

CHAPTER 5

How to See Things Differently: Tim Burton's Reimaginings

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I try not to draw too heavily on those types of influences, because then you're just trying to emulate something as opposed to creating something new . . . I might like to draw a certain feeling or flavor out of an older movie, but I'm not trying to make a Xerox copy of it.

—Tim Burton (qtd. in Pizzello 56)

Barnabas Collins (Johnny Depp) emerges from his earthy prison to find Collinsport, Maine, much changed from the colonial fishing port he last set eyes upon 200 years ago. Bedeviled by monstrous construction equipment, satanic Golden Arches, and unnervingly smooth tarmac, he eventually stands transfixed by a pair of blazing Gorgonic orbs that rush toward him at supernatural speed. Expecting death, he is instead unceremoniously told to “Get out of the road, asshole” by the car’s panicked driver. Wrenched out of his New World fiefdom, this undead aristocrat has been rudely awakened to the fallen world of Nixon’s America. His abrupt recontextualization is disconcerting to say the least. Darkly Byronic romanticism is now passé, supplanted by the banalities of the Carpenters, the studied glam of T. Rex, and the calculated grotesqueries of Alice Cooper. He endeavors to restore the grandeur of his family name but finds the process of adaptation distasteful. In short, Barnabas discovers to his dismay that enthrallingly Gothic dark shadows have been enfeebled by postmodernity’s florescence, and he is but an insubstantial shade. His second coming has been prefigured and diminished by an array of pop cultural predecessors, and his ghoulish charisma dwindles to tolerable eccentricity in an era incapable of astonishment.

Barnabas's condition in *Dark Shadows* (2012) is a plight shared by the well-worn multimedia franchises of the twenty-first century. They bear the trappings of the familiar and thus have the cultural currency to assert themselves prominently within a highly competitive entertainment market. Call this *commoditized conspicuity*. And yet such recognizability is both blessing and curse as familiarity can also breed contempt, or guarded suspicion at the very least. Protectorates of a franchise's exchange value are both judicious connoisseurs and exacting gatekeepers, and their supplication is now essential to the good fortunes of a highly visible cultural product. But what is a suitable form of tribute to fans of an enduring cultural franchise in order to maximize a new adaptation's exchange value, and how do media producers circumvent fans' reactionary contempt? In other words, how is the commoditized conspicuity of an adaptation affected by the electronic networks of expansive fandom?

These questions have taken on new importance for filmmakers such as Tim Burton—directors who are tasked with overseeing the production of costly ventures in adapting preexisting media products with influential fan followings. Burton's contribution to the *Dark Shadows* franchise reveals a great deal about Hollywood's current management of adaptations and fandom via the manufacturing of "*reimagined*" properties. The aim of this chapter, then, is to theorize the commoditized conspicuity of Burton's reimagined texts and their canny handling of fandom's subcultural authority. In order to do so, Burton's adaptations will be situated within a broader discussion of cinematic remediation. The expanding boundaries of the field, its consideration of audience reception and the economics of franchise filmmaking, and the dethroning of fidelity criticism as a reigning paradigm are all relevant here. From there, Burton's reimagined films will be characterized as works that are neither remakes nor adaptations in the familiar sense; rather, they are understood as paradigmatic examples of an *adaptive management system*—a contemporary industrial practice that harnesses and regulates the creative energies of both filmmakers and fans.

Burton's approach to adaptation, then, is one of the clearest exemplifications of the "*reimagined*" film as a *strategically designed taste category*—a business tactic that emerged in the 2000s as a means of hailing, appropriating, and containing cultic networks.

Postliterary Adaptation and Intertextual Expansiveness

One of Tim Burton's distinct qualities as a celebrity director is his penchant for adapting preexisting properties. In addition to traditional literary properties (i.e., six novels, a short story) and a dramatic source (i.e., a Broadway

musical), he has to date also adapted, remade, or drawn extensively from three other films (including his own), a comic book franchise, a television serial, and a series of trading cards. Thus, he is an exemplary figure in the contemporary shift toward “*postliterary adaptation*,” Thomas Leitch’s term for Hollywood’s tendency to poach from sources other than literary or dramatic texts and for reasons other than the narrative appeal of these sources (258). Such films are noteworthy not only for the even-handedness by which they “either narrativize or denarrativize their originals,” but also for the investment they place in the “marketing cachet” of their sources rather than the “aura” of literary cachet (Leitch 260).

Burton’s own postliterary adaptive proclivities include a preference to adapt well-known texts with multiple “encrustations”—Jim Collins’s term for the syntactic associations that have developed within cultural memory over the course of a property’s extensive lifespan (178). His 2003 adaptation of Daniel Wallace’s novel, *Big Fish*, then, is the sole exception to Burton’s penchant for creating new versions of familiar and already reworked material. Both versions of *Frankenweenie* (1984 and 2012), his two *Batman* features (1989 and 1992), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Mars Attacks!* (1996), *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), *Planet of the Apes* (2001), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005), *Sweeney Todd* (2007), *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), and *Dark Shadows* either explicitly rework or are fundamentally indebted to what Linda Hutcheon calls *adaptogenic* sources: preexisting properties with at least two earlier incarnations in various media forms (15). His gravitation toward such properties helps facilitate his trademark refashioning of familiar story elements into new and unusual permutations.

