.

In addition to the printed advertisements, my research material includes an audio-visual advertisement for the Batman soft drink. Veikko Laihanen Oy produced the film for Mallasjuoma Oy in 1967 (Mallasjuoma Batman 1967). It can be accessed through Elonet, a database and video on demand -service provided by The National Audiovisual Institute KAVI (F.A.Q.: What is Elonet?, N.D.). The database can be accessed and used freely, and it features Finnish film, radio and television material, as well as material related to film. In addition to feature films, KAVI has digitized short films, documentary films, newsreels and advertising films.

I also gathered images of merchandise, pictures taken at promotional events of the Batman soft drink, and photographs of children dressed in Batman costumes. Such images were published in the *Batman* comic book and in *Helsingin Sanomat*, but also in an essay collection titled *Batman aukene!* (1988). The collection was published by a collective called 'Bat-instituutti', 'The Bat Institute', and it accompanied an exhibition of Batman paraphernalia that toured Finland in 1987–1988. An exhibition catalogue was also produced by the institute, featuring pictures and details of the artefacts on display, as well as a text written by a former Batman fan club member Anneli.

The essays in *Batman aukene!* shed light on the character of Batman and Batmania in Finland, and reading the collection raised my interest in the Batman soft drink advertising campaign. Both the essay collection and exhibition catalogue also feature a large amount of pictures of the 1960s Batman merchandise and fans. Images of Batman's fans dressed in their Batman costumes, photographs of the soft drink advertising tour, and the letter by former Bat-fan Anneli are part of my research material.

Looking at Batman-related advertisements published in the newspaper as well as on film, allows me to see more broadly the amount of merchandise marketed to consumers. In the late 1960s, profit made from licencing exceeded revenue from comic book sales for Batman's publisher DC in the U.S.A. (Gordon 1998, 153). American commercial popular culture was spreading to Finland in the 1950s–1960s (Frisk 2019, 29; Kortti 2007, 90), and consumer products and their advertisements were an important part of Batmania.

The different parts of the research material represent different ways of engaging with the character of Batman. First, the drawings published in the *Batman* comic book were made by fans, but as they were featured in the comic book, they became part of the official publication. Second, the photographs of children dressed as Batman also represent a fannish practice, but they were not published officially. Third, the Batman soft drink and its marketing campaign was made by marketing professionals and did not belong to the official *Batman* publication. The purpose of the sources is to show how Batman's transmedia universe is built from different pieces, both official and unofficial, fan-made as well as corporate-made. The drawings, photos and the advertising film reveal different aspects of Finnish Batman-adaptations.

Different Bat-media, same Batman

Batman, as well as other superheroes, exists in multiple networks of transmedia and adaptation: he can recur in several different instalments and forms, which are usually helmed by a specific creative team only for a certain period. Superheroes have many incarnations simultaneously, and are often resurrected or rebooted because they have proved popular in another media or instalment. Big media conglomerates such as WarnerMedia concentrate on the production of entertainment universes based on previous iterations of familiar characters, and new films, TV shows, games, and merchandise are bound to emerge continuously.

According to Julie Sanders, intertextuality and allusions to other texts, as well as the joy of recognizing the networks of references is at the core of the appeal of adaptations (Sanders 2006, 7). TV's *Batman* is an adaptation of original comic books, but for the Finnish audiences, it was the centre of a new pop culture phenomenon that spread to different media, merchandise and advertising. It presented a campy, even silly version of the city of Gotham, of Batman and Robin and their recurring adversaries. The show was meant to be funny from the point of view of adult audiences, but simultaneously appeal to children with its comic book characters (Gordon 1998, 153). For many fans as well as creators of *Batman* comics, the sixties' TV-Batman is notably different from the 'true' Batman of the comics, a dark and mysterious detective (e.g. Brooker 2000, 171–177). On the other hand, there might not even be a 'true' Batman, as Uricchio and Pearson stated in 1991 (Uricchio and Pearson 1991, 185). As a multifaceted product of popular culture, Batman is very open for adaptations and new versions. The audience, as well as the producers of Batman-related media and merchandise, can choose their favourite versions of the character and mix-and-match according to their tastes (Meehan 1991, 57).

