Also by Kathleen Loock

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FILM REMAKES

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SECOND TAKES: CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE FILM SEQUEL (*co-edited with Carolyn Jess-Cooke*)

Film Remakes, Adaptations and Fan Productions

Remake | Remodel

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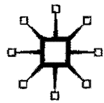

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For Hans-Joachim, Doris, and Ilka Loock
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For George, Angela, and Erin, and in loving memory of Paul Verevis (2 Jan. 1980–23 Jan. 2012)
—CV

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1

'Toto, I Think We're in Oz Again' (and Again and Again): Remakes and Popular Seriality

Frank Kelleter

For example: the Wizard of Oz

You know the story—because it has been told many times. A little girl, perhaps nine years old, an orphan, lives with her aunt and uncle on a desolate, gray farm in desolate, gray Kansas. It is America's least fantastic place but it serves as the point of departure for one of America's most fantastic tales. A tornado destroys the farm and carries the little girl into a colorful land, which is the exact opposite of Kansas. There, far away from home, without the protection of parents or grown-ups, she makes new friends and learns something about herself.

The story was familiar even before L. Frank Baum published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900. Dorothy in the Land of Oz: retold many times, this story is itself a retelling of the traditional fairy tale in which a child is forced to leave home and confront an outside world that is both marvelous and dangerous. To be left to one's own devices, to face up to incomprehensible authorities, to discover the pleasures of self-sought companionship—these are standard situations in tales told about, and often for, children.[1]

In this sense, the original *Wizard of Oz* was already a remake.[2] Like any remake, however, it made a difference. We would not confuse the *Wizard of Oz* with *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan* or "Hänsel und Gretel," because Baum insisted on remodeling his familiar tale for a specific time and place, or more precisely, for a specific culture which is itself frequently regarded as the remake of an Old World. As Gerald Early notes, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, published at the threshold of the twentieth century, "tried very hard to be an American book in its sensibility"

(456).[3] Consider what happens to Dorothy in her new world. Blown out of Kansas with her dog Toto, she meets three partners in misfortune, three inhabitants of Oz who are, however, equally forlorn in that foreign land: the Scarecrow whose head is filled with straw, the Tin Woodman who has no heart, and the Cowardly Lion, who looks frightful but lacks courage. The four of them and Toto set out for the Emerald City to ask a mysterious wizard for the things they want: brains for the Scarecrow, emotions for the Tin Woodman, self-confidence for the Lion and a return home for Dorothy. In addition to a wizard, Oz has witches in different sections of the land: the wicked Witch of the East, the wicked Witch of the West, the good Witch of the North, and Glinda the Good, living in the South. Except for the wicked Witch of the East, who is killed when the tornado drops Dorothy's house on her, these powerful women either impede or facilitate the companions' progress toward the Emerald City. But thanks to Dorothy's determination and her group's team spirit, the friends finally manage to destroy the wicked Witch of the West, as required by the Wizard in exchange for fulfilling their wishes. The Wizard, in turn, confronts them as "Oz, the Great and Terrible" (Baum, *Wonderful* 187) in various daunting incarnations: a ball of fire, a wild beast, a beautiful lady, a monumental levitating head, and a disembodied voice that announces its presence from all directions.

The true surprise, however, is still in store and it is quite an American surprise: toward the end of the tale, the God-like Wizard turns out to be a circus impostor from Omaha, Nebraska, whose hot-air balloon accidentally drifted into Oz some time ago. To protect himself from the truly gifted witches, this professional conman did what he does best and created a realm of illusions and simulations around himself. Even the astounding Emerald City owes its glamour to a ruse; everyone entering the city is required to wear green glasses. It is a humbug urban landscape, inspired by the White City of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Baum's Chicago and in turn a source of inspiration for Walt Disney's amusement parks. Clearly, the Wizard of Oz stands in a long line of great American entertainers.[4]

Little wonder that this likeable charlatan does, in the end, manage to fulfill the wishes of Dorothy and her friends, even without magic, by making them understand that the things they are looking for are already in their possession. This quintessentially American insight—you can take on any identity if you only believe in it—previously transformed the man from Omaha into a powerful magician; now it turns the brainless Scarecrow into a philosopher, the heartless Tin Woodman into a sentimental soul, and the Cowardly Lion into the king of the animals. Dorothy and Toto, in turn, are supposed to fly back to Kansas with the Wizard's patched up balloon, but the balloon mistakenly ascends without them, so that Glinda's magic is needed to get them back home, even though Glinda reveals that Dorothy had it in her power to return all along.

What does it mean to say that this story is one of the most popular ever told in America? On the one hand, it means that this is a story *about* America, a story with which the culture describes itself. Baum's short introduction to the first edition of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* made it clear that Dorothy's tale was meant to establish a genuinely American children's literature. Baum explained that he wanted to invent "a modernized fairy tale." What he had in mind was a fairy tale without moralizing and cruelty, but with characters and incidents that "pleasure children of today" (Baum, *Wonderful* 4). In 1900, this repudiation of didacticism was visibly an American gesture—not in the sense that it did not exist in other literatures but in the sense of being a gesture by which American culture described and recognized itself after the Civil War.[5] Such anti-didacticism places *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in a framework of national self-conception sometimes subsumed under the name of pragmatism, with pragmatism understood in a wide sense, referring not only to a school of philosophy but to a set of cultural practices and values intent on (re)constructing national identity at a time of crisis. If we view *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, with its resolute heroine and its friendly conman title character, in the context of post-Civil War modernity, then Baum's book has more in common with the narratives of Mark Twain and the educational philosophies of John Dewey than with the subversive Victorian wit of Lewis Carroll.[6] Instead of nonsense, we get common sense, all the way down to style: the plain, unsentimental language of Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, so untypical of its period's children's literature, anticipates the mid-Western modernism of Ernest Hemingway.[7]

On the other hand, to say that Oz is one of the most popular stories ever told in America means that it is a story *of* America: the probable but stunning result of a particular mode of making stories. L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, while remaking narratives long familiar, is a product and a force of American popular culture. This simple observation helps illuminate the terms and conditions of Dorothy's frequent return to Oz. There have been literally thousands of sequels to Baum's original novel, including adaptations, musicals, movies, games, and so on.[8] Making sense of these endless variations requires a theory of popular culture that can explain popular culture's affinity for serial narration.[9] Specifically regarding American popular culture, there are, at least, two

features that elucidate its preference for serial forms: its fundamentally commercial organization and its need to address exceptionally diverse audiences, meaning audiences typical of modern immigration societies. The commercial foundation fosters standardization (that is, industrial reproduction), while mass-address, as maintained by various theories of the popular, demands multiple coding and polysemy (that is, increased connectivity).[10] Both features of popular culture—industrial reproduction and increased connectivity—encourage serialization.