These directorial preferences are not only indicative of the economics of postliterary adaptation, but they also neatly correlate with the newer territorial demarcations of adaptation studies, particularly its broad interest in *hypertextuality*. Gérard Genette describes hypertextuality as a “relationship uniting a text B [*hypertext*] to an earlier text A [*hypotext*]” via “a process of . . . transformation” (5). As an adaptation, a reimagined hypertext (e.g., Burton’s *Dark Shadows*) might transform its hypotext (e.g., Dan Curtis’s *Dark Shadows*, the ABC television serial broadcast from 1966 to 1971) through “selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, analogization, popularization, and recontextualization” (Stam 68). Given this array of remediating strategies, Robert Stam advocates for a more pluralistic conceptualization of adaptation as *intertextual dialogism*. Adaptation is to be considered as “an ongoing dialogical process” in which “every text forms an intersection of textual surfaces,” and thus, Stam asserts that scholars need to consider “the open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture” that might inform an adaptation (64).

Burton's career in particular is informed by compulsive recycling, and therefore the density of interwoven influences and remediated elements in his work is especially striking. His intermedial mash-ups amount to an embarrassment of riches for advocates of intertextual broadmindedness. *Sleepy Hollow*, for example, is a blackly comic detective/horror film with direct allusions to Basil Rathbone's Sherlock Holmes, Disney's animated *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1949), *Bonanza* (1959–1973), certain tropes of Gothic literature, Mario Bava's *Black Sunday* (1960), and Hammer horror—particularly *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* (Freddie Francis, 1968). For Antoine de Baecque, “an archeological hoard” such as *Sleepy Hollow* “is a profoundly gothic work in the sense that the various elements, in the way they are assembled or isolated, derive form and meaning from the successive or simultaneous appropriations that are made of them” (139). If viewers take care to forge appropriate intertextual relationships between Burton's work and other texts, then, the dialogism of his films can facilitate rich interchanges across media. As we shall see, these interchanges are increasingly guided by cultic fan formations.

Adaptations and Audiences

Rather than concentrate exclusively on textual properties, adaptation theorists of the past decade have posited spectatorship as a reflexive process in which viewers are inherently engaged in conscious comparative activity. It is a reimagined film's dependency on viewers' memories of antecedent cultural works that bears consideration here. Central to one's apprehension of a reimagined film as such is the conscious cognitive employment of *recall*: a comparative process that entails a focus on the object as well as its context. Not only might the reimagined work foreground its own contingent position, but as Christine Geraghty asserts, “the act of comparison invited by an adaptation might also draw on memories, understandings, and associations with other versions of the original, in a variety of media” (4). To be clear, our cognizance of this act of recall is not what demarcates an adaptation as such, but rather our awareness of the distance (temporal, cultural, aesthetic, philosophical, political, etc.) between a reimagined film and its hypotext. That is, a gap always exists “between what is being referred to in the work of recall involved in the adaptation and what we see on screen” (Geraghty 5).

Take, for instance, the tonal disjuncture between the labored eeriness of the *Dark Shadows* soap and Burton's deliberately camp exaggeration of the same material. In Burton's *Dark Shadows*, secret rooms reveal macramé collections instead of closeted corpses, and the ominous strains of pipe organs are replaced by a Hammond's preprogrammed bossa nova beat (which Barnabas

unintentionally triggers during a moment of bathetic self-pity). These comic touches are sources of amusement for casual viewers, but represent a dramatic atmospheric disparity for fans of the original series. And it is the fan's recognition of this gap between the two properties that identifies Burton's reimagined text as such, and is furthermore the source of either their subsequent discursive consternation or tribulation. In promotional interviews, Burton himself uses strategically ambiguous language when describing the film's tone to ensure that fans bridge this gap in a manner that serves his adaptation's commercial interests. Thus, he "never considered [the film] a comedy" and, instead, "wanted to capture the weird vibe of *Dark Shadows*" (qtd. in Horowitz). But fans prove to be canny analysts of industrial spin control, and their engagement with Hollywood's efforts at reception management is a crucial element of their intermedial literacy. On *Blog of Dark Shadows*, for example, one respondent to the interview criticizes Burton's "intentional disingenuousness": "To claim that his version of *Dark Shadows* isn't primarily a comedy at this point is insulting to everyone involved. Continuing his attempt to hide behind his 'weird vibe' smokescreen makes him seem like a junior varsity PR hack . . . He should at least have the courage of his convictions and stand squarely behind his woefully misplaced vision" (qtd. in Gross, "Tim Burton").