As a character interpreted in numerous ways by different people in several media for decades, Batman is a transmedia character, or a 'fictional hero whose adventures are told across different media platforms, each one giving more details on the life of that character' (Bertetti 2014, 2345). Definitions of transmedia start from Marsha Kinder's (1991) analysis, where she writes that TV programmes and toys targeted to children form a network of transmedia intertextuality (Kinder 1991, 1). In 2006, Henry Jenkins includes storytelling into the concept of transmedia, writing about the transmedia narrative that 'unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole' (2006, 95–96). Building on existing conceptualizations of transmedia storytelling and transmedial worlds, Koistinen, Koskimaa and Välisalo's understanding of the concept of transmedia universe includes aspects that have been missing from previous theorizations. As they show, transmedia texts have other functions and contexts of production than constructing a unified storyworld, such as commercial expectations (Koistinen, Koskimaa, and Välisalo 2021, 2–3, 5). The idea of the transmedia universe broadens the understanding of transmediality to include versions of the story or character that can be in conflict with the unified storyworld, also including fan-made art, cosplay, and websites in addition to the corporate-made media and toys.

Comics scholar Daniel Stein describes how an American superhero becomes a transnational character as it is 'reimagined in a specific national context, narrative tradition and graphic style' (2013, 129). The concept of transnational relates to

a diverse group of actors who can be corporate or non-corporate exchanging ideas and interacting with each other (Stein, Denson, and Meyer 2013, 16), and the Finnish versions of Batman are an example of how American popular culture crosses national and linguistic borders, becoming transnational. While Marie Cronqvist (2020, 383) highlights the importance of the agency of individual producers in transnational exchange as she describes how the East German Sandman figure was adapted for Swedish children's television in the 1970s, I focus on the non-corporate adaptations as well.

My analysis of the children's drawings of Batman includes comparing them to an original, or rather two originals: television's Batman and comic book Batman. Despite differences between TV-Batman and comic-Batman, both versions included campy elements and DC made sure that Batman's basic template stayed intact on TV: he must remain moral and never kill another being. In considering the US series Brooker (2000, 186–187) argues that 'increased continuity' between the two media meant that the comic book with heightened campy tones and pop art aesthetics served as marketing for the TV series, as much as the show boosted sales of the comic book. This is exemplified in issue 1/1967 of the Finnish *Batman* comic book, which features a story from the US *Batman* #183 (June 1966).² In the story, Robin looks at the TV and declares to Batman '[...] you can watch your own wild adventures' on p.21³ (in the original version, Robin calls *Batman* on TV as a 'documentary about you [Batman] and some of your greatest adventures!', *Batman* #183, June 1966). Although, according to Jan-Noël Thon, 'there is no reason to assume that all represented entities sharing, for example, a common name, are or should be treated as the same character' (Thon 2019, 187), this scene in both languages implies that Batman and Robin in the comics are the same Batman and Robin as on television.

It is clear that the TV series and comic book were connected in Finland, although not distributed by the same company. The comic book was launched to serve as a 'fanzine' of the TV show, and it featured advertisements for the series, pages dedicated to a Batman fan club with the names and hometowns of each new member published in a special section, and children sent their letters and drawings to the letters pages. In the 21st century, media convergence described by Henry Jenkins as the 'flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want' (2006, 2), has increased, but the trend was visible already in 1960s Batmania. The audiences of the TV show were encouraged to subscribe to the comic book, tell their friends about it and join the fan club. In addition to this, the comic book published pictures drawn by the young readers, and photos of the young fans dressed as their favourite characters. The comic book was at the centre of Batman's transmedia universe (Koistinen, Koskimaa, and Välisalo 2021, 3), featuring the official diegetic content, serving as a marketing platform, as well as a site for fan activity.

