

From Novel to 3D Film: Practice-Based Reflections on Adaptation Theory

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ABSTRACT: *The process of adapting novels into films has been a significant area of study, yet the transformation of literary works into three-dimensional (3D) animation remains largely unexplored. This article presents a practice-based investigation into adaptation, centered on the creation of a five-minute 3D animated short film based on the Indonesian novel Nagabumi by Seno Gumira Ajidarma. By treating creative practice as both methodology and data, the study illustrates how theoretical perspectives from Linda Hutcheon, Thomas Leitch, Brian McFarlane, and Vallittu et al. inform practical decisions made during scripting, design, animation, and sound production. The analysis identifies three core aspects: the transformation of narrative through condensation and externalization, the unique aesthetic possibilities offered by 3D animation, and the navigation of cultural codes between local traditions and global cinematic norms. The findings suggest that fidelity is best understood not as exact replication, but as the preservation of a work's essence, and that 3D animation enriches adaptation theory by emphasizing stylization, symbolic expression, and cultural hybridization.*

KEYWORDS: *adaptation, 3D animation, practice-based research, fidelity, cultural codes, Nagabumi*

I. INTRODUCTION

Adaptation stands as a fundamental and enduring characteristic of media culture, consistently ensuring the enduring journey of narratives across diverse generations, varied formats, and myriad cultural contexts. From the nascent stages of cinematic development, novels have unequivocally served as a foundational wellspring of source material for film, thereby engendering profound inquiries concerning fidelity to the original, the nature of transformative changes, and the intricate web of intertextual relationships. As perceptively articulated by Linda Hutcheon (2004), adaptation is not merely a static outcome but rather an active and dynamic interplay, embodying both a tangible product and an ongoing process. It is, in essence, a profound act of creative re-interpretation and imaginative re-imagining, rather than a simplistic or mere derivative act. Adaptations give new life to old stories, making them relevant to today's audiences while still respecting their historical origins and core narrative.

Yet, while novel-to-film adaptations have been widely studied, the adaptation of novels into 3D animated films remains a largely underexplored and academically underserved area. The rapid rise and sophisticated evolution of digital animation technologies have profoundly transformed the global cinematic landscape, offering new avenues for storytelling and visual expression. Landmark works such as Robert Zemeckis's *Beowulf* (2007), a groundbreaking motion-capture animation that breathed new life into the Old English epic poem, and the visually stunning *The Polar Express* (2004), another Zemeckis venture that pushed the boundaries of photorealistic animation, exemplify the remarkable capacity of 3D animation to reimagine and

reinterpret complex literary and cultural narratives for contemporary audiences. Furthermore, DreamWorks Animation's *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010) showcased the medium's ability to create immersive fantasy worlds and emotionally resonant character arcs adapted from Cressida Cowell's book series.

In Indonesia, this emerging trend is also gaining traction, demonstrating a unique intersection of traditional storytelling and cutting-edge digital technology. Projects like the highly anticipated adaptation of *Nagabumi*, a revered Indonesian fantasy novel, into animated form highlight how rich local storytelling traditions and mythological narratives are being rearticulated and given new visual life through the innovative application of digital animation techniques. This local development signifies not only a technological leap but also a cultural re-engagement, allowing indigenous tales to reach wider audiences through a globally recognized and increasingly popular medium.

This article delves into the intricate process of adapting a novel into a 3D animated short film, exploring the multifaceted transformations that occur during such a creative endeavor. At its core, the study seeks to answer a fundamental question: What happens when a novel is adapted into a 3D animated short film? This overarching inquiry then branches into a more granular examination of how established theoretical frameworks of adaptation—specifically fidelity, transfer, intertextuality, and cultural context—manifest and interact within the practical realm of creative production.

To rigorously address these questions, the research employs a practice-based methodology. This approach is deeply rooted in the author's direct, hands-on experience, drawing extensively on the personal production of a five-minute 3D animated short. This film is an adaptation of *Nagabumi*, a work that serves as the central case study for the entire investigation. By immersing itself in the actual creative process, the study gains unique insights into the challenges and opportunities inherent in translating a literary narrative into a distinct visual and auditory medium.