Producers of reimagined texts, then, are obliged to acknowledge fans' prior expertise with a hypotext—their especial literacy, in other words. Burton and his core collaborators are intuitively aware of fans' investment in the earlier stages of sequential consumption. Their mindfulness certainly informs Burton's take on *Alice in Wonderland*, which Kamilla Elliott describes as a "compendium" of other previous iterations of this transmedial franchise. "Embedded here," she claims, "is a concept of adaptation as collective memory and of film as a flashback to other cultural productions" (198). Alice's return to Wonderland in this film is mediated by an authorial awareness that a broad number of viewers are "returning" with her, and that their nostalgia for the first encounter is a force with which to be reckoned. Why else would so many of Alice's forgotten childhood companions complain that she is "the *wrong* Alice"? And why else would her vanquishing of the Red Queen be effected but to restore Burton's "Underland" (the world's "real" name, she is told) to the prior state of wonder that Alice (and her fans) recalled as a child?

The concepts of dialogism and media literacy place an "emphasis on the reader," but they also suggest "that the perennial question of faithfulness is not a matter for textual analysis but rather for work on reception. Faithfulness matters if it matters to the viewer" (Geraghty 3). When conceived of in this sense, fidelity only becomes a watchword when contending with entrenched fan groups of a reimagined franchise. "Getting it right" is a careful balancing

act between competing recontextualizations, but an increasingly necessary one in the age of high-stakes interactive promotional campaigns often targeted at highly literate fan bases. The revisionist auteur of a beloved cultural franchise discounts the collective (and politicized) comparative processes of fan communities at her/his peril.

In these respects, Burton is a noteworthy figure in the history of the American film industry's inexorable movement toward more pronounced gestures of fan placation. Warner Bros.' extensive effort to manage the ire of legions of outraged Batman fans during the preproduction of Burton's first *Batman* film marked a significant turning point in Hollywood attitudes toward fandom. Warner publicists were faced with a particularly tricky case of double jeopardy as the company needed to satisfy the incommensurable desires of two very different Batman fan groups: those with a fondness for ABC's comedic television series (1966–1968) and those with a devotion to the more "serious" take on the hero in DC's two ongoing Batman comic series. According to Alan Jones, "Burton saw his dilemma as a 'no win situation' and decided to follow his instincts come what may," including the controversial casting of Michael Keaton as the titular character (59). An oft-cited front-page story of *The Wall Street Journal* reported that "fans have circulated petitions demanding a different cast, and they booed Warner representatives who had the audacity to show up at a comics-fan convention with a photograph of Keaton" (Hughes). With the *Comics Buyer's Guide* receiving "more than 500 protest letters," it was unsurprising Warner Bros. hired Batman co-creator Bob Kane as a creative consultant in order to "help . . . combat comic book fan backlash" (Hughes; Jones 64).

Burton's own response to the initial furor over *Batman* is characteristically blasé. On the subject of dealing with outraged fanboys, he recounted a story of attending the 1978 Comic-Con and experiencing intense fan hostility toward a Warner Bros. press officer about the perceived mishandling of minutiae in their upcoming *Superman* film. With some bemusement, Burton claims that he "never forgot" how the tirade of an irate fan—"Superman would never change into his costume on a ledge of a building. I'm going to boycott this movie and tell everyone you are destroying the legend!"—received a "huge round of applause" (qtd. in *Burton on Burton* 74). By contrast, however, Warner Bros. learned that such nonchalance toward fans was a luxury they could ill-afford. Responding to the overwhelming number of fan petitions against *Batman* pre-release publicity, *Comics Buyer's Guide* co-editor Maggie Thompson asserted that "the discrepancy between the fan's idea and the average guy's image of Batman is a real problem for Warners. This is like the *Star Trek* movies. You have to win the fans to insure the film's success"

(qtd. in de Vries 2). Indeed, some have claimed that the combined force of various petition campaigns and the *Wall Street Journal* report caused Warner shares to drop in value in early December 1988 (Ferenczi 33). Another account of one such petition claims that Warner Bros.'s administrative offices received over 50,000 letters from comic fans protesting Keaton's casting as Batman (Nasr). In sum, then, the shift toward concentrated fan mollification that began in earnest with *Batman* sets the stage for the careful manufacturing of reimagined texts in the 2000s—adaptations that are not just new visual transcriptions of well-known hypotexts, but also serve as creative interfaces between fans and the film's source material.

Franchises and the Flight from Fidelity

These creative interfaces are of particular interest to those proponents of the final shift in adaptation studies under discussion here: a growing interest in the cultural and industrial economics of adaptation and the ensuing departure from concerns about fidelity. Given the growing centrality of franchise filmmaking in the 2000s, adaptation studies have taken a much more materialist approach by including the corporate incentives to adaptation production. This growing interest in corporate economics should come as little surprise. An adaptation's built-in audience of fans represents a guaranteed partial return in producers' investment, which helps to explain why 7 out of the top 10 grossing films of 2012 were adaptations of presold properties. Thus, the industrial prominence of postliterary adaptations has a number of noteworthy consequences.