The published drawings adapt both the TV Batman and comic book Batman, indicating the importance of the character instead of a specific incarnation. A drawing by Markku, for instance, depicts the Batmobile exiting the Batcave (*Batman* 5/67, letters page). The layout of the drawing, the landscape surrounding the vehicle as well as the sign indicating Gotham City replicate a scene reoccurring in each episode of the *Batman* series. The Batmobile speeds through a forest, either to or from Batman's secret lair (Figure 1). Markku's drawing is a faithful adaptation of a part of the TV show.

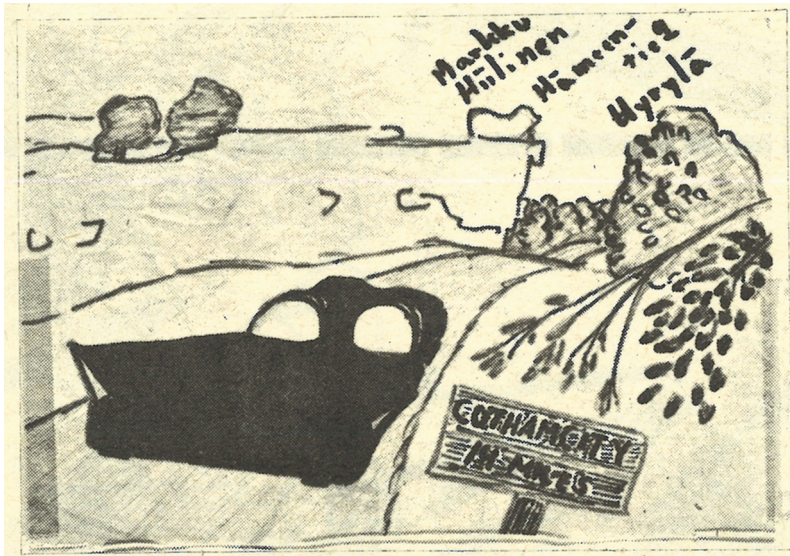


Figure 1. A drawing of the Batmobile inspired by the Batman TV series. *Batman - Lepakkomies* 5/1967. Sarjakustannus Oy.

Batman's adventures in different media do not necessarily make a unique contribution to a story as in transmedia storytelling described by Jenkins (2006, 95–96), but transmediality also includes elements that contribute to the building of a transmedia world (Koistinen, Koskimaa, and Välisalo 2021, 2, 11). *Batman* on both television and in comic books expands the storyworld (Ryan 2013, 366) by adding characters and plots, modifies it by presenting alternate versions of events, and transposes the basic elements of Batman's story into a new setting. A drawing by Petri in the Finnish *Batman* comic book (*Batman* 2/1967, letters page) recreates a fistfight between Batman and an adversary dressed in a skeleton outfit seen in an earlier issue of the comic book (*Batman* 2/1966). The scene is an example of the transmedial relationship between the TV show and the comic book, and of the increased continuity between them. In the original panel imitated in Petri's drawing (originally published in *Batman* #180, May 1966), Batman and Robin are punching identically dressed, faceless thugs from left and right, making humorous remarks to each other as they fight. Onomatopoeic 'Sok!', 'Rakk!', and 'Pow!' sounds surround the characters in the panel in a very similar way to fight scenes in television's *Batman*. In this case, Petri's drawing is a faithful adaptation of what he has read in his comic book, but the panel he has adapted can also be interpreted as an adaptation – its style and verbal elements are inspired by the TV series. Onomatopoeia is a staple of superhero comic book storytelling, but its use in the TV series has become iconic. This exemplifies how, since the 1960s, comic book characters from *Batman* have existed in a narrative dynamic of multiplicity (Jenkins 2009), where the style and characters of the TV adaptation have an impact on the style and characters of the comic book, and vice versa. Characters can, and do, appear in the comics (and other media forms) in very different ways simultaneously, such as on TV, in the comic books and even as cute versions designed

especially for merchandising and licencing (Brown 2018, 121.). The audience's response to Batman's adventures in the form of drawings highlights the idea of adaptation as an act of 'creative imitation' (Golsan 2004, 32, 21). Whether on television, in comics or on the letters page, Batman remains recognizable through his specific look and outfit, as well as his action-packed adventures.