Through a critical reflection on this creative process, viewed through the analytical lens of adaptation theory, the article aims to make substantial contributions to two key academic fields: adaptation studies and creative arts research. It posits that practice-based methodologies offer a unique vantage point, revealing dimensions of adaptation that are often less apparent or even entirely invisible when relying solely on traditional text-to-text analyses. This includes, but is not limited to, a deeper understanding of the inherent tension between fidelity and creativity—the delicate balance between remaining true to the source material and exercising artistic license to exploit the new medium's potential. Furthermore, the study illuminates the specific affordances of the animated medium, detailing how its unique characteristics influence narrative choices, visual storytelling, and character representation. Finally, the research underscores the crucial role of negotiating cultural codes, highlighting how the adaptation process navigates and reinterprets cultural nuances and meanings embedded within the original text for a new audience and a different medium.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Adaptation as Process and Product (Hutcheon)

Linda Hutcheon (2004), in her seminal work, reconceptualizes adaptation beyond its traditional perception as a secondary or inferior creative act. Instead, she posits adaptation as a sophisticated form of "cultural repetition with difference." This framework highlights that adaptations are not mere copies but rather dynamic entities that simultaneously echo their source material while diverging from it through reinterpretation and transformation.

Hutcheon's theory emphasizes a crucial duality within adaptation: they are both products and processes. As products, adaptations stand as autonomous new texts, possessing their own distinct aesthetic, narrative, and thematic qualities. They exist independently of their source, capable of being analyzed and appreciated on their own merits. Concurrently, adaptations are also processes – ongoing acts of reinterpretation that are profoundly shaped by a multitude of factors. These shaping forces include the specific medium into which the adaptation is translated (e.g., novel to film, play to musical), the prevailing cultural and historical context of their creation and reception, and the intended audience for whom the adaptation is crafted. Each of these elements influences how

the source material is understood, reimagined, and presented.

This multifaceted understanding of adaptation is particularly salient in the realm of 3D animation. In this medium, digital mediation plays a transformative role, profoundly altering the visual, narrative, and cultural dimensions of the original story. The transition into 3D animation necessitates fundamental shifts in character design, world-building, storytelling techniques, and even the emotional resonance of the narrative. The digital environment allows for unprecedented levels of visual detail and dynamic camera work, which in turn can amplify or alter the original narrative's impact. Moreover, the cultural context of 3D animation often targets a global audience, requiring adaptations to navigate diverse cultural sensitivities and expectations, further illustrating how the "process" of adaptation is continuously influenced by its environment and intended viewers.

2.2 Beyond Fidelity (Leitch)

In his 2003 work, Thomas Leitch offers a compelling critique of what he terms "fidelity discourse." This concept refers to the prevailing tendency within academic and popular discourse to evaluate adaptations primarily on the basis of their faithfulness to their source material. Leitch contends that such judgments are fundamentally flawed and misleading, asserting that no adaptation can—or, indeed, should—ever aim to perfectly replicate its original. To expect an adaptation to be a mere carbon copy of its predecessor is to misunderstand the very nature of adaptation itself.

Instead of trying to achieve a flawless reproduction, Leitch suggests a more subtle and insightful approach. He argues that scholars and critics should shift their focus to analyzing the intricate strategies employed by adaptors, the specific contexts in which adaptations are created and received, and the new meanings that emerge from the transformative process. This perspective encourages a deeper understanding of how adaptations engage with, reinterpret, and often enrich their source texts, rather than simply measuring them against an impossible standard of exact duplication.

This critical perspective is particularly salient and indeed crucial when considering the realm of 3D animation. Unlike live-action adaptations which might strive for a closer resemblance to reality or a direct transposition of existing visual elements, 3D animation inherently embraces stylization, condensation, and profound visual transformation as intrinsic elements of its artistic process. The very tools and techniques of 3D animation lend themselves to imaginative reinterpretation and the creation of distinct visual worlds. Therefore, evaluating 3D animated adaptations solely on their fidelity to a source would overlook the creative possibilities and unique characteristics that define the medium itself. Leitch's framework allows for a more appropriate and appreciative analysis of how 3D animation utilizes its inherent qualities to adapt stories and themes in ways that are often distinct from their origins, fostering new interpretations and experiences for audiences.

2.3 Transfer and Transformation (McFarlane)

Brian McFarlane's 1996 theoretical framework for adaptation distinguishes between elements that are more readily "transferred" and those that necessitate a more profound "adaptation proper." According to McFarlane, transferable elements primarily encompass the foundational aspects of a narrative, such as plot events and identifiable characters. These components often serve as the structural backbone of the original work and can be recognized, albeit sometimes in modified forms, across different media. For instance, the sequence of major happenings or the core personalities of characters can often be directly translated from a novel to a film.