First, if the cultural cachet of "the original" has been diminished in the age of big-budget, high-stakes franchise filmmaking, so too has the prominence of fidelity as a criterion of value—at least for a so-called general audience. That is, if fidelity only matters if it matters to the audience, then it is not surprising that "the primary motive for fidelity in the most wide-known adaptations [such as *Gone with the Wind* or *The Lord of the Rings*] is financial, not aesthetic" (Leitch 128). Even here, the film version is always "haunted" by other "subsidiary sources the adaptation more or less consciously imitates" or "other antitexts" that it tries to shun (Leitch 129). For example, if *Dark Shadows* is obliged to reference Jonathan Frid's distinctively modish "Barnie-Bangs" hairstyle, Depp's fingers are also affixed with pointy prosthetics and his pallor is distinctively waxier than Frid's as a nod to another major stylistic influence: Max Schreck's Count Orlok. In this way, not only does Burton adhere to an expected level of fidelity and acknowledge other sources of authorial inspiration, his representation of the character also serves as a deliberate "antitext" to the teen-vamp franchises of *Twilight* and *The Vampire*

Diaries—that is, Barnabas is “a kind of rebellion against vampires that look like underwear models” (qtd. in Miller). The makeup design thus combines layers of hypotextual filters recognized by fans of varying degrees of generic savviness, but otherwise inconsequential to the casual viewer.

A second consequence of Hollywood’s investment in franchise filmmaking is that the question of fidelity becomes dispersed across multiple incarnations of an adaptogenic property. Crucially, and because they deliberately cater to the expertise of fan-consumers, the latest reimagined instalment in a cultural franchise often replicates the creative activity of fan-authors—that is, they produce *hypothetical narratives* that serve as commentaries on, supplementary indexes to, or parodies of a well-known property. Take, for example, the frequency with which reimagined texts provide speculative “origin stories” that flesh out underdeveloped or unknown elements within their generative ur-texts (and which might vie for canonicity to varying degree of success). *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Jonathan Liebesman, 2006), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Samuel Bayer, 2010), *Robin Hood* (Marc Streitenfeld, 2010), and *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott, 2012), *Oz the Great and Powerful* (Sam Raimi, 2013), and *The Lone Ranger* (Gore Verbinski, 2013) are all noteworthy examples of this quasi-fannish phenomenon.

Consider Burton’s contribution to the ever-evolving representation of Fleet Street’s demonic barber. Sweeney Todd is a remarkably adaptogenic figure. His origins lie in urban legend and an unverified true crime story that allegedly wound its way from Paris’s Minister of Police, Joseph Fouché, in 1800 to the pages of the London magazine *The Tell Tale* in 1824. The first mass-mediated appearance of the character can be found in *The String of Pearls* (1846–1847), published in 18 weekly parts in *The People’s Periodical and Family Library* (#7–24) and probably co-written by penny dreadful authors James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest. A 92-part serialized version of *Pearls* was subsequently published in book form in 1850, spawning in turn a plagiarized version in the United States two years later, authored by Harry “Captain Merry” Hazel. The first of at least five adaptations for the stage—a melodrama in the grand guignol style by George Dibden Pitt—was performed at the Britannia Theatre in March 1847 where it was apparently billed as being “Founded on Fact” (Barsanti 60). The 1979 musical by Hugh Wheeler and Stephen Sondheim that Burton adapted for the screen is itself an adaptation of Christopher Bond’s 1973 version of the tale. Burton’s controversial excision of the musical’s choral numbers does not even represent the first time a filmmaker has chosen to forego the tale’s socially satirical dimensions in favor of emphasizing the barber’s personal tragedy: four filmic and four televisual versions precede his melancholic treatment of Todd (to say nothing of at least two audio programs—produced by the

CBC in 1947 and by Yuri Raskovsky in 2007—and a ballet performed by the Royal Ballet in 1959).¹ Burton's film, then, is not so much an adaptation of Sondheim and Wheeler's musical as it is another installment "in a long line of adaptations of a rather fluid story," and subsequently accounts for the filmmakers enjoying "a certain amount of freedom to reinvent the story for a new audience" (Riley 205).

