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Proposed question for Independent Inquiry:

“How has the adapting of *The Transformers* changed over time, and how is nostalgia affected by this?”

In this paper, I will be taking a brief look into three different topics, *The Transformers*, Nostalgia and Adaptation. After researching into each topic, taking the information that I have learned, I will be concluding this writing with a question. But why did I choose these topics? First, *The Transformers* is a subject that is near and dear to my heart, it is a subject that I have been very interested in for many years and am always willing to learn more about. In thinking about that, I came to my other two subjects. Nostalgia is also, a very relevant concept for me that I believe plays a bigger role in our day-to-day life than we realise, especially when considering toys, TV shows and music. Following from that came the topic of Adaptation, a concept that is in constant motion in our daily lives from something minute to something much larger.



(Sienkiewicz, 1984)

Transformers.

Released in 1984, *The Transformers* is a series that follows the story between the forces of good and bad, Autobots (the good) versus Decepticons (the bad), transforming alien robots

from the planet Cybertron whose war led to them crash landing on Earth where the Decepticons attempted to use Earth's resources to build up enough energon to return to Cybertron and conquer it. The Autobots fought to protect the Earth and all its inhabitants because "Freedom is the right of all sentient beings" (Optimus Prime, 1986). Unlike some of the biggest classics from the 80's like *G.I. Joe*, *The Transformers* "cartoon stands out most for all Transformers fans" (IGN TV, 2012) and not the comic book, which became more popular with the growth and popularity of the show. Originally, the series started out as the "Diaclone toy line made by Takara Toys" (Logie, 2020) in 1980, of which Hasbro would get the license to the "car-robot" transforming toy line along with the micro man line in 1982; combining them to create *The Transformers*. Hasbro then partnered with Marvel, giving them the job of bringing these toys to life, "giving the toys a backstory", "character profiles", "more of an identity that kids could connect with" (Logie, 2020). Jim Shooter and Dennis O'Neil became responsible for the story and Bob Budiansky for the names and characteristics.

In an interview with Budiansky in 2004, he spoke about how "not a lot of people at Marvel expected *Transformers* to be a success". With multiple people being asked to help write for the comics, of which was only meant to be a mini-series with only 4 issues. This would later be extended into a continuing series after the sales of the issues started coming in. 80 issues ended up being made between 1984 and 1991 (ComicBookDB, 2009).

The first characters to be released with the toy line that were seen in the first episodes (these were not the only characters in the first few episodes and these descriptions are based on my view of the characters from watching G1) of the series were: Optimus Prime, leader of the Autobots, known for his bravery and caring nature as the iconic line "Autobots, Transform and Roll Out!", transforming into a semi-truck along with one of his minicons, Roller. The Lamborghini twins, Sunstreaker, the yellow Lamborghini with confidence and an ego (vain but not obnoxious) and Sideswipe, the red Lamborghini who equally cares about his

appearance but takes on the more ambitious, 'come at me' attitude. Bluestreak and Prowl, same models, different personalities again. Prowl, transforming into a police vehicle, is one of the higher-ranking members of the Autobots, trustworthy, dependable, and grounded. Bluestreak, falls more under the 'little brother' category, determined but sometimes a little too ambitious. Hound, an army Jeep, is level-headed, and inquisitive and true to his name, Hound specialises in tracking and utilises holographic technology. From another mould is Ratchet and Ironhide. Ratchet is the chief medical officer, often having to repair his fellow Autobots after encounters with the Decepticons. Ironhide is portrayed as one of the older bots, who's seen a lot of action over the years in the war, with an "are you feeling lucky punk?" attitude (Which his character in the Michael Bay adaptations quotes), while also being the bot you go to for war stories. Both bots have an element of elders' sass.

Trailbreaker is among the characters that unfortunately doesn't get very much screen time during the animated series but when he does get some screen time, he's generally an easy-going bot with forcefield capabilities. Wheeljack, the resident 'mad scientist' of the Autobots, when he's not helping with repairs. He was also responsible for the creation of the Dinobots in the animated series, with a helping hand from Ratchet. Finally, of the Autobot toys released, is Jazz. Jazz is a one of Prime's right-hand officers. A very upbeat, outgoing character who loves culture and seamlessly incorporates Earth slang and music into his personality.

Following from the Autobots comes the Decepticons. Of the toys released, there was the transforming gun, leader, Megatron. Whose name was originally rejected by Hasbro as Bob Budiansky describes in an interview in 2004. This was due to the word 'mega' having the connotations to nuclear bombs at the time, and that it was 'too scary'. Even though the whole point was to be scary, he was the leader of the evil Decepticons, bent on ruling the universe by any means. Soundwave, one of his right-hand officers with no face and robotic voice, was

also produced along with his arsenal of minicon cassettes (he transforms into a cassette player), Laserbeak and Buzzsaw (birds), Ravage (Panther), Frenzy and Rumble (bots). Finally, were the Seekers, Starscream, Thundercracker and Skywarp. Despite his constant attempts to overthrow his master and become leader of the Decepticons (which inevitably backfire/fail), Starscream is second in command and the Seekers leader. Skywarp is the prankster of the three with the ability to teleport short distances. Then there is Thundercracker who is often the middleman, trying to keep some peace in the lower ranks of the Decepticon forces.