However, McFarlane argues that true adaptation goes beyond mere transfer, requiring a more transformative process for other elements. These are the aspects that necessitate adaptation proper, including nuanced features like narrative voice and the intricate realm of interiority. Narrative voice, which in a novel is conveyed through authorial style, word choice, and sentence structure, must be reinvented for a visual medium. Similarly, the deep psychological insights, thoughts, and feelings of characters—their interiority—which are often conveyed through extensive internal monologues or descriptive passages in literature, cannot be directly presented in a visual format.

In the context of 3D animation, this distinction becomes particularly salient. The rich, evocative

descriptions of settings, atmospheres, and the complex psychological depths of characters, which are the hallmarks of many novels, pose a significant challenge. These elements must be reimagined visually or symbolically. For example, a character's internal turmoil might be conveyed through facial expressions, body language, camera angles, lighting, or even symbolic imagery rather than through explicit narration. The sprawling descriptive passages of a novel might be condensed into a single, powerfully evocative shot or a series of carefully crafted visual details.

This necessity to reimagine and transform highlights the core of McFarlane's observation: adaptation is fundamentally less transfer than transformation. It is not a passive carrying over of content from one medium to another, but an active, creative process of reinterpreting and re-expressing the original material within the constraints and opportunities of the new medium. The essence of the source material is not simply reproduced but undergoes a significant metamorphosis, emerging in a new form that resonates with the unique capabilities of the target medium, in this case, 3D animation. This transformative act ensures that while the core narrative and characters may persist, their presentation and the way they affect the audience are inherently altered to suit the new artistic language.

2.4 Contextual Codes (Vallittu et al.)

Vallittu, Hax, and Olavarria (2018) provide a crucial framework for understanding adaptations by highlighting the profound influence of cultural, intertextual, and temporal contexts. Their research underscores the idea that no adaptation is a solitary entity; rather, it is perpetually interwoven with intricate and expansive frameworks of meaning. This perspective is vital for any comprehensive analysis of adapted works.

Considering this, a hypothetical 3D animated adaptation of *Nagabumi* serves as an excellent illustration of this principle. Such an adaptation cannot be genuinely comprehended or critically assessed by solely examining its relationship to the original novel. Instead, its full significance emerges when it is read within a broader tapestry of influences. This includes, but is not limited to, a deep understanding of Indonesian cultural codes and nuances, which inform narrative choices, character portrayals, and thematic interpretations. Furthermore, the global aesthetics and conventions of contemporary animation play a significant role, dictating visual styles, storytelling rhythms, and audience expectations derived from exposure to other animated works. Finally, the adaptation must also contend with the evolving expectations and sensibilities of contemporary audiences, who bring their own experiences, preferences, and cultural filters to their viewing experience. Therefore, a successful and meaningful adaptation necessitates a careful navigation and synthesis of these multifaceted contextual layers.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a practice-based research methodology, in which creative production is both a method of inquiry and a form of knowledge generation (Nelson, 2013; Barrett & Bolt, 2014). The research object is a five-minute 3D animated film adapted from *Nagabumi*, created by the author. The film functions as primary data, and the creative process serves as a site of reflection and analysis.

The creation of a mere five-minute animation proved to be a meticulous and time-consuming endeavor, spanning an entire year of dedicated effort from the author. This extensive production timeline served as a profound testament to how deeply the author's personal knowledge, coupled with their unique life experiences, influenced and shaped every aspect of the adaptation process. Each frame, character movement, and narrative beat was imbued with insights gleaned from their understanding of the world and their personal journey, making the final animation a rich reflection of their internal landscape.

The research for this project is built on three distinct types of data. First, the Creative Artifact—the completed five-minute animation—serves as the primary output and a core subject of analysis. This final product embodies the culmination of all creative and technical decisions. The second data source, Process Materials, documents the journey of the animation's creation. This includes a wide range of developmental items such as various script drafts, detailed storyboards, 3D models, rendered images, and records of sound design experiments. This collection provides crucial insight into the iterative nature of the creative process. Finally, the Reflective Notes offer a deeper, more personal look into the project. These notes capture creative decisions, document

challenges that arose during production, and record theoretical insights as they were developed, providing a narrative of the choices and challenges behind the finished work. Together, these three data sources offer a comprehensive view, from the initial idea to the finished piece, along with the thinking that guided the entire production process stage.