The third consequence of relevance here follows from this so-called creative freedom, and that is that the authority of a hypotext's original author is circumvented. A helpful tactic is the reimagining of perceived "authorless" properties, or at least works with a sufficient degree of anonymity or creative dispersal—hence Burton's adaptations of comic book and trading card series. Moreover, Burton's own distinctive author-brand arguably puts his reimagined works at an advantage over those produced by more-or-less unknown filmmakers (e.g., in attempting to reimagine *Dawn of the Dead*, Zack Snyder is unavoidably engulfed by the very dark shadow of George Romero). Like Shakespeare specialist Kenneth Branagh and self-professed fanboy Joss Whedon—the very cannily hired directors of *Thor* (2011) and *The Avengers* (2012)—Burton is included in the ranks of auteurs who "imply corporate models of authorship that seek to hide any signs of corporate production beneath the apparently creative hand of a single author whose work . . . can be trusted" (Leitch 256). Their personal "authorial trademarks" thus become "more powerful than other authorial trademarks with which [they] will inevitably compete" (256). And if Burton cannot compete with particularly forceful authorial trademarks, the studios that contract him can always negotiate for authorial approval—hence the hiring of Bob Kane as creative consultant on *Batman* and the legal wrangling with Liccy Dahl (Roald Dahl's widow) prior to Burton's hiring as the director of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Horn).

Burton's decision to direct his sole adaptation not based on an adaptive property, *Big Fish*, is instructive in these respects. Compared to the Dahl estate, Daniel Wallace has comparatively minimal authorial clout and the novel is a decidedly less-well-known artifact than the Batman franchise. In explaining his decision to adapt *Big Fish*, Burton himself admitted that "in some ways, it's good to not have a novel that's extremely well known—this big, thick, heavy thing everybody loves—just because I think it's easier to adapt into a film, somehow, a little less daunting" (qtd. in Schwartz 176). The novel's structure is also conducive to Burton's appropriations. *Big Fish* is a collection of loosely connected, fantastic vignettes mediated by a narrator who moves through a process of bereavement. Burton selects from these Southern Gothic-tinged recollections at will, condensing and elaborating in a manner that supports his own aesthetic interests. Little wonder, then, that a

carnival looms large in the film, as does the haunted town of Spectre, which barely warrants a few pages of description in the novel.

But although *Big Fish* is less of a known literary entity than *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Burton nevertheless subjects both novels to a process of authorial rebranding by distilling them through his own well-known set of personal preoccupations. Both films replay traumas of abandonment—Burton’s favored psychodramatic motif. Both Wills—Bloom (Billy Crudup) and Wonka (Johnny Depp)—join the ranks of Bruce Wayne, Edward Scissorhands, Ichabod Crane, and Sweeney Todd: familiar figures who are rewritten as melancholic outsider figures damaged by secreted and traumatic familial pasts. Burton’s own Expressionistic accounts of his estrangement from his parents and his feelings of suburban alienation growing up in Burbank are well rehearsed in numerous interviews. Critics are subsequently often quick to draw links between these pale men haunted by the memories of tyrannical fathers or lost families and Burton’s own biography. All reductive psychoanalyzing aside, if Willy Wonka—Dahl’s mischievous moralist extraordinaire—can be reimagined as a psychically scarred, chocolate-loving son of a spooky dentist, then personal biography is clearly utilized to trump or rewrite the cultural authority of a prominent author-figure. Such aggressive rewriting also serves to displace within cultural memory the status of a rival antitext: Mel Stuart’s *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971). Again, because Burton’s film is a reimagined version of Dahl’s novel, it is therefore economically “obliged” to pay fealty to the numerous fans of a beloved children’s classic. Therefore, the filmmakers still employ fidelity strategically by offering “corrective” scenes to Stuart’s version—for example, golden-egg-laying geese are replaced by nut-shelling worker squirrels (who drag spoiled “bad nut,” Veruca Salt [Julia Winter] down a garbage chute) as Dahl “intended.” In this way, the filmmakers determinedly attempt to have *and* eat their cake.

In a similar vein, *Mars Attacks!* capitalizes on the relatively little-known status of the 1962 Topps trading card series on which it is based. The cards featured a story by cartoonist-writer Woody Gelman and Len Brown, pencils by pulp legends Bob Powell and Wally Wood, and colors by renowned commercial artist Norman Saunders. Issues of fidelity or authorial intentions are even more complicated here as the cards are themselves pastiches. They deliberately invoke the clichés of 1950s B movies (such as *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* [Fred F. Sears, 1956]), Woods’s influential cover art for *Amazing Stories*, and literary invasion narratives (H. G. Wells’s 1898 *War of the Worlds* most famously), but raise them to surprising levels of graphic violence (Smith and Matthews 173). Thus, the cards form iconic structural units that Burton is free to reference and adapt liberally in the same vein as

Big Fish's vignettes. Gelman and Brown's elementary story outline forms the film's basic plot architecture, the visual design of the Martians' skeletal faces and exposed brains are retained, and the occasional visual scenario by Powell, Wood, and Saunders is graphically replicated. Shots almost identical to individual cards include "Attacking an Army Base," "Washington in Flames," the wine-toasting invaders in "Watching from Mars," and most infamously, the self-explanatory "Burning Cattle." Burton in turn adds additional intertextual layers. He employs a multifoliate narrative structure featuring an ensemble cast of A, B, and C listers—in the same vein as 1970s disaster movies—and devises a *deus ex machina* (a brain-melting song by Slim Whitman) that serves as an oblique reference to an identically climatic plot device in *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* (John De Bello, 1978). This reimagining amounts to a trans-textual and intermedial mash-up. Numerous hypotexts are sampled in the manner of a hip hop DJ and are best appreciated by discriminatingly cultic aficionados.