In fact, most of the children are very faithful in their adaptations of Batman, as they detail the character's outfits and features. Although adaptation studies has been criticized of its emphasis on fidelity, faithfulness continues to matter to the audiences (Burke 2022, 87). Batman is a combination of the black cape, the cowl that covers the upper part of his face, and the Bat-symbol in his costume, and it is important to include these in the adaptation. A superhero's costume is an expression of his or her complex existence. Whether we see Batman in his cape and cowl, or Bruce Wayne in his tailored suit, he is manifesting only a part of his identity (Brownie and Graydon 2016, 1.). The essence of the character lies in his appearance, and the same details are featured in toys and costumes marketed for children. The drawings remain faithful to Batman's appearance, and they can even be categorized into those inspired by the comics, with Batman being more muscular and having a square jawline, and those inspired by the TV series, with Adam West's outfit. At the same time, they are new, creative interpretations of the character, and represent the audience's engagement with popular culture.

In addition to details of Batman's costume, action is a common feature in the drawings, as many of them picture Batman doing his superheroic deeds. Drawings, poems, and other letters prove that watching and reading *Batman* is interactive and the young audience interprets the events and characters in creative ways (Seiter 1993, 34). The letters page encourages and simultaneously limits the possibilities of interaction for the readers (Nikunen 2007, 114), as it facilitates certain kinds of participation.

Action is represented in the drawings with speed lines, which implies the characters are moving fast, as well as by presenting Batman and Robin punching villains in fight scenes. Punching a criminal or just punching the air is a very typical representation of Batman. This is hardly surprising, as violence is an integral part of both the comic book and the TV show. Many drawings also include onomatopoeia made famous by the TV show such as 'Pow!', 'Bang!', or 'Zok!'

Action and high pace are also represented by vehicles. Several drawings include Batman's helicopter and car, and in one drawing Batman is standing next to a petrol pump as if he has stopped to fill up the Batmobile. Guns and other weapons are also visible in some of the drawings, but surprisingly Batman's many gadgets are not there. Batman's vehicles are integral in both the TV show as well as the comic book. Moreover, both the helicopter and the Batmobile were available for purchase as toys, and the Finnish Batman and Robin who promoted the soft drink produced by Mallasjuoma, usually arrived on helicopter or by car to their meet and greets. Children are aware of products and advertisements (Seiter 1993, 106), and repeatedly seeing the car and helicopter in not only Batman's adventures, but in advertisements and marketing campaigns, as well as a part of their own playing or at a friend's house, made them a natural part of their own interpretations of Batman.

TV's Batman and comics' Batman blended into one in the Finnish *Batman* comic book. The drawings published on the letters pages, mostly faithful adaptations, depicted both versions of the character, and the interconnectedness of both depictions of Batman were

apparent in some of the stories as well. In the next section, I will expand this transmedia universe by introducing the Finnish Batman used for advertising.

Adaptation, merchandising and the Batman soft drink

The character of Batman has been a commercial success from its early years, with the solo *Batman* comic book launched in 1940, the syndicated comic strip in 1943, and licenced merchandise being produced already in the early 1940s (Brooker 2000, 35–36). Today, superhero comics serve as a source for a multi-billion dollar business of film franchising and the production of merchandise that is tied to it (Varis 2016, 275–276). Already in its early decades, television was a way in to a new consumer culture, both in the U.S.A. and in Europe (Kortti 2007, 32–33). *Batman* became a huge merchandising success, and hundreds of licenced products were sold with Batman's name and logo printed on them (Daniels 2004, 140–143, Onnela 1988; Väiläsalo 2010, 46–48.). Finland was no exception.

An advertisement in *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS) declares 'Batman tiedoittaa!' ('Batman announces!', HS 18.11.1966, 42). The announcement declares Reportage Bureau Laszlo as the official representative of licenced Batman-products in Finland, and the text is written from the point of view of the Caped Crusader himself: 'Call, write or contact directly to manufacture or import Batman related goods, for only my main representative can grant the permit to manufacture or import them in Finland.'⁴ In fact, many of the licenced products sold in Finland were produced locally, especially clothes and other textiles. In the early 1960s, only 6–8% of private consumption in Finland consisted of imported consumer goods (Kortti 2003, 59).