The creative process unfolded in four phases:

1. Script Adaptation

To accommodate five-minute duration, select passages from the novel were abridged. The focus was on highlighting the philosophical solitude and martial artistry of the Pendekar Tanpa Nama.



Figure 3.1. A page from Nagabumi's Novel.

Here are the words that written on the page:

“Mereka akan segera menyerangku begitu aku menampakkan diri, dan dengan mata terpejam aku cukup menggeser tubuh, melambatkan tangan, atau mengibaskan rambut panjangku untuk mengembalikan senjata-senjata itu ke tubuh pemiliknya. Maka Bumerang Sakti pun tewas oleh senjatanya sendiri setelah siulanku menambah kecepatan putar balik senjata yang tidak bisa ditangkapnya lagi; Kaladanda mati tersedak oleh semburan uap beracunnya sendiri setelah angin yang kudorong membuat uap itu keluar bahkan terhisap ke dalam paru-parunya; Golok Kembar kepalanya terpenggal oleh sepasang golok yang berputar kembali ke lehernya setelah aku terpenggal oleh sepasang golok yang berputar kembali ke lehernya setelah aku berkelebat ke balik punggungnya dan menotok urat saraf tertentu dari belakang; dan kedua lengan Si Tangan Besi kupatahkan tanpa membunuhnya untuk memberi hukuman atas kekejamannya selama ini - tetapi ia ternyata justru menjadi tewas karena daya hidupnya memang berada di lengannya itu. Aku telah mematungkan diri agar dipukul dengan jurus andalannya yang mematikan.”

Here is the translation:

"They would immediately attack me as soon as I showed myself, and with my eyes closed I only needed to shift my body, wave my hand, or flick my long hair to return those weapons to their owners' bodies. So the Magic Boomerang died by its own weapon after my whistle increased the speed of the weapon's impossible-to-catch return; Kaladanda died choking on his own poisonous steam after the wind I pushed made the steam exit and even be inhaled into his lungs; the Twin Machetes had their heads severed by a pair of machetes that spun back to their necks after I had their heads severed by a pair of machetes that spun back to their necks after I flashed behind their backs and pressed certain nerve points from behind; and I broke the arms of the Iron Hand without killing him to punish him for his cruelty all this time - but he actually died because his life force was indeed in his arms. I had frozen myself to be struck with his deadly signature move."

2. 3D Modeling, Rigging, and Animation

Characters, environments, and combat sequences were created in Blender. This stage foregrounded the negotiation between cultural authenticity (pencak silat movements, Indonesian landscapes) and technical/visual stylization. These are examples of the character.



Figure 3.2. Front View. Pendekar Cicak – Reimagined.



Figure 3.3. Front Medium View. Pendekar Cicak – Reimagined.



Figure 3.4. Right View. Pendekar Cicak – Reimagined.

3. Rendering and Sound

Final production involved lighting, rendering, and sound design. Indonesian-inspired music and ambient sound were integrated to reinforce cultural resonance.



Figure 3.5. Final Render Opening Scene.



Figure 3.6. Final Render Fight Scene 01.



Figure 3.7. Final Render Fight Scene 02.



Figure 3.8. Final Render Fight Scene 03.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Narrative Transformation

The ambitious adaptation of the novel necessitated a significant transformation, condensing its sprawling narrative into a tightly structured, five-minute sequence. A key challenge lay in translating the protagonist's rich interior monologues, which were externalized and made visible through a sophisticated use of visual metaphors. Shadows, often employed to represent inner turmoil or hidden fears, became a dynamic visual manifestation of unspoken thoughts. Similarly, deliberate moments of silence, punctuated by the sounds of combat, served to amplify the weight of unarticulated feelings and decisions. Pauses in the midst of action were not merely breaks but carefully constructed cinematic devices, allowing the audience to perceive the character's internal processing and emotional states. This approach aligns seamlessly with Linda Hutcheon's concept of adaptation as "repetition without replication," where the core essence of the original is preserved, but its form is reimagined. Furthermore, this method resonates with Brian McFarlane's critical observation that the interiority inherent in literary works demands a transformative process when adapted to a visual medium, necessitating innovative solutions to convey what is not explicitly stated.

A novel, by its very nature, is a canvas woven from words, a tapestry of language that unfolds within the mind of each individual who encounters it. Unlike visual mediums such as film or illustrated books, a novel like "Nagabumi" offers no pre-conceived images to guide the reader's imagination. This absence of visual cues is not a limitation, but rather a profound strength, enabling a unique and deeply personal narrative transformation within each reader.