(Clarkson, 2010, Acrylic on wood Panel)

Nostalgia

Originally coined as a medical term by Swiss medical student, Johannes Hofer in 1688, nostalgia started out as the name for a ‘disease’. Hofer created this term after he began noticing a pattern with his patients who lived far from their homes. Patients that obsessed over returning to their homes would become “physically, sometimes fatally, sick” (Matei,

2017). “Symptoms included loss of appetite, fainting, heightened suicide risk, and, according to Swiss doctor Albert Van Holler, hallucinations of the people and places you miss” (Matei, 2017). The term ‘Nostalgia’ is a combination of two Greek words; *nostos*, which means homecoming, and *alga*, which translates to pain. However, years later, during the 1800s, doctors would come to agree that the term nostalgia was incorrect, at least from this perceived understanding, and was no longer a valid medical diagnosis. Following this, the terms definition changed, its perspective different, “...an emotional state characterized by a wistful affection for the past” (Matei, 2017). In Robert Hemmings book, *Modern Nostalgia Siegfried Sasson, Trauma and the Second World War* published in 2008, he quotes Svetlana Boym saying how nostalgia is “not merely an artistic device but a strategy of survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming” (Hemmings, 2008), this is one way that the concept is spoken about in relation to soldiers, returning from war. Boym in her own writings and research, investigated the concepts of nostalgia, and identified two separate version of nostalgia as briefly described in an article following her passing, “reflective nostalgia” and “restorative nostalgia” (Fox, 2015). ‘Reflective nostalgia’ “acknowledges that the past can never truly be reconstructed. In consequence, she argued, it fosters empathy and a bittersweet consolation”, while ‘restorative nostalgia’ “seeks to resuscitate the past as rigorously as possible” (Fox, 2015). The reflective kind of nostalgia is probably what most people experience when a memory of the past comes up, as they reflect on the past, for example, when an old TV show or song is shown/played and an individual hasn’t heard, seen, or thought of that thing in a long time, they go down this road of reflecting on it and, presumably happy, memories it brings. Meanwhile, the restorative kind is the version of nostalgia which often leads to negative effects. This unwillingness to let go of the past that leads to people trying to recreate this vision of something no longer relevant/sustainable but try everything to resuscitate it. “Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is

also a romance with one's own fantasy.” (Boym, 2007). This quote from Byom’s book *Nostalgia and its Discontents*, I believe, best encompasses both types of nostalgia, depending on how you choose to read it.



(Ruijter, 2021)

Adaptation

The term ‘adaptation’ can alter slightly depending on the context of which it is used. In general, in accordance with the Cambridge Dictionary, adaption is a noun, that is used to define “the process of changing to suit different conditions”, “a film, book, play etc. That has been made from another film, book, play, etc.” if you want to look at it from the most common example of it in media, for example, *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings*. In a 2010 paper written by Michael Ryan Moore, he refers to the *Call of Duty* franchise when they released *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* “this Cold War alternative history bears a striking resemblance to John Milius’ 1984 film *Red Dawn*.” (Moore, 2010) as he sees a strong similarity between the two. This is an example of how a story can be adapted into something

else, especially when it comes to appealing to a different audience. Similarly, to a topic discussed earlier, *The Transformers* was a pre-existing toy line that was adapted into the franchise that it is today with a massive fanbase, of which has gone through multiple adaptations, but all have the same base core, even if they are completely different in style and/or main plot. In this evolving age where technology continues to advance, advertisement continues having to adapt and change in order to keep up with how people consume information and where. In an article by Jen Smith in 2016, they discuss how toy manufacturers must then adapt their strategies due to fewer children seeing their television adverts because fewer and fewer children are watching TV and instead watch On Demand services, Netflix, or YouTube, just to name a few. On the sites that do show advertisements, it is getting harder for companies to aim their products at children due to algorithms, “perhaps because tech developers themselves are now having children and so we’re seeing more attention being paid to ‘safety’ and the ‘appropriateness’ of the content served to children.” As described by Smith in 2016. They also provide the examples of “Mattel’s “imagine the possibilities” campaign for *Barbie*”, discussing how, in this example, they chose to gear their advertisements at adults as well, using nostalgia “that highlighted the feel-good aspects of make believe” (Smith, 2016). The *Star Wars* franchise is the other example, as they have “also taken a multi-generational approach, encouraging children to share their parents’ passion for the Millennium Falcon, Darth Vader and light sabres.” (Smith, 2016). These companies have used the fanbases that they made over the years, to continue promoting their products, but in such a way that they can get the adults that grew up with them, might consider purchasing said product(s) for their children/ young relatives if they have any but then they might make the purchase for themselves because of the nostalgia that they may have attached to it. In a more common example, primarily in the art community, the adaptation of characters and illustration, especially under the ‘DTIYS’ (Draw-this-in-your-style) hashtag, people make a ‘challenge’ out of adapting an artist’s work, into their own, using their own skill set and their own style.

To summarise, *The Transformers* is franchise born out of Japanese toy line manufacturer Takara Toys that Hasbro bought the rights to, to which they created a universe for these toys to live in and develop personalities with the help of Marvel, all to sell more toys but became much more. The franchise went from something that many believed wouldn’t take off that became something massive and continues to grow and change. Nostalgia, closely tied to subjects like *The Transformers* especially for people like myself, when you use the bittersweet definition of the term, the ‘reflective nostalgia’, but can easily be changed to the ‘restorative nostalgia’ when people chose to not let go and allow growth, doing what they can to prevent/ reverse these changes. Then there’s adaptation, another topic that relates to *The Transformers* and closely relates to the concept of nostalgia, very closely.

After some consideration, I have come to this question:

“How has the adapting of *The Transformers* changed over time, and how is nostalgia affected by this?”

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