Altogether, I argue that popular seriality, highly standardized and at the same time extremely flexible in terms of storytelling and usage, is best investigated as a commercially driven, largely self-reinforcing process of narrative and experiential *proliferation*. It is a process that produces its own follow-up possibilities, because structurally, a serial narrative is always open-ended, promising to constantly *renew* the ever *same* moment. More abstractly put, popular seriality promises to accomplish a paradox which may well be the structural utopia of all capitalist culture: it promises a potentially infinite innovation of reproduction.

I shall return to this concept of popular seriality and its relevance for the study of remakes. At this point, suffice it to say that Baum's original Oz narrative was immediately serialized and transposed into other media. The first major adaptation of Dorothy's story dates back to 1902 when the novel was made into a successful musical, for which Baum produced the script.[11] In turn, this success allowed, indeed necessitated, further continuations. Between 1904 and 1919, Baum wrote 13 more Oz novels and six shorter booklets for small children, the so-called "Little Wizard of Oz stories," then other authors took over.

Even if we adopt an author-centered perspective (which is never quite appropriate for popular series) and concentrate on Baum's personal involvement as a novelist, disregarding the activities of other players and media, as well as the internal productivity of serial texts, we find that the Oz narratives exhibit certain core features of American popular culture at large. These are, most importantly, a close interaction between producers and consumers (Baum received numerous letters from readers with queries, requests, and recommendations for further plot developments) and the organization of a more or less coherent narrative universe across different media (after the success of the first musical, Baum tried his hand at several theater and movie adaptations, including the traveling multimedia show *Fairylogue and Radio-Plays* in 1908, before he founded his own motion picture company in 1913).[12] Baum's consecutive forewords, in which he reflected on mail received from young readers, express his changing attitude toward the series.

From requesting a certain number of responses before he would produce another volume to adopting a playful tone of resignation about the inescapability of further sequels, Baum became increasingly aware that he was not master of his own story world. These forewords reflect an author's growing recognition of the inevitable division of labor in commercial serial storytelling.

In fact, the transmedia existence of the Oz universe was already evident in the 1902 musical, which was the first Oz text to mention Dorothy's surname, Gale, before it was picked up in the literary series. Already Baum's second novel, *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (1904), drew heavily on the musical. The book is dedicated to Fred A. Stone and David C. Montgomery, the actors who played the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman in the stage production. The Cowardly Lion, who only had a minor part in the musical, was completely dropped from the book's cast of characters. Evidently, the relationship between Oz novels and Oz stage productions was not going to be one of original and adaptation. Rather, we find opportune serializations across different artistic channels. In fact, *The Marvelous Land of Oz*—with its army of girl soldiers, perfect for a chorus-line—was clearly written with an eye to being produced as a stage play (which happened in 1905, when Baum scripted the musical *The Woggle-Bug*) (see Riley 99–109).

In terms of content, Baum's *The Marvelous Land of Oz* continued the story of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, using familiar characters such as the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman, who had been particularly popular in the 1902 stage production, but also adding new figures and themes such as the immensely popular character of the Woggle-Bug, who in turn generated further publications.[13] The plot centered on a boy called Tip who, in the course of the story, transforms into the girl Ozma to become the princess ruler of Oz. A few years after *The Marvelous Land*, Baum followed the success of his first two books with the novels *Ozma of Oz* (1907), *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* (1908), *The Road to Oz* (1909), and *The Emerald City of Oz* (1910). This sixth novel was conceived as the final installment of the series; in it, Dorothy, Aunt Em, and Uncle Henry settle in Oz for good to escape an economic depression in their own world (the bank threatens to seize their mortgaged farm). The novel concludes with Dorothy informing her readers that a Barrier of Invisibility will henceforth protect Oz from visitors—and, presumably, from the curiosity and ongoing demands of customers of the franchise.

Three years later, Baum himself faced financial troubles and could no longer afford to ignore his readers' insistence that he produce new

Oz novels.[14] Once more, popular art rhymed with money—or the lack thereof. In fact, the publication of the *Little Wizard of Oz Stories* in 1914 had already been driven by commercial considerations; these simplified tales were supposed to familiarize a new generation of younger readers with the Oz universe after Baum had decided to launch a second series. The novels written after 1913—made possible, Baum explained, by his use of wireless telegraph to contact the cut-off land—did not restore his wealth but tied his financial lot to the series even more closely.[15] As if to mark this changed relationship to his creation, he now signed his books as "The Royal Historian of Oz," a title expressing his new understanding of popular authorship as a kind of commissioned office. (In a similar manner, John R. Neill, who succeeded W. W. Denslow as illustrator after the first book, became "The Imperial Illustrator of Oz.") To stay afloat Baum produced a new Oz book each year until his death: *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (1913), *Tik-Tok of Oz* (1914), *The Scarecrow of Oz* (1915), *Rinkitink of Oz* (1916), *The Lost Princess of Oz* (1917), *The Tin Woodman of Oz* (1918), *The Magic of Oz* (1919), and the posthumously published *Glinda of Oz* (1920).