Consider, for instance, a hundred individuals picking up the same copy of "Nagabumi." Each will embark on an identical journey through the author's carefully chosen vocabulary, sentence structures, and plot points. However, the internal landscapes they construct, the characters they envision, the settings they experience, and the emotions they feel will differ remarkably. One reader might picture a protagonist with flowing dark hair and piercing eyes, while another might see a more subdued figure with a thoughtful gaze. A particular village described in the text might evoke a bustling marketplace for one and a quiet, ancient hamlet for another. This is the magic of the purely textual narrative: the words act as catalysts, igniting the reader's own memories, experiences, and cultural understanding to form a bespoke version of the story.

Therefore, it is an undeniable truth that one hundred readers will invariably create one hundred different interpretations of "Nagabumi." Each reading becomes an act of co-creation, where the author provides the blueprint, and the reader supplies the bricks and mortar of their own unique perception. The emotional resonance, the philosophical insights, and even the subtle nuances of character motivation will be filtered through the unique lens of each individual's consciousness, leading to a rich and diverse tapestry of understanding. This inherent subjectivity is precisely what lends such profound depth and enduring power to the novel as an art form.

The intricate process by which a reader's imagination is ignited and shaped while immersed in a novel

is a fascinating interplay of various interconnected elements. This mental construction isn't a passive reception of information but an active, dynamic process influenced by both the text itself and the reader's unique cognitive and experiential landscape.

Firstly, Textual Cues serve as the foundational blueprint. Authors meticulously craft descriptions of characters, their physical appearances and internal lives; settings, from grand landscapes to intimate rooms; and actions, the unfolding events of the narrative. These descriptive details provide a framework, offering specific imagery and sensory information that guides the reader's visualization. A vivid description of a character's weary eyes or the scent of a blooming garden allows the reader to begin building a mental image, albeit one that remains uniquely their own.

Secondly, a crucial component is the Reader's Prior Knowledge. Each individual brings a wealth of accumulated information, experiences, and understandings to the act of reading. This includes their cultural background, which influences interpretations of symbols, customs, and social dynamics. Furthermore, familiarity with different literary genres—be it fantasy, historical fiction, or mystery—primes the reader's mind with certain expectations and conventions, influencing the mental imagery they conjure. For instance, a reader well-versed in historical fiction might more readily visualize the intricate details of a specific era's attire or architecture.

Thirdly, Personal Experiences & Emotions deeply color the imaginative process. Individual memories, both profound and mundane, and a spectrum of emotions—joy, sorrow, fear, wonder—contribute significantly to how readers visualize scenes and empathize with characters. A scene describing loss might evoke a reader's own past experiences with grief, leading to a more visceral and emotionally resonant mental visualization. This personal connection transforms the abstract text into a deeply felt and imagined reality.

Fourthly, Cognitive Processing, specifically the inherent ability of individuals to form mental images, plays a significant role. Just as individuals vary in their musical aptitude or mathematical prowess, so too do they differ in their capacity for vivid mental imagery. Some readers naturally create incredibly detailed and immersive internal worlds, almost like watching a movie, while others may experience more abstract or conceptual visualizations. This inherent cognitive variation contributes to the diverse ways in which stories are imagined by different readers.

Finally, the Cultural & Social Context in which the reader exists also shapes their imaginative interpretations. Shared cultural norms, societal values, and common understandings of symbols and behaviors play a role in how imagery is interpreted and visualized. For example, a cultural understanding of heroism or community might influence how a reader imagines the actions and motivations of characters within a story, even if those details are not explicitly stated in the text.

As Mar and Oatley (2008) compellingly argue in their seminal work, *The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience*, reading fiction is far from a passive activity; it is an active and profound engagement of the imagination. Fiction serves as a powerful catalyst, prompting readers to construct intricate mental simulations of various aspects of the story. This involves a continuous process of drawing upon both the explicit textual information provided by the author and the reader's vast reservoir of personal experiences, knowledge, and emotional associations to breathe life into characters, visualize the unfolding events, and construct the settings in their minds. As Mar and Oatley (2008) eloquently state, "When reading narratives, readers build mental models of the situations described, drawing on both textual information and their own experiences to imagine characters, events, and settings" (p. 173). This statement underscores the dynamic and collaborative nature of reading, where the author's words act as a springboard for the reader's imagination, creating a unique and deeply personal experience within the shared framework of the narrative.