This multilayered, scattershot narrative of *Mars Attacks!* has much in common with the minimal narrative coherence of *Batman* and *Batman Returns*. Both films eschew the clearly defined three-act structure associated with the well-made play, feature antagonists with ill-defined or inconsistent motivations, and contain plot trajectories that abruptly halt or peter out with minimal resolution. The films serve as condensed versions of the comic books' serialized and multi-authored stories, with various nodal conjunctions forming an aggregated impression of Batman. Like the reception of *Mars Attacks!*, the navigation of these stories is made appreciably easier by a suitable degree of intermedial awareness, and fans employ intertextual readings as an act of narrative rehabilitation. In their reception study of comic fan reactions to *Batman*, Camille Bacon-Smith and Tyrone Yarbrough found that "when the product falls short of fulfilling the fans' needs, viewers make use of an extreme form of fill-in-the-blanks interpretation. Rather than fill in the action with what the movie has led them to assume would be there, fans substitute plot twists that change the meaning of the on-screen evidence" (105). There is some question, for example, as to whether Batman purposefully or accidentally drops mob lieutenant Jack Napier (Jack Nicholson) into a vat of chemicals, thus precipitating his transformation into the Joker. There have been conflicting accounts of the Joker's origins throughout the history of the comic book franchise—as the character himself claims, "If I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice!" (Moore). So fans might settle the question of Batman's complicity in the Joker's creation for themselves by invoking various comic versions: whether it be his original 1951 backstory in *Detective Comics* #168 (in which Joker's original alter ego, the Red Hood, purposefully dives into a chemical catch basin to avoid capture) or the revisionist version

in *The Killing Joke* (in which the small-time crook jumps from a catwalk in fear of the ghoulish hero).

The reimagined text, then, is often fundamentally dependent on such fannish expertise for its very narrative coherence. More broadly, the new configurations of franchise filmmaking have resulted in a more strategic and flexible approach to fidelity. Faithfulness is emphasized in accordance with the potential for profitability, and every effort is extended to ensure that a new entry in an adaptogenic franchise can be placed on an equal footing with antecedent texts within the marketplace.

Reimaginings versus Remakes

So we can now begin to offer some summative conclusions concerning this decade-old industrial trend. What kind of an adaptation is a reimagined property? How does it differ from the garden-variety remake? How is it utilized to manage fans' investment and proprietary interest in the commoditized conspicuity of Burton's adapted properties?

As far as can be determined, the term "reimagining" was first actively employed by Hollywood publicists and filmmakers alike in 2001 during the production and advertising of a Tim Burton film, *Planet of the Apes*. The film "was touted neither as an adaptation nor a remake, but rather a new addition to a collection of stories revolving around a similar theme" (McMahan 160). The term "reimagining" was also explicitly invoked by Burton himself in pre- and post-publicity interviews. "[T]his is not a remake or a sequel," he asserted, "there is a way to do it differently, exploring things thematically but in a different way. I think it can be revisited and re-imagined to a whole new generation and to people like me who are interested in other aspects of what the film said" (qtd. in Woods 161–162). Subsequently, however, he has taken care to establish that this industrial neologism was very much the product of studio spin control, claiming that "Fox . . . insisted that this was neither a remake nor a sequel, but something else entirely" (qtd. in Salisbury, "Gorillas" 145, italics mine). The film's lengthy development history (12 years, 11 potential directors, 7 screenwriters) was well known. It had already gained the reputation as a difficult project by the time Burton was hired, and the film was rushed through shooting in order to make a summer release. Given the film's poor popular reception (e.g., with an IMDb user rating of 5.60, it is easily his lowest ranked production), it is likely the term "reimagining" was devised as an attempt to deflect future criticism from disappointed fans of the *Apes* franchise. Burton's own attitude toward this strategy is telling, as his comments betray his own dissatisfaction with the project: "The thing that may allow us to *get away with this film* is that we aren't trying to make

it the same thing,” he has asserted. “They say you should try to remake only bad movies, and *Planet of the Apes* wasn’t a bad movie” (qtd. in McKenna 62, italics mine).

Thus, it is not merely that the screenwriters with whom Burton works take a liberal attitude toward sacrosanct aspects of the hypotexts they adapt. For example, his collaborators have altered significant story events (e.g., a young Joker as the killer of Bruce Wayne’s parents in *Batman*), revised character functions (e.g., Ichabod Crane as a detective in *Sleepy Hollow*), or altogether ignored the intentionality of their hypotexts’ original authors (e.g., Alice Kingsleigh as blossoming imperialist in *Wonderland*). Rather, Burton’s adaptations are mischievous at the levels of visual and conceptual design insofar as he subjects familiar cultural icons to the aesthetic warping of his distinctly neo-Gothic *mise-en-scène*, and subsequently calls into question our ability to recall these figures as coherent emblems of meaning and desire. His commitment to such mischief is an index of the popular regard for this strategy, and speaks to the possible diminishment of fidelity as a general evaluative measurement—except among those (post)literary franchises that boast a committed fanbase and/or an author who retains creative control as a condition of granting the rights to her/his work (e.g., J. R. R. Tolkien, J. K. Rowling, or Stephanie Meyer).