After Baum's death in 1919, Ruth Plumly Thompson, who as a child had been an avid reader of the Oz books, took over as Royal Historian of Oz and continued the series until 1939 with 21 further volumes. Later authors included John R. Neill, Jack Snow, Eloise McGraw, Lauren McGraw, and many others. Altogether, the fan website Books of Oz (Frodelius) lists 370 authors, among them Baum's sons Frank Joslyn and Kenneth Gage Baum as well as his great-grandson Roger S. Baum. Like many American entertainment industries, Oz is obviously also a family business, including grudges and legal battles.[16]

In addition to the authorized sequels, there are countless translations, adaptations, and revisions. Abroad, the series spawned its most curious spin-off in Russia, where Aleksandr Volkov loosely translated Baum's novels, then increasingly modified them (because American copyright did not extend to the Soviet Union) until there was an independent Russian series. Most of the Russian adaptations were in turn translated for publication in the German Democratic Republic so that after World War II there were two distinct Oz cultures in Germany: one following Baum's series, the other one ("Der Zauberer der Smaragdenstadt") based on Volkov's versions, which are also better known in China (see Wladimirski and Ernst).

And this is only the print sector. Like most popular series, the Oz narratives quickly spread through various media, generating radio shows, theater productions, musicals, movies, animations, television programs, comic books, and so on. Of all these remakes and transpositions, none

has left a deeper impression on American culture than the 1939 MGM movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, with Judy Garland as Dorothy.[17] When the movie was first released, it was only mildly popular. Its cultural importance really dates back to the postwar decades, when it successfully crossed over into another American entertainment industry. In 1956 and 1959, the MGM *Wizard* was shown on television during the holiday seasons. Ever since, re-watching *The Wizard of Oz* has been part of the nation's cultural routines.

The MGM production may well be one of the most frequently and most intensively watched movies of all time. Its influence on twentieth-century literature and art is immense, probably exceeding the influence of Baum's original novel. Salman Rushdie declared that this movie (about which he published a book) made him want to become a writer. James Thurber, Ray Bradbury, Gore Vidal, John Updike, Stephen King, and others have written essays about the film or based novels or stories on it. Judy Garland's puzzled exclamation on her arrival in Oz, "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore" (a sentence that does not appear in Baum's novel), has become a byword in American literature, serving, for example, as epigraph to the third part of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1973.

Illustration 1.1 Dorothy (Judy Garland) upon her arrival in the Land of Oz in the 1939 MGM movie *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

Among more recent adaptations, Gregory Maguire's 1995 novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* has been the most influential. Maguire retells the stories of Baum's first Oz novel and the MGM movie from the perspective of the Witch: a revision made plausible by the original series' refusal to turn even its most villainous characters into figures of evil. In this sense, Maguire developed and radicalized an aspect of the Oz universe that was already contained within the initial texts, most likely through the influence of Baum's mother-in-law, Matilda Joslyn Gage, who published a feminist history of witch hunts in 1893, which argued that witches were killed for "crimes which never existed save in the imagination of [their] persecutors" (*Woman, Church, and State*, qdt. in Schwartz 279). Against this background it is noteworthy that the two killings of witches in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* are accidents and that Baum's wicked Witch of the West is herself a somewhat ambivalent character, deeply irritated by the death of her sister and untypically afraid of the dark (Baum, *Wonderful* 223; see also Hearn 222). By foregrounding these character options, Maguire's novel has retroactively impacted the reception and meaning of its source texts. Remakes and series often work this way: their narrative accomplishments are oriented backwards as much as forwards; they provide continuity by changing their own past.

In 2003, *Wicked* was turned into a successful musical, so that Maguire found it profitable to write two more revisionist Oz books. The first of these, *Son of a Witch* (2005), was supposedly inspired by the Abu Ghraib torture photographs. The novel is dedicated to the cast of the *Wicked* musical in much the same way in which Baum dedicated his second novel to the two actors who turned the 1902 stage extravaganza into a success. (In both cases the musical version took great liberties with its novelistic precursor.) The third novel, *A Lion Among Men* (2008), centers on the Cowardly Lion and reflects the difference between military and diplomatic methods of conflict solution. A fourth installment, "Out of Oz," appeared in November 2011. Evidently, Dorothy's tale has become a stable intermediary for American culture to measure its own instabilities and evolutions.

All of this is Oz as a piece of modern American popular culture: a wide and constantly expanding realm of interlocking, transmedially active, mass-addressed commercial stories. With their narrative sprawl and their openness to ever new uses, these serial products complicate traditional narratological notions of beginning, middle, and end, source and adaptation, original and copy. More than that, popular seriality complicates the very categories of author and reader. The importance of letters to the editor (or author) in the history of popular culture is paramount, starting with Eugene Sue's *Les mystères de Paris* (1842–43) and not ending with L. Frank Baum's reading of his readers' writing.[18] Of course, copyright and proper names remain crucially important in serial storytelling, but the Oz universe is clearly not authored by any *one* writer, producer, or company. Obviously, popular address always invites popular participation. Serial publication amplifies this process, making acts of writing and reading increasingly permeable, because serial publication by definition overlaps with serial reception. A series, in other words, can observe its effects on audiences while the narrative is still running and react accordingly. Conversely, audiences can influence a narrative's development if the narrative is still unfolding, that is, if it is a serial narrative.

In extreme cases—and with technologies such as the internet, the extreme is gradually becoming the rule—the distinction between producer and consumer, author and reader, is almost completely dissolved. As Michael Chabon suggests, popular culture eschews institutional control of author/reader roles. Instead of a canonical anxiety of influence, Chabon finds that popular aesthetics is ruled by what he calls the "bliss" of influence (57). Such enthusiasm may be overstating the case, but it helps explain the predominance of serial formats in popular art. Apparently, popular producers, whether corporate or private, are inclined to see themselves not so much as authors, creating more or less self-contained structures, but as *co*-producers in a literal sense, as reader-producers, *aficionados* or fans, inviting ever more recipients to *continue* a pleasurable game with narrative material that is familiar, shared, and easily accessible.

Similar observations have brought forth neologisms such as "wreading" (Landow) and "produsing" (Bruns) to describe the increasingly porous boundaries between popular production and popular reception. Even so, the dynamic of commercial proliferation consists in more than a de-hierarchization of cultural practices or academic concepts. In fact, it may be useful to move beyond the fashionable privileging of popular reception over popular production (with production usually framed as restrictive and reception as emancipatory) and the attendant populism that organizes much contemporary research on popular culture. The wide range of popular amateur or reader productions (from early unauthorized renderings of Sherlock Holmes, perhaps the first serial character in a modern commercial sense, to the manifold varieties of user creativity on the internet) express a fundamental feature of all modern popular aesthetics: its inherent tendency to produce, out of itself and

by itself, ever more diversified continuations, spin-offs, revisions, and sub-genres. "All novels are sequels," says Chabon (57). If this is so, what is the best way to study this textual sprawl?