4.2 Aesthetic Strategies in 3D Animation

The utilization of 3D animation proved instrumental in achieving a highly expressive stylization, allowing for a dynamic and visually captivating narrative. Character designs were meticulously crafted with a hybrid aesthetic, seamlessly blending realistic details with symbolic elements. This deliberate choice aimed to strike a delicate balance between conveying narrative gravitas and delivering a compelling visual spectacle. Furthermore, the strategic implementation of lighting shifts and dynamic camera angles played a crucial role in

amplifying dramatic intensity, particularly during pivotal combat sequences, immersing the audience deeper into the action and emotional depth of the story.

The visual design of the short film was the result of a carefully negotiated balance between imaginative concepts, technical constraints, and cultural considerations. At the conceptual stage, creative sketches and stylistic explorations established the thematic mood and visual direction of the adaptation. These initial ideas were then rigorously tested against the realities of production, particularly the limitations of hardware, rendering capacity, and available post-production tools. The production timeline further demanded pragmatic choices, compelling the team to privilege clarity and narrative impact over exhaustive detail. As Manovich (2001) argues, digital aesthetics are frequently shaped by the negotiation with technical limitations, and in this project, such constraints became catalysts for inventive solutions—encouraging stylization and symbolic abstraction rather than exhaustive realism.

Beyond technical pragmatism, the visual design functioned as a narrative tool. Choices in color palette, lighting, and composition externalized psychological states and thematic motifs, effectively translating interior monologues into visual metaphors. This aligns with McFarlane's (1996) claim that interiority cannot simply be transferred from novel to film but must be reimagined through medium-specific strategies. For instance, shadows were used to signify solitude, while shifts between warm and cold palettes marked changes in emotional tone. In this way, the adaptation confirms Hutcheon's (2004) notion of adaptation as "repetition without replication," where the spirit of the source is preserved while its form is transformed.

Cultural specificity was equally central to the design. Visual elements such as Indonesian martial arts movements, traditional costume patterns, and environment design rooted in local landscapes were consciously integrated, embedding the adaptation in its cultural context. At the same time, cinematic conventions drawn from global animation—dynamic camera work, exaggerated motion, and polished lighting effects—ensured accessibility for international audiences. As Vallittu, Hax, and Olavarría (2018) suggest, adaptation is always shaped by contextual negotiations, and the hybrid visual design of this short film demonstrates how local identity and global aesthetics can be productively intertwined.

Finally, the director's artistic vision provided cohesion, functioning as the interpretive lens through which all design decisions were filtered. While technical and cultural factors imposed necessary compromises, the director's vision ensured that every element—set dressing, lighting, costume design—contributed to a unified cinematic language. In this sense, the visual design was not merely ornamental but central to the project's aim of achieving thematic fidelity, understood not as literal replication but as a commitment to the ethos and atmosphere of the source novel (Leitch, 2003).

4.3 Cultural Codes and Hybridization

The adaptation of Nagabumi negotiates a dynamic balance between localized cultural expression and global narrative conventions, resulting in a viewing experience that is both culturally resonant and broadly accessible. Central to this process is the film's deep engagement with Indonesian heritage, most notably through its representation of traditional martial arts. The fluid yet forceful movements of silat are depicted with careful attention to detail, conveying both authenticity and aesthetic power. Equally significant are the landscapes of the Indonesian archipelago, which function not simply as background scenery but as narrative agents imbued with historical and cultural meaning. Costume design further reinforces this cultural grounding, drawing inspiration from indigenous textiles and symbolic motifs. Together, these elements assert a strong sense of Indonesian identity while simultaneously aligning with the cinematic codes of global animation.

Simultaneously, the film consciously embraces established cinematic conventions prevalent in global animation, thereby enhancing its reach and appeal to an international audience. Techniques such as carefully orchestrated slow motion sequences not only highlight the precision and artistry of the martial arts but also amplify moments of dramatic tension and emotional impact, a common stylistic choice in action cinema worldwide. Dynamic framing, characterized by fluid camera movements and imaginative shot compositions, contributes to the visual dynamism and keeps the viewer engaged, ensuring a vibrant and energetic pace. This strategic blend of cultural specificity and universal cinematic language directly exemplifies Vallittu et al.'s argument that adaptations are not mere replications but rather products of complex contextual negotiations. These negotiations involve a