Burton’s take on *Alice in Wonderland*—in which we are explicitly required to “build on our memories” of earlier encounters with previous “Alices”—is emblematic of the demands of a reimagined text (Bonner and Jacobs 38). Such a representative reimagining can be conceived of as an *adaptive management system*: a two-pronged industrial logic whereby the creative interests of a filmmaker are strategically wedded to the cultural authority of niche fan groups—an authority that is in turn both appropriated and contained. The key point to be made is that *the economics of reimagining as an industrial tool involve hailing and delimiting the hyperdiegetic play and expertise of a cultural franchise’s fan groups*. “Hyperdiegesis” is Matt Hills’s term for fans’ extension of a narrative world according to the work’s own internal logic—an activity with the potential for “creative speculation,” “affective play,” and the “management of identity” (137–138). Like *Alice in Wonderland*, for example, *Dark Shadows*’ fan base is pervasive, creatively prolific, and vociferously protective of the franchise largely due to its longevity and trans-media cult visibility. Compelling examples of this protectionism is evident in Ed Gross’s entry on *Blog of Dark Shadows* that asks fans to share their ideas on how they would helm a \$150 million remake of the series. A palpable air of discontent with Burton’s dilettantism is evident amid the eighty respondents, and is summed up nicely by one fan who proclaims that, “Burton lives in his own world and really cares less about the beauty and majesty that was (and can be again) *Dark*

Shadows . . . And it's not just Burton—but all extravagant Hollywood moguls whose bottom line is always the almighty dollar and not the satisfaction of their viewers" (qtd. in Gross, "*Dark Shadows* in Your Hands").

In Ryan Lizardi's words, a reimagined film "includes the benefit of a proven economic product with an already developed template as well as the idea that a whole new generation of money can now be brought in the door" (114). However, any industrial addition to an adaptogenic franchise cannot expect instant accreditation but is perceived as a *contender* for incorporation within the corpus by subcultural gatekeepers—many of whom may perceive themselves as creative competitors (albeit at folk levels). Burton's film, then, is not inherently welcomed with open arms by all quarters, and is only a potential contender for canonization within a franchise that includes a 1,255-episode soap opera, 32 paperbacks (1966–1972), three comic book series (1969–1976, 1991–1993, 2011–), a newspaper strip (1971–1972), two previous films (1970, 1971), four novels (1998–2012), an additional TV revivals (1991), an unaired revival pilot (2004), a stage play (2003), and an audio serial (2006–). Indeed, a reimagined film requires the purchasing power of a franchise's fans as much as it needs to co-opt their social networks for the purposes of crowdsourced advance promotion.

But what makes Burton's approach to adaptation, or other reimagined texts, distinct from the garden variety remake, and why regard it as a logic of control? Remakes obviously require certain cultural or historical transpositions, but such alterations inevitably risk a degree of resistance from certain protective audience sectors. When coupled with an elitist but pervasive distaste for remakes in general (as indicators of perceived creative bankruptcy in commercial filmmaking), these sectors represent a potential obstacle to the maximization of profits. Therefore, "*reimagining*" is a *corporately conceived taste category that serves principally as a kind of risk management*. The label is an honorific that circumvents the aforementioned complaints by implicitly acknowledging and authorizing the creative liberties taken by the new adaptation. Thus, the cynicism of the discriminating spectator is placated rather than dismayed at the prospect of (yet) another *Alice in Wonderland* because it is "reimagined" by the singular artistry of an auteur such as Burton. More crucially, a reimagined text is fundamentally *fan oriented*: it is a deliberately structured and marketed invitation to certain niche audiences to engage in comparative activities. That is, its preferred spectators are often those opinionated and outspoken fan cultures whose familiarity with the texts is addressed and whose influence within a more dispersed filmgoing community is acknowledged, courted, and ultimately colonized.