Remake: a change

There are at least two ways in which remakes can become fertile objects of cultural analysis, and insofar as American popular culture is a culture of remakes and serializations, this argument can be extended to this larger sphere. The first way to study commercial remakes, and by implication popular culture, is to read these texts for the information they provide about historical change. In one form or other, this is certainly the most common approach to popular repetitions today. Another approach, more rarely tried, examines the dynamics of repeated popular narration itself—or put differently, it examines the agency of remakes in an ongoing process of communicative modernization. I argue that these are distinct modes of analysis, both valuable, often mutually enhancing, but with different interests and demands.

The established approach is to utilize remakes as measuring devices for cultural transformations. Commercial remakes are particularly suited to this type of investigation because a remake always foregrounds a change, be it a change of narrative technique or a change of the context in which the narrative unfolds. Post-structuralism has taught us—if we did not already know it—that there is no such thing as an exact repetition. Iteration always takes place in time: something has changed between an act and its duplication. Indeed, change best reveals itself against the background of regularity. Paradoxically, then, commercial standardization provides an excellent opportunity to observe what is new. Serial narratives are especially useful for this kind of observation because a series is always structured as a constant with variables, reproducing the same situations or characters in ever new circumstances or constellations. In this sense, a serial analysis of, say, the James Bond movies would speak volumes about changing gender conceptions in the Western world between 1962 and today. The same can be said about remakes: it is precisely because a remake repeats a story that has already been told that the disparities between its own telling and a previous one are highly visible.

More abstractly put: serial texts and remakes (treated as similar modes at this point) indicate the *temporality* of culture more directly and more strongly than single texts are able to do. In fact, it would be possible to trace the evolution of twentieth-century American culture, or important strands of it, through a comparative reading of the Oz narratives. For instance, Baum's original novel, with its deficient but good-natured men, its imposing women, and its pragmatic heroine—a prototype of the American girl in numerous later popular novels and movies—obviously reflects the growing influence of feminism in the American public around the turn of the century. Baum dedicated *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* to his wife Maud Gage, the daughter of Matilda Joslyn Gage, a prominent suffragette and co-author with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony of the multi-volume *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881–86). From what we know, Matilda Gage was an active supporter of Baum's literary career and she was the one who first encouraged him to write down the bedtime stories he told his sons and send them to a publisher. (The result was *Mother Goose in Prose*, 1897, Baum's first bestseller.)[19]

However, as the series continued it became more focused on economic and political conditions in Oz. In their cumulative effect, Baum's 13 sequels paint a relatively coherent vision of social organization, offering an imaginative alternative to economic developments in the United States at the time. For many readers, therefore, these novels stand as major expressions of American utopian literature as it flourished between the Civil War and the First World War.[20]

These utopian tendencies allowed later critics to use the Oz novels to revitalize progressivist ideas for their own times. Often reading Baum's narratives as socialist parables or communitarian utopias in the vein of Edward Bellamy, such scholarly allegories can be included among the welter of time-bound retellings of the *Wizard of Oz*. In important ways, they *remake* Baum's largely matriarchal and feudal society as a collectivist paradise (while downplaying Baum's preference for deus-ex-machina solutions, so typical of children's literature).[21] By contrast, other scholars took note of Baum's talents as salesman and advertiser. Before turning novelist he was not only an oil salesman and a newspaper editor but also owned a variety store, founded a monthly journal on shop window dressing, and authored a book on the same topic, *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors*, published almost simultaneously with *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Not surprisingly, a number of critics have therefore pointed to the commodity status of the Oz narratives and claimed the exact opposite of populist readings: Oz is a parable of capitalist consumption.[22] What both readings have in common is their interest in updating the Oz narratives for contemporary times and interests. They are, in every sense of the term, remakes: they exhibit a strong tendency to invigorate popular texts by instrumentalizing them;

they de-emphasize discordant proliferations in favor of current binaries.[23] Engaged scholarship *on* popular culture thus testifies to the cultural uses made *of* popular culture—in much the same way in which a comparative reading of Baum's Oz novels and, for instance, Volkov's Russian transpositions would shed some light on different conceptions of community, solidarity, and social morality in the United States and the Soviet Union.

In 1939, then, the MGM movie production made a difference in the emphatic sense of the term. Much has been written about this film. If studied as a remake, it offers insight into the cultural mood of America toward the end of the Great Depression. While remaining faithful to Baum's plot and character constellation, the MGM *Wizard* added musical numbers and deviated in two significant ways from the novel and earlier adaptations. First, Judy Garland's Dorothy is more passive than Baum's protagonist. Given to tears and often dependent on the help of others, Garland spends much of the movie longing to return to Aunt Em and Uncle Henry. In this manner, the escapist swoon of her song "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is ultimately neutralized by the definitive charisma of Dorothy's final words in Oz, "There's no place like home."

This sentimental reinterpretation of the protagonist is closely related to the second innovation offered by the MGM movie. The 1939 *Wizard* portrays Kansas in sepia tones and Oz in Technicolor, but Oz is not a parallel universe. Instead, the wonderful land is peopled with characters that are obvious variations of Dorothy's real-life friends and foes. Oz, in other words, turns out to be the product of Dorothy's feverish dreaming. Far from offering a viable alternative to Midwestern gloom, as in Baum's novels, the marvelous land exists only in Dorothy's imagination. Hence, it makes sense that all her adventures are headed for a family reunion. Doggedly the movie progresses towards a climax that is almost a template for narrative closure in American film. In the end, *the family* reconstitutes itself as the ultimate realm of solidarity and the lost child is restored to her kinfolk. If Judy Garland's Dorothy emerges from Oz matured, the lesson she has learned is to accept her living conditions, no matter how miserable and provincial they are. This is a story of the Great Depression indeed: there is no place like home, even if home is a rundown farm in the middle of nowhere.