delicate balance between preserving the source material's essence and adapting it to resonate with a broader audience while navigating the commercial and artistic demands of a globalized media landscape.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the author's interpretation and visual manifestation of the "Nagabumi" narrative, as translated into this cinematic work, will inevitably diverge from the original novelist's intrinsic vision. The act of adaptation inherently involves a process of reinterpretation, where the new medium and the adaptor's creative sensibilities shape the material in unique ways. The author believes that their imaginative rendition of the story might look totally different from how the novel's creator originally conceived it. This divergence is not only inevitable but also a natural consequence of the creative process, as each artistic mind brings its own set of experiences, perspectives, and visual language to the foundational text. The film, therefore, stands as a distinct artistic entity, an imagined world built upon the foundations of the novel but filtered through a new creative lens, offering a fresh perspective on a beloved narrative.

4.4 Fidelity Reconsidered

The inherent limitations of literal fidelity in adaptation become strikingly apparent when translating a literary work, such as the novel *Nagabumi*, into a cinematic medium, particularly 3D animation. This reality underscores the fundamental disparities between the two art forms. As McFarlane (1996) cogently argues, while certain foundational narrative components—like character arcs or pivotal plot points—can be transposed with relative ease, other deeply embedded aspects, notably interior monologues or the intricate nuances of a novel's stylistic narration, necessitate a complete re-imagination within the new medium. Therefore, the challenge in adapting *Nagabumi* was never to produce a direct, word-for-word replication of the original text but rather to re-interpret its profound essence, translating its core meaning through the distinct visual and temporal syntax of 3D animation. This approach acknowledges that adaptation is not mere transcription but an act of creative metamorphosis.

To achieve this ambitious objective, the adaptation meticulously focused on preserving the underlying spirit of the *Nagabumi* narrative. This spirit was carefully distilled into three interconnected thematic cores that permeated every aspect of the cinematic interpretation. Firstly, the adaptation centered on the protagonist's deeply personal journey of wandering, a motif that speaks to exploration, discovery, and often, a search for meaning. Secondly, it emphasized the profound experience of solitude, exploring its dual nature as both a source of introspection and a test of resilience. Lastly, the adaptation highlighted the cultivation of inner strength amidst adversity, showcasing the protagonist's growth and fortitude in the face of challenges. By foregrounding these universal and resonant themes, the adaptation consciously embraced a perspective that challenges what Leitch (2003) critically identifies as the inherent insufficiency of fidelity discourse. Leitch posits that truly successful adaptations are not the result of a mechanical, uninspired replication of their source material. Instead, they emerge from a transformative engagement with the original work, leading to the creation of new artistic endeavors that, while deeply resonating with their sources, are not rigidly constrained by them. In this light, the short film adaptation of *Nagabumi* embodies, in Hutcheon's (2006) insightful terms, an act of "repetition without replication." It is a re-creative gesture that remains faithful to the ethos and intrinsic meaning of the original novel but innovates boldly in its formal execution, offering a fresh yet recognizable experience.

This sophisticated notion of transformative adaptation inherently points towards a cyclical model of storytelling, suggesting that narratives are not static entities but dynamic, evolving forms. The short movie itself is thus conceived not as an immutable, final destination for the *Nagabumi* story but rather as a flexible, permeable narrative construct inherently capable of future re-interpretation and re-imagination. For instance, consider a hypothetical scenario: if one were to retranslate the completed film back into a novelistic form, the resulting text would, by its very nature, inevitably diverge from the original *Nagabumi*. This divergence would be a direct consequence of the new author's distinct voice, their unique perspective, and their individual prose style, each shaping the narrative in novel ways. Following this, a subsequent cinematic adaptation of that re-imagined novel would again yield a completely fresh visual and narrative grammar, distinct from both its immediate literary predecessor and the initial film adaptation. This recursive and ever-evolving cycle beautifully illustrates what Stam (2000) describes as the "intertextual dialogism" of adaptation. In this framework, each new version of a

story actively enters into a multifaceted dialogue with its prior iterations, acknowledging their influence while simultaneously asserting its own unique departure and creative contribution.