As Essi Varis writes, the value of a branded character lies in the character itself, not in the format in which it is published (Varis 2016, 284). As proved by how the different versions of Batman blended on the pages of the *Batman* comic book, the character of Batman, whether on TV or in comics, was the 'commercial nexus' (Kinder 1991, 54) around which products were marketed, and which was important for the audience in Finland. Children were eager to dress up as the Dynamic Duo, and many seem to rely on official Batman-merchandise in their dress-up (Huhtamo 1988, 50–53). However, it was not necessary to own any official paraphernalia to imitate the heroes, as a towel could serve the purpose of a cape just as well as an official licenced product (Huhtamo 1988, 51).

Based on the advertisements for licenced Batman-merchandise, many of the products are toys, such as the Batmobile (HS 9.12.1966, 40), Batman-stickers (HS 26.11.1967, 51), sweets with a special mention that the package has the Batman-logo (HS 13.1.1967, 15), and a Batman-costume complete with cape, cowl and a gun (HS 20.12.1966, 5). Mass-produced popular culture is a business where the text, *Batman*, becomes a commodity that must be sold to consumers, or the audience (Meehan 1991, 61), which mainly consisted of children in this case. The targeting of licenced merchandise towards children is explicitly stated by one of the merchandisers, the Mallasjuoma beverage company in a marketing letter: 'The main attack of the advertising campaign shall be directed towards what we think is the correct consumer fragment – children.'⁵ (Huhtamo 1988, 47).

Mallasjuoma's Batman-drink was an orange and apricot-flavoured soft drink branded and marketed in collaboration with Reportage Bureau Laszlo. The marketing campaign was extensive, and heavily influenced by the TV series. It was based on the use of live characters

and impressive props, such as cars and helicopters, and it was launched with a parade at the opening of the Christmas shopping season in Helsinki in December 1966. Two employees of the advertising agency, Erkki Toivomäki and Reijo Salminen, played Batman and Robin on a tour around Finland, representing the product (Onnela 1988, 63–66) (Figure 2).

In addition to live events, the campaign included advertisements in print and film form. In one film belonging to the campaign, glass bottles with no labels shake against each other, animated in stop-motion style. With a BLAM! sound effect from TV's *Batman*, one of the bottles gets a label and as a voiceover starts talking about the product, the drink is poured into a tall glass. 'Follow the hero, drink Batman',⁶ the voiceover insists, as a boy drinks the soda. His regular clothes change into a Batman-costume. The film, clearly directed at children, uses sound effects made familiar by TV's *Batman*. Although it only advertises the soft drink, the film features a licenced Batman-costume, similar to the ones advertised in *Helsingin Sanomat*, appearing on the child as he drinks it. The voiceover tells audiences to follow Batman, but the film's visuals suggest that the boy changes *into* Batman, just as Bruce Wayne does when he descends into the Batcave.

Despite extensive marketing and advertising of licenced products, homemade accessories and toys are also visible in the research material. For example, a newspaper article from 1966 describes how to sew Batman's outfit yourself.⁷ The article offers instructions



Figure 2. Batman and Robin advertise the Batman soft drink made by Oy Mallasjuoma in 1966. Saarinen, UA, UA Saarinen Collection, JOKA Journalistinen kuva-arkisto, Finnish Heritage Agency.

for not only the parents on how to sew the desired outfit for their children, but for children on how to appropriately wear the outfit and imitate the hero, as it features an image of a young boy dressed in a Batman costume his mother has made, striking a pose typical for the hero (Figure 3). The instructions have economic value as well, as Mrs. Salovaara is quoted to have bought the fabric for the cape and cowl for three Finnish marks. In an advertisement for Christmas presents, a set containing Batman's cape, cowl and cuffs costs 12,90 FIM, and a bigger set including a shirt and belt as well, costs 24,90 FIM.⁸ Instructions like this bridge the gap between children and their parents. Adults can view children's television and the toys related to it as alien culture, and as violent and dumb (Seiter 1993, 8). Children live in a media culture of their own, and their interpretations of television might differ from adult readings of the same programmes (Seiter 1993, 105). Advice on how to sew a Batman costume makes the imported cultural phenomenon less alien for the parents.