Possible consequences of this kind of family contentment are shown 46 years later in a remarkable movie called *Return to Oz* (1985). It is a Walt Disney production that poses as the direct continuation of the 1939 film, as if it were the most belated sequel ever made for a movie.[24] Like most sequels, however, it is also a remake. Directed by Walter Murch, the film strongly re-emphasizes the feminist aspects of Dorothy's visit to Oz, but instead of Baum's turn-of-the-century concern with social equality we now get a feminism that is interested in the psychological demands of inhabiting a female body. *Return to Oz* begins with Dorothy being checked into a mental hospital where surgery is offered as the most modern tool to exorcise her childish fantasies about a marvelous land (so much for "There's no place like home"!). What follows is *The Wizard of Oz* as a horror movie. The prettiness of the MGM production has vanished, not only because an evil king has taken possession of Oz, but because in Dorothy's own world the twentieth century is dawning, as her dangerously understanding neurologist repeatedly emphasizes before he gets ready to chase electricity through her brain. The first 20 minutes of the movie are unremittingly dark, drawing a chilling image of bourgeois science. Women who dream of faraway countries, or girls who look in the mirror and see someone else instead of themselves, are promised shock treatments and lobotomies.

Fairuza Balk plays Dorothy accordingly, a trusting little girl who gradually learns that in the real world, outside her dreams, no one can be trusted. In the beginning, she innocently follows Aunt Em's advice, believing what all the loving grown-ups are telling her: always to mind the doctors and nurses—until it is no longer believable. So Dorothy escapes to Oz again. Much closer to Baum's practical heroine than sentimental Judy Garland, Balk's Dorothy always finds a way out when someone gets too close to her, which happens all the time. Once in Oz, she is confronted with the worst molestations the world holds in store for a girl, all of them faithfully adapted from Baum's novels *The Marvelous Land of Oz* and *Ozma of Oz*. And Dorothy prevails. Without compromising her childish heart, without turning shrill, vindictive or robust, she overcomes a gang of predatory youngsters (the rapist-like Wheelers), escapes mutilation in the name of beauty (Mombi's hall of severed female heads for all occasions), and tricks patriarchal know-it-alls (the surreal stone face of the Nome King). As with Huck Finn, that other pragmatic American dream character, this may be the most fabulous thing about her: that she learns to be clever without growing up, that is, without hardening or going crazy.

While repeating familiar motifs and characters, *Return to Oz* speaks to its time, as the MGM movie and Baum's novel did to theirs. Thus, when Dorothy's companions from the earlier film are dutifully restored at the end of the 1985 sequel, they look oddly out of place, like puppets from another show, shadows from another nightmare. It is a good thing no

one is singing songs anymore—unlike in another remake, made eight years earlier, where song is inevitable: *The Wiz* is an African American musical, first performed on Broadway in 1975, then quickly released as a movie, a Motown production, in 1978, starring a full-grown Diana Ross as Dorothy. This version not only features an all-black cast; it transfers Baum's story to New York City. Dorothy is at home in Harlem, not Kansas, and her journey to Oz is a journey downtown, through parts of the city she never dared to visit before.

Dorothy's adventures in this fantasy Manhattan look like a wild inventory of inner city despair in the 1970s. We are in the era of Jimmy Carter's American malaise: there are children's playgrounds so run-down they look like frightful crime scenes; garbage bags are piled man-high to mark the yellow brick road; Dorothy tells the Scarecrow that he is just "a product of negative thinking"; the Tin Man is rusting away in a closed-down amusement park; the Lion's fur is dusty. At one point, Dorothy and her friends are attacked in a subway station by street peddlers and trash cans—and finally by the subway station itself coming alive. Baum's field of poppies has become a seedy nightclub, and there are yellow cabs on the yellow brick road but, unsurprisingly, the characters hail them in vain, because the cabs do not stop for black people.

Thus the marvelous land has turned into a post-apocalyptic landscape, New York as it might look after a nuclear attack, with an industrial drone always in the distance. And yet, the characters break out into song and dance, and not only because this is a musical but because they are determined to turn their hopeless surroundings into a decent living space. In a word, *The Wiz* is a true Motown production, turning urban gloom into golden entertainment. Fittingly, Michael Jackson portrays the Scarecrow as a pitiful drifter, crucified in the beginning but then dancing with the pure joy of being alive. The Wizard, played by Richard Pryor, resides as a media tycoon at One Liberty Plaza in the World Trade Center. Terrified of being found out as a fraud, he leaves it to Dorothy to explain to her friends that they already possess what they are looking for. This is only logical because the film's transposition of Baum's turn-of-the-century fairy tale into a story of African American urbanity endows the motif of companionship—the necessity of sticking together—with a new, no longer childlike urgency. But this also accounts for the nightmarish quality that permeates even the most carefree musical numbers, certainly a reason why *The Wiz*, which was intended to be the pinnacle of 1970s all-black cinema, flopped at the box office.

These are just a few examples and it continues. In the post-Cold War era, there are Gregory Maguire's parables about animal rights and terrorism. There is Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* from 1995, one of the early successes in hypertext fiction, inspired by Baum's 1913 novel, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*.[25] There is the dystopian steam-punk of *Tin Man*, a 2007 mini-series on the Sci-Fi channel. There is going to be a CGI movie directed by John Boorman as well as a prequel feature film directed by Sam Raimi. And so on. Watching these remakes means watching cultural history at work. Since variation draws attention to itself, to remake a narrative is one of the strongest ways to make a point. Remakes lend themselves to media innovations as well as to political uses, as they invite us to reconsider the stories we tell ourselves, not only in commercial mass culture but also in more robustly canonized formats. Think of postcolonial literature and its affinity for revisionist retellings. Think Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, think Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. But also think Dorothy in Oz, accompanying American culture from 1900 until today.