Such an enlightened perspective fundamentally reframes adaptation. It is no longer viewed as a simplistic, unidirectional act of transfer from one medium to another, but rather as an ongoing, vibrant process of artistic reinterpretation that transcends specific media and contextual boundaries. Each new adaptation—whether it manifests as a novel, a film, or any other artistic form—constitutes a profound metamorphosis. It actively translates the enduring and timeless themes of wandering, solitude, and the cultivation of inner strength into forms that precisely reflect the expressive capacities and inherent strengths of the chosen medium, as well as the unique sensibilities and artistic visions of its creators. This continual, vibrant reimagining ensures that the narrative essence of Nagabumi remains perpetually vibrant, dynamic, and relevant. It evolves and adapts with each new version, thereby sustaining its profound relevance and resonance across generations and through diverse artistic expressions.

V. Findings

The practice-based adaptation experiment produced several key findings that illuminate the challenges and opportunities of translating a literary text into 3D animation:

1. Narrative Condensation and Transformation

The adaptation process revealed that it is not feasible to transfer the novel's expansive narrative in its entirety into a five-minute short film. Instead, condensation became an essential strategy, compelling the selection of pivotal themes and the reimagining of interior monologues through externalized visual metaphors. This underscores the notion that adaptation is inherently transformative rather than reproductive.

2. Medium-Specific Aesthetics

The affordances of 3D animation introduced new expressive possibilities that shaped the adaptation. The stylization of characters, manipulation of lighting and camera movement, and the capacity to render symbolic landscapes all allowed for meanings that exceeded what the novel's descriptive prose could directly convey. These findings affirm that adaptation is always mediated by the expressive capacities and constraints of its chosen medium.

3. Cultural Identity and Hybridization

A central discovery was the extent to which cultural identity could be both preserved and re-contextualized. The adaptation incorporated Indonesian martial arts (silat), indigenous costume motifs, and archipelagic landscapes, which grounded the film in local traditions. At the same time, the film employed global cinematic conventions—dynamic pacing, framing, and sound design—that rendered it accessible to international audiences. The result was a hybrid form in which local cultural expression and global narrative codes coexisted.

4. Fidelity Reframed as Spirit

The process highlighted the limits of literal fidelity to the source text. While replication of the novel's detail proved impossible, thematic fidelity—preserving the ethos of wandering, solitude, and inner strength—emerged as a guiding principle. This supports theoretical perspectives that fidelity in adaptation should be understood in terms of spirit and resonance rather than replication.

5. Constraints as Catalysts for Creativity

Practical limitations in technology, time, and production resources did not simply hinder the project; they shaped its aesthetics. Rendering limitations, for instance, encouraged symbolic minimalism rather than exhaustive realism, leading to visual strategies that were both efficient and expressive. Constraints thus

became generative forces, prompting innovative design solutions and contributing to the distinctive look of the film.

VI. Conclusion

This practice-based study of adapting Nagabumi into a five-minute 3D animated short film demonstrates how the act of adaptation is less a matter of replication than of creative negotiation. The process underscored the impossibility of literal fidelity, given the inherent differences between literary and cinematic media, and affirmed that the essence of adaptation lies in the preservation of spirit rather than in direct reproduction. By foregrounding the themes of wandering, solitude, and inner strength, the film succeeded in capturing the ethos of the novel while simultaneously creating a new text with its own expressive identity.

The findings highlight several key contributions. First, narrative condensation and transformation are not deficiencies but vital strategies that reimagine the story in ways that resonate within the constraints of a short animated format. Second, medium-specific aesthetics—such as stylized character design, symbolic use of lighting, and dynamic camera movement—enabled new forms of storytelling unavailable to prose. Third, the adaptation revealed how cultural identity can be preserved through visual design, embedding Indonesian martial arts, costume patterns, and landscapes within a cinematic framework that remains accessible to global audiences. Finally, the project reaffirmed that constraints often drive creativity, with technological and temporal limitations prompting inventive solutions that enriched the film’s visual and narrative design.

These insights position adaptation as a cyclical and transformative process. A novel can be remade into a film, which could then lead to a new novel or another adaptation. Each version changes the story to fit the new medium and the creators' vision. Such a perspective resonates with Hutcheon’s (2006) conception of adaptation as “repetition without replication” and Stam’s (2000) view of adaptation as dialogic, where every version enters into conversation with its predecessors while generating new meanings.

Ultimately, this project affirms the value of practice-based research in adaptation studies. By situating theory within the lived realities of creative production, practice-based approaches reveal dimensions of adaptation—technical, aesthetic, and cultural—that cannot be fully captured by textual analysis alone. The adaptation of Nagabumi demonstrates that storytelling across media is not a process of loss but of renewal: each transformation is an opportunity to keep the narrative alive, dynamic, and resonant with new audiences and contexts.

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