As a relatively short but intensive phenomenon, Batmania manifested typical features of fannish behaviour among children. For children, being a fan is often intensive and the fannish object can change quickly, defining social relationships. Fanness is manifested especially through toys, and children's media is often marketed as a whole package ranging from TV shows to their soundtracks, and from comic books to dolls and their accessories (Nikunen 2009, 76). The relationship between Batman's costume, his identity and his powers becomes visible in real life as well, as according to a study, dressing up as superheroes can alter children's behaviour while they are in costume (Brownie and



Figure 3. A child dressed in a homemade Batman outfit. Helsingin Sanomat, 25.11.1966.

Graydon 2016, 3). Dressing up in a costume with all the details is a form of embodied consumption. By inviting readers to send letters and pictures to 'be found on the pages of *Batman*', the publisher suggests that by sending fanmail, the readers can become part of the phenomenon and maybe a part of Batman's heroism can be rubbed onto them. The same suggestion is made by the advertisement for the Batman soft drink encouraging children to 'follow the hero'.

Batman was presented as something more real and tangible than just a popular culture character (not to say that popular culture characters are not real) in Finland. In the Finnish *Batman* comic book, it was implied that Batman was not entirely fictional, but existed simultaneously in the television reality, as well as in the Finnish reality. In 1967, *Batman* featured an article titled 'Unohtumaton tähtihetki voimakaksikon seurassa' ('An unforgettable moment with the Dynamic Duo', *Batman* 2/1967, 18–20), detailing the travels of Batman and Robin from Gotham City to Finland. The article describes how a group of young fans have waited outside the venue, a printing house where the *Batman* comic book is printed, for more than an hour for the heroes. It describes their excitement and enthusiasm as some of the children receive small gifts from Batman. However, the article is not only a report of a meet and greet opportunity with the comic book's characters: it is partly an interview with the fictional characters, advertising both the comic book itself, and the licenced Batman-soft drink. The writer describes Batman as calm and professional, while Robin jumps on a container and makes excited remarks – in other words, they are described to behave just as they would on TV and in the comic book. The article is accompanied with photographs of Batman and Robin surrounded by children.

Instead of official promotional images for the TV show, the article's illustrations are photographs taken inside the printing house, as well as outside in a snowy surrounding. One image shows Batman greeting people, waving at an audience, while the other three feature Batman or Batman and Robin surrounded by children dressed in winter clothing. The milieu is not typical for superheroes, as usually they are seen in the urban landscapes of Gotham City. As the entire marketing campaign for Batman soft drink, this article expands the universe inhabited by Batman and Robin, and offers more possibilities for their actions. As Jeffrey Brown (2018) writes, 'each variation of any given superhero character does not dilute or contradict some core identity, but rather promotes and reinforces the overall brand of that character and/or its parent corporation' (Brown 2018, 122). Besides fighting supervillains such as the Joker or the Riddler and preventing crime in Gotham, Batman and Robin can also endorse a Finnish soft drink and give autographs to children in a Finnish city.

It seems that some of the readers also considered Batman to be a 'real' person in a sense that he himself is the movie star, instead of Adam West, who was playing the character. On the letters page of *Batman* 3/1967, one letter says: 'I like Batman. He is the best film star that I have ever seen. ZOK! I have also made a Batman-suit.'⁹ However, other children were confused about the report of Batman and Robin's visit to Finland, as Anneli Nygren reminisces in her 'Letter regarding Batman', published in the catalogue of the 'Batman aukene!' exhibition in Kemi, Finland in 1987: 'In the comic book I followed Batman's visit in Finland, which was a confusing experience for me. What did all these brats and little girls winning their weight in candy have to do with Batman?!' As opposed to the writer of the letter described above, to Anneli it was clear that Batman did not exist, and she experienced the contrast between reporting about Batman in Finland (as if he

was real) and the newest plots of the supervillains to be disturbing. Twenty years after Batmania, the former Batman fan club member remembers her confusion and irritation towards mixing different incarnations of the same character.