Thoughts on an alternative approach: popular seriality and American culture

Popular culture loves repetition, and repetition offers an excellent opportunity to measure temporal difference. Research that makes use of popular material in this manner is bound to come up with remarkable results. The method has merits, and I have tried to outline a few of its interpretive possibilities for the Oz narratives. However, because this is such a successful and widely established approach the challenge for future research may lie elsewhere. When we turn popular remakes into stable data material for the routine questions of Cultural Studies, tracing constellations of race, gender, or class in these texts, we certainly learn something important, but we learn little about why popular culture keeps generating such repetitions in the first place. We learn little about the conflict-ridden agency of specific serial texts, little about the narrative and media dynamics of commercial remakes, little about their differences from retellings in other fields of cultural practice. These questions are important, not only because they address the flexible doings of serial narratives, but because popular culture, despite our hopeful convergence theories, generates formal and experiential possibilities that are still distinct from those prevailing in, say, folk culture or artistic fields more strongly invested in notions of the closed oeuvre and non-commercial authorship. Hence it might be useful to shift

our analytical interest to the terms and conditions of popular seriality itself.

Think about it: a scholar's life could be devoted to mapping the narrative sprawl set in motion by L. Frank Baum's original novel. But there is no need for that. Popular audiences are already doing it. The world of Oz has given rise to readers and fans who, in turn, have given rise to entire networked orders of knowledge about Oz. There are full-fledged schools of reading, especially on the internet, and the questions that divide them are usually not about the plausibility of this or that individual interpretation but concern the structure of the serial universe itself. In this fashion, exegetic problems abound *within* the Oz narratives. They are, in fact, driving forces *of* the narratives because the competing answers produced by different agents are of consequence for the ongoing self-description of the serial universe. For example, should the Oz novels be read as a consistent narrative? This question is raised not only by readers but inevitably by each new installment to the series. And how can we make sense of existing and ever growing inconsistencies? Readers and writers alike, often indistinguishable from each other, are engaged in the continual establishment of meta-narratives of order—canons, that is—which try to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate, influential and non-influential contributions to the universe, even as they add further variations of their own: an almost inevitable consequence of any longer running series.[26]

Thus, personal variations and the search for means to integrate mushrooming installments into a more or less coherent sequence (or well-arranged network) increase the complexity of the series exactly by trying to reduce it. A case in point is provided by the manifold activities of the International Wizard of Oz Club, founded in 1957 by a 13-year-old Justin G. Schiller. The Club's journal, *The Baum Bugle*, like most such fanzines, has long crossed the boundary between parascholarly commentary and active contribution to the serial universe. Even before the Club's founding, many Oz authors typically started out as fans, including the "Royal Historians" Ruth Plumly Thompson and, especially, Jack Snow, who was also one of the first Oz scholars. But perhaps this way of phrasing it already obscures the author/reader relations operative in popular series: Thompson and Snow did not cease to be fans when they became official authors of the series; nor did their writing for OZ start only when they were paid for it by Reilly & Britton. The productivity of such career moves (their cultural work) consists in opening the field of organized fan activities to ever more controversial self-descriptions. Since the emergence of "acafandom," these self-descriptions can overlap with explicit scholarly conflicts about popular narratives.[27] In fact, self-aware performances of acafandom accelerate and radicalize a process of serial complexity management that generates more and more contested authorizations (including competing definitions and practices of egalitarian participation, gift-giving, community-building, identity politics, and so on, as well as rival critiques of supposedly restrictive but unavoidable hierarchies): paradoxical proliferations of serial order, increasingly complex reductions of complexity. What is more, complexity management of this sort unfolds itself in a serial fashion: again and again, in quick succession. In this manner, popular canons are distinguished from their counterparts in highbrow culture by their sheer number, volatility, and the velocity of their competitive moves. Not only do they consist of series, they come themselves in serialized form.

To put it in different terms: popular series have created countless strategies of simulating coherence and unity where, structurally, neither unity nor coherence is to be had. The best known devices in this context are probably the strategies of retrospective continuity (retcon) in American superhero comics. The Oz series has developed similar ploys. For instance, some of March Laumer's Oz novels work hard to assimilate Aleksandr Volkov's Russian versions into the narrative world invented by Baum. Laumer achieves this through an elaborate scheme that establishes Volkov's Oz as a parallel universe, but then he is also the author of some deliberately non-canonical and crypto-pornographic Oz novels published in Hong Kong and Sweden, such as *The Green Dolphin of Oz* (1978).

From a Cultural Studies perspective, it is easy to celebrate such developments as the cultural equivalent of grassroots democracy or, in Stuart Hall's and John Fiske's terms, as the subversive tactics of a readerly "people" undermining the authority of a writerly "power bloc." According to Hall and Fiske, a new globalized folk culture is at work in the realm of popular consumption, fighting capitalist technology with its own weapons. However, if the history of serial narratives illustrates anything, it is the difficulty of applying to modern popular culture the high-cultural dichotomy of author and reader, even in its neo-Marxist inversions, folksy repeals, or "participatory" blends.[28] I suggest, therefore, that we understand such appropriations and remakings as essential parts of commercial seriality itself. In an intensely networked media culture, serial narratives always tend to unfold in a self-reinforcing sprawl rather than in the consecutive manner typical of the field of restricted production. Usually produced in a division of labor, popular series inexorably

complicate the authority of personal artistic control, subjective or collective. Serial narratives support little authorial commitment; instead, they foster a dynamic of continuous differentiation, provoking further concatenations in all directions. It is usually not "the people" who are doing this against a cabal of elitist authors or companies. Rather, what we can observe in these manifold reprises is the productivity of serial textuality itself: narrative entanglements that, in their sum, are never the result of intentional structuring, even as they invite ever more intentions and ownership claims to participate.