So, on the one hand, the notion of reimagining can imply the expectation of modernizing, rebooting, or retrofitting as "new generations" are sought

for older properties. But on the other, these adaptations and/or remakes also accentuate known elements (e.g., the *Planet of the Apes* series' penchant for twist endings, the increasingly graphic depictions of Sweeney Todd's barbarities, etc.) while simultaneously exploring the underdeveloped or latent possibilities of earlier iterations in an adaptogenic cultural franchise (e.g., the possibility that Willy Wonka might actually detest children, a certain psychosis and freakery shared between Batman and his foes, etc.). In addition, Burton's recurrent blending of incongruent genres is not simply a wilful act of hybridization-as-shock-tactic (*à la Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* [2009], *Cowboys vs. Aliens* [John Favreau, 2011], or the Burton-produced *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* [Timur Bekmambetov, 2012]). Rather, at their best, his generic mash-ups also implicitly compel viewers to recognize canonicity as a historically contingent enterprise that requires audiences to consider the generational palatability of a work's features. Thus, the appeal of *Frankenweenie* or *Edward Scissorhands* lies in their representation of the potentially malignant repressiveness of suburbia rather than as cautionary tales about the hubris of unfettered scientific exploration. Indeed, in many ways, Frankenstein's monster is a paradigmatic emblem for Burton, and the filmmaker's visual fetishizing of stitches (e.g., on the neck of young Victor's resurrected bull terrier, Sparky; that run throughout Catwoman's vinyl bondage gear; that Sally threads through herself in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* [1993]; etc.) are graphic acknowledgments of his suturing together of disparate sources. Like these signs of needlework, his films leave tactile traces of an ingeniously ramshackle craftsmanship.

Although Hollywood reimaginings are now produced with some regularity (over two dozen between January 2011 and July 2013), Burton's adaptations are readily identifiable and marketed as the products of a distinct creative vision. Indeed, with the major exception of J. J. Abrams—whose status as an auteur is also inextricably tied to his creative reworkings of known properties and self-declared alignment with the taste culture of his proudly geeky fan base—Burton is peerless in his approach to adaptation. For unlike the growing bevy of reimagined franchises helmed by more-or-less unknown filmmakers, Burton's films are sold on the basis of the recycling and filtration of familiar elements through an equally familiar artistic sensibility. And yet these reimaginings are not fundamentally subversive reworkings of earlier textual incarnations because their radical potentialities are buffered by the corporate branding of Burton as an auteur. Familiar attenuations include the stress on recurrent visual motifs (spirals, anthropomorphic architecture, the radiant gaucheries of Halloween and Christmas); the foregrounding of repeated thematic motifs (the misunderstood outsider, the emotionally removed father, the melancholy celebration of visible difference);

and the presence of privileged collaborators (Johnny Depp as the director's performative analogue, Danny Elfman as his musical voice, and so on).

These attenuations are certainly in effect in *Dark Shadows*—a reimagining that exemplifies Hollywood's Janus-faced acknowledgment of cultic autonomy. In order to draw upon and contain the hyperdiegetic play and expertise of the franchise's fans, the film both acknowledges and inhibits their cultural authority. On one level, *Dark Shadow* cannily and explicitly defers to fan expertise textually by including the following: (1) signature lines of dialogue such as "My name is Victoria Winters" (articulated during the series-defining train ride that brings her to Collinsport), (2) familiar plot elements such as Julia Hoffman's attempt to cure Barnabas of his vampirism via blood transfusions, and (3) unheralded cameos by former cast members (Jonathan Frid, Kathryn Leigh Scott, Lara Parker, and David Selby). Narratively, the film also pays fannish homage to serial storytelling by structurally incorporating daytime soap conventions. These include a substantial degree of expository dialogue, complexly intertwined subplots, incremental advancement, repetition, performative ostentation, and a high degree of aperture. Such deference is also maintained at promotional levels. Johnny Depp, for example, has declared in numerous interviews that as a child he wanted to *be* Jonathan Frid, while Burton has likewise waxed nostalgic about the original soap (Salisbury, "*Dark Shadows*").

And yet the film also attempts to place strategic delimitations on fan resistance by utilizing Burton's brand appeal to minimize potential discontent. The creative decision to trade in Gothic melodrama for gonzo comedy, for example, courts the ire of activist fan groups who appreciate the original soap's camp appeal but might have little sympathy for perceived outright mockery of the show. Indeed, Burton has also gone on record admitting that the original soap "was, in some ways, quite crappy" (qtd. in Salisbury, "*Dark Shadows: On Set*"). However, such resistance is potentially circumvented by promotional efforts and intertextual strategies that stress Burton's generic suitability to the project. Not only is the director's own neo-Gothic leanings heavily exploited in the film's design, but his success in handling effects-laden comedies is also emphasized. The film is careful, then, to cite not just key structural elements from the original soap but also prominent elements from Burton's own cinematic career—including a scene involving the transformation of a railing into a serpent that is lifted directly out of *Beetlejuice* (1988). Thus, just as Burton's own flights of fancy are tethered to time-honored properties, our own capacity to imagine Burton is constrained by a familiar dictum: one always comes to a reimagined property prepared to expect the unexpected.

Note

1. The films are directed by George Dewhurst (1926), Walter West (1928), George King (1936), and Andy Milligan (1970), and the television adaptations were produced by *Mystery & Imagination* (1970), *Purple Playhouse* (1973), British Sky (1998), and the BBC (2006). King's adaptation—starring the villainous Tod Slaughter—is probably the best known of these antecedents.

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