However, in many cases different versions of a character work to extend the audience. In Koistinen, Koskimaa and Välisalo's terms, a transmedia universe is 'a diegetic storyworld or a universe comprising of various storyworlds' and 'a construction that encompasses all materials related to the core text, one that is not limited to specific media' (Koistinen, Koskimaa, and Välisalo 2021, 18.). Like the soft drink-Batman travelling across Finland, drawings and poems made by readers and spectators of *Batman* become part of the universe and extend the characters and their stories. Through consuming licenced products, such as the soft drink or toys, by sending a drawing to be featured in the comic book, or joining the fan club, children can become part of Batman's universe.

Batman in the 1960s Finland was a transmedia character, appearing in different media as well as in licenced products (Jenkins 2006, 2), existing in a transmedia universe with his allies, adversaries, and gadgets. Although the audience engages with the entire storyworld when reading the comics or watching *Batman* on television, the children pictured in the letters pages of the *Batman* comic book and the *Batman aukene!* -collection are specifically dressed as and want to imitate the character of Batman. Batman's universe crystallizes in the titular character as its recognizable and somewhat unchanging symbol (Varis 2016, 291). In the account of the character's visit to Finland, Batman leapt out of the storyworld and into the audience's world. All versions of Batman, including official as well as fan-made iterations, expand the audience's knowledge of the character and contribute to Batman's transmedia universe.

Conclusion

For two years in the 1960s, Batman was extremely popular in Finland. In 1966–1968, Batman appeared simultaneously on television and in comics, and the relationship between the two media was complicated. On the one hand, Batman was an early transmedia character living in two separate storyworlds simultaneously, but on the other hand, both version influenced each other in a partly shared continuity. In addition to this, local versions of Batman and Robin existed in Finland, where audiences of both Batmen made drawings of their heroes, and a soft drink was advertised by a large live-action campaign featuring two Finnish actors playing the parts of the Dynamic Duo.

Following Koistinen, Koskimaa, and Välisalo's definition, the concept of a transmedia universe includes all materials connected to a specific popular culture phenomenon (2021). Official narratives, such as Batman's adventures on TV and in comics, adaptations made for commercial uses, such as the Finnish advertising agency's *Batman*, and audiences' own adaptations of *Batman* belong to this universe, expanding its borders and providing new interpretations of its inhabitants.

Notes

1. In 1966 and 1969 four issues, and in 1967 and 1968 12 issues respectively.
2. Note that the numbering of comic book issues is different in Finland and in the U.S.A.. In Finland, the numbering starts again from 1 at the start of each new year, and issue 1/1967

indicates the first issue published in 1967. In the U.S.A., the numbering starts from the very first issue of a comic book, and it goes on until the comic book's publishing ends. I use the month and year of publication to specify when the issue was published, for example that *Batman* #183 was published in June 1966.

3. "[...] niin voit katsella omia hurjia seikkailujasi!".
4. 'Soittakaa, kirjoittakaa tai ottakaa henkilökohtainen yhteys Batman aiheisten tuotteiden valmistuksesta tai maahantuonnista, sillä vain pääedustajani luvalla saa Suomessa valmistaa tai tuoda maahan Batman aiheisiä tuotteita.' (HS 18.11.1966, 42).
5. "... tullaan pää-asiallinen mainosyökkäys kohdistamaan suoralla mainonnalla mielestämme oikeaan kuluttajaportaaseen – lapsiin".
6. 'Seuraa sankaria, juo Batman'.
7. HS 25.11.1966, 12.
8. HS 20.12.1966, 5.
9. "Minä tykkään Batmanista. hän on paras filmitähti mitä olen koskaan nähnyt. ZOK! Minäkin olen tehnyt Batman puvun".

Disclosure statement

Figure 1 is an image published in the Finnish *Batman* comic book in 1967. Its publisher, Sarjakustannus Oy, ceased to operate in 1969. Every attempt possible was made into identify and contact the publisher to obtain the copyright material.

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