In this sense, what is remarkable about reader and fan participations, beyond the ideologically contested self-descriptions of the actors involved, is how such activities speed up a process of textual sprawl that exists independently of—and often in opposition to—the purposes of the people it engages. Obviously, there is no central management that would plan or guide such narrative proliferation. Rather than being determined by interests and identities, it deploys interests and enables identities to recognize and formalize themselves (see Kelleter, "Serial"). As a consequence, fan productions constitute a huge arena for popular culture to observe itself, an experimental field where serial narratives ceaselessly reflect on the possibilities of their continuation. Perhaps such self-reproduction is best conceptualized as an evolutionary process that makes use of an unprecedentedly high number of players and products, ambitions and commitments, ideological affiliations and sexual preferences, to generate variations or mutations (lucky accidents) for future employment and retroactive mobilization. From this perspective, the size of the experiment matters more than the participatory gratification of individual agents. In fact, the huge majority of fan actions, if approached as single contributions, are evolutionary dead ends in the sense that they have little or no impact on further variations. They might as well not have happened. However, in their sum total, they produce momentous effects, because even the most isolated posting on an internet blog feeds into a sizeable process of narrative trial and error. It may not seem to be an efficient process but in the absence of concentrated organization or stable authorization, the continual renewal of variable identities and volatile control claims proves to be an astonishingly reliable method of reproduction. The more variations there are, the higher the probability that the system will hit on sustainable ones.

If we begin to read popular texts from this perspective, we will be less ready to construct an evaluative contrast between popular reception and popular production. Reading popular texts within the framework of an overarching theory of seriality as a self-dynamic form, we will

attend to amateur productions, fan fiction, letters to the editor, and so on, not as oppositional or idiosyncratic counter-discourses but as necessary features of popular seriality itself, even and especially when they generate oppositional self-descriptions. Furthermore, we will see narrative texts, both authorized and unauthorized, not as raw material for (dissident or complicit) uses but as prime actors in a larger historical process of communicative modernization that has been going on since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, transcending the agency of individual desires and even the remarkable power of economic ownership claims. On a formal level, we will read these texts with an interest in the specific possibilities and restraints of serial commercial narration, asking how each serial text refers back to earlier tellings and how it allows for future tellings, how it depends on mediation and prepares remediations.[29] As Ruth Mayer writes, popular seriality is "a principle rather than a technique" (n. pag.). It is, in other words, a dynamic of storytelling that is not only modern but modernizing: instead of merely reflecting history in narratives, it makes narrative history. Popular series are a currency of culture.

Understanding seriality as a principle that creates its own conditions of possibility—as an evolutionary process rather than a narrative device—helps us to make sense of numerous features of serial storytelling we would otherwise regard as epiphenomena, such as the high degree of self-reflection that is typical of serial formats. But auto-referentiality is not a gratuitous extra that can or cannot be affixed to serial texts. Interacting as commodities, popular series have a vital interest in monitoring their own development. Their recursive and competitive operations force them to pay constant attention to their own evolution as narrative forms and cultural forces. Consequently, commercial series offer one of the most compelling occasions to observe how popular culture observes itself.[30]

In conclusion (as far as the topic allows) I suggest that we not only ask how a given serial text reflects the cultural situation and intentional structures of its time but also what work it performs in enabling its own cultural realities and intentional follow-ups. I suggest we ask how a serial text *makes* popular culture: how it deploys multiple inter-actors both human and objective, both personal and aesthetic, to situate itself actively as a dependent but novel part within an ongoing set of narratives. Each serial text develops a previous text's openness for continuation into something concrete, if another suspended solution, while it suggests further continuations and remakes. It is in this sense that the cultural work of popular seriality knows no end, no conclusion. Once

set in motion, it seems, these stories can always be continued, retold, revived. Perhaps they will only disappear when the culture they make disappears.

And so it goes, also with Oz: a scenario already familiar when it was first published in 1900 becomes a lucrative "storytelling engine" (Chabon 47) and a multi-auctorial shaping force of American culture. Are we surprised to learn that one of the earliest astronomical projects looking for extraterrestrial life was called Project Ozma (see Vidal 1096)? Or consider the invasion of other stories, Oz spilling over into distant narratives and looking strangely familiar there: John Boorman's dystopian movie *Zardoz* from 1974, starring Sean Connery, paints a totalitarian society founded on an esoteric reading of Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*; David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* from 1990 features Glinda as goddess ex machina, together with numerous visual allusions to the MGM film; in the 1990s, a rumor circulated on the internet that Pink Floyd's 1973 album *The Dark Side of the Moon* is perfectly synchronized with MGM's *Wizard of Oz*, which prompted Turner Classic Movies to broadcast both works superimposed on each other as *The Dark Side of the Rainbow* in 2000; Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's graphic novel *Lost Girls* (1991–2006) devotes one of its parts to Dorothy's sex life; the HBO series *Oz* (1997–2003) tells about the brutal conditions in a high security prison, ironically calling on names and places from the Oz novels and films.

This is popular culture, often in its specific manifestation as American popular culture. And despite our justified qualms about American exceptionalism, it remains interesting to ask why so many of these texts actually reach us as "American" texts. Apparently, the function of mass-addressed commercial art in the United States is still a little different from its operations elsewhere, entangled histories and worldwide webs of communication notwithstanding. Apparently, the American *type* of culture—geographically extensive, socially incongruous, historically improbable, and inevitably multicultural—has a special need for serial media artifacts to get and keep a sense of its own coherence. Looking at this unlikely culture, perhaps we can say America would not even *be* a culture without its popular culture, meaning: without a self-perpetuating system of narrative trust created and insistently reproduced by serial narratives. Within the chaotic echo-chamber of self-references that is American popular culture, each remake not only introduces a change but also has a stabilizing function, as each new variation reinforces the entire system of cultural self-generation and furthers the culture's belief in its own existence and continuity. Many more Oz remakes and adaptations could be named by way of example, but ultimately Oz itself is more than just an example: it is an agent of cultural subsistence and renewal, an active network of variable iterations that make and remake American culture.

Notes

For suggestions and critique, I wish to thank Christy Hosefelder, Andreas Jahn-Sudmann, Alexander Starre, and Daniel Stein.

1. Baum's reliance on folklore and myth has been discussed in numerous publications; for a recent reading, see Tuerk.
2. At this point, I use the term "remake" in a literal sense, denoting the time-delayed retelling of a narrative within the same medium. In the following, a more restricted understanding of the term (referring to films that use the plot, character constellation, and often title of an earlier film as resource material for narrative modernizations and revisions) will be related to the overarching logic of popular seriality.
3. Like Early, I will use the term "America" in a non-normative manner, i.e. in accordance with effective self- and hetero-descriptions of United States culture (see Kelleter, "Transnationalism").
4. On the White City, see Badger; Böger; Burg; Harris et al; Hollweg; Larson; Muccigrosso. For its influence on Baum, see Hearn 176; Schwartz 212–27. The term "humbug"—reminiscent of P. T. Barnum, the self-proclaimed Prince of Humbugs—is used by the Wizard to describe himself. Famously, Thomas A. Edison, often dubbed the Wizard of Menlo Park, illuminated the White City with electric light (on these and other sources, see Hearn 261–62; Schwartz 82–92).
5. The historical context is important to distinguish Baum's search for an American fairy tale from earlier attempts such as Washington Irving's transposition of European folklore into American landscapes or Nathaniel Hawthorne's metaphysical reinterpretation of local legends (see Hearn xlix). As Hearn points out, Baum's understanding of what constitutes American literature was strongly influenced by discussions of this topic at the 1893 Columbian Exposition, in particular Hamlin Garland's "Literary Emancipation of the West."
6. The standard discussion of pragmatism in these terms is Menand. On Dewey and Baum, see Zipes, "Explanatory Notes" 359.
7. See Vidal on the novel's opening sentences as "the plain American style at its best" (1105).
8. See Snow: "It is interesting to note that the first word ever written in the very first Oz book was 'Dorothy.' The last word of the book is 'again'" (59). Some transmedia descendants of Baum's novel are discussed in Durand and Leigh; on adaptations prior to the 1939 movie, see Swartz.
9. Many of the themes discussed in the following have been developed in the six-project Research Unit "Popular Seriality: Aesthetics and Practice" at the University of Göttingen (Germany): see http://popularseriality.uni-goettingen.de. In accordance with this research group, I use the adjective "serial" as a general term for all types of commercial seriality, not just for narratives extending story arcs over many episodes, as in

the series/serial distinction common in Anglo-American media studies (see Williams). The present approach—and the set of studies linked to it—assumes that the difference between what television scholars call a "series" and a "serial" is not as clear-cut as often suggested; see Kelleter, "Serial Agencies," "Populärkultur und Kanonisierung." On the relationship between sameness and renewal in serial forms, see Kelleter and Stein, "Great."

10. On the connection between popular culture and American multiculturalism, see Fluck; the classic statement of popular polysemy can be found in Hall, "Encoding."
11. The standard study of the musical is Swartz.
12. On the interaction between Baum and his readers, see Westbrook.
13. Apart from the (unsuccessful) stage play mentioned above, the Woggle-Bug appeared in a series of 27 syndicated Sunday newspaper comic pages, "Queer Visitors from the Marvelous Land of Oz" (1904–5), written by Baum with Walt MacDougall and followed by Baum's *The Woggle-Bug Book* (1905).
14. For biographies of Baum, see Baum and MacFall; Rogers; Schwartz.
15. See Hearn, "Introduction": "Because of the onset of World War I and changing conditions at home, the later titles did not sell as well as the earlier ones. Reilly & Britton suspected that the decrease was due largely to the flood of cheap Baum books now on the market.... Baum in effect was competing with himself" (lxxiii–lxxv).
16. On Ruth Plumly Thompson, see Gardner 40. Frank Joslyn Baum's publication of *The Laughing Dragon of Oz* in 1934 was followed by a lawsuit between Frank and the publishing house Reilly & Lee which represented the interests of Frank's mother Maud. The case was decided in favor of Maud Baum (see Hearn, "Introduction" lxxxvi–lxxxvii).
17. The best introduction to the film is still Fricke et al.; also see Rushdie.
18. On the influence of readers' letters on *Mystères de Paris*, see Thiesse. On the relation of serial authorship and serial readership, see the project "Authorization Practices of Serial Narration: The Generic Development of Batman and Spider-Man-Comics," directed by Daniel Stein and myself as part of the Research Unit "Popular Seriality" (n.9 above).
19. The feminist aspects of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and Matilda Gage's influence in this regard are stressed by Lurie.
20. On Oz as a utopia, see Sackett; Wagenknecht. For a critique of utopian readings, see Vidal 1103.
21. On feudalism in Oz, see Bewley (261) and Vidal about Oz's "minuscule countries... governed by hereditary lords" without "parliaments or congresses" (1103). Examples of progressivist interpretations are Littlefield; Ritter; Rockoff; Zipes, "Introduction." For a survey, see Dighe; Parker.
22. On Baum's career in shop window dressing, see Schwartz 128–50. For (anti-) capitalist interpretations, see Culver; Leach.
23. What both positions also have in common and what organizes their disagreement is the underlying assumption that the commercial dimension of popular storytelling exists in opposition to its praxeological openness. My decision to include scholarly readings among the cultural activities of a series (in other words, to treat interpretations as serial effects) is discussed in more detail in Kelleter, "Serial." It is indebted to the description of Actor-Network-Theory in Latour.

24. The official sequel to the MGM production is *Journey Back to Oz* (1971), an animated movie produced by Filmation.
25. On Jackson's work, see Hayles.
26. For an (openly involved) perspective on canon formation in the Oz universe, see Durand.
27. On the term "acafan" (academic fan), see Hills.
28. For the term "participatory culture," committed less to Marxist preconceptions and more to democratic ideologies, see Jenkins. For an approach that seeks to make the intuitions of the participatory paradigm fruitful without perpetuating its populism, Kelleter and Stein, "Autorisierungspraktiken."
29. On the interplay of seriality, mediation, and popular narration, see the project "Serial Figures and Media Change," directed by Shane Denson and Ruth Mayer as part of the Research Unit "Popular Seriality" (n.9). The term "remediation" is borrowed from Bolter and Grusin.
30. In this context, it is particularly promising to investigate the logic of serial contest, which is perhaps best expressed by the tendency of serial narratives to outbid, surpass, or competitively circumvent each other. See the project "The Dynamics of Serial Outbidding *(Überbietung)*: Contemporary American Television and the Concept of Quality TV," directed by Andreas Jahn-Sudmann and myself as part of the Research Unit "Popular Seriality" (n.9).

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