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"All Over the Map:" Building (and Rebuilding) Oz

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"The story is in the world; not the other way around. That is to say, a world is big and hopelessly uncontrollable. It spills messily outside the edges of any one story […] The challenge of genres like science fiction and fantasy is to not only spin a good tale, but to invent for that tale an imagined backdrop that seems to stretch clear into the horizon."

Travis Beacham (2013, n.p.) on the *Pacific Rim* franchise.

Disney offered *Oz the Great and Powerful* (Sam Raimi, 2013) to viewers as a spectacular world to map and explore far more than as a story to be experienced. One teaser ad showed the yellow brick road, heading past rambling green hills. Another showed a tornado carrying the hot air balloon to Emerald City. A final ad

revealed an expansive vista showing an enchanted landscape, a haunted forest, two different castles implying rival kingdoms, a town made of china cups, and other film locations. The advertisements echoed the highly iconic campaign for Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), a commercial hit Disney was eager to associate with its upcoming release. Both had been based on classic children's books, involving journeys into magical realms, and promising to show the traditional characters as we had never seen them before [Fig.1].

Critics objected to Tim Burton's radical rewriting of *Alice in Wonderland*, overlooking more than a hundred of years of "alternative Alices" (Sigler 1997), starting within months of the book's first publication. When *Oz the Great and Powerful* was first announced, some protective fans decried what were perceived as plans to develop a "prequel" to the beloved MGM musical. For many, *The Wizard of Oz* is a story, more or less what's depicted in the Judy Garland version, a distilled version of L. Frank Baum's first Oz novel. Dorothy is swept away from Kansas by a cyclone, lands amongst the Munchkins, kills the Wicked Witch of the East; she travels down the Yellow Brick Road, meets her three companions (Scarecrow, Tin Man, Cowardly Lion), and gets dispatched by the Wizard (really, a humbug) to kill the Wicked Witch of the West and returns home – there's no place like it! Let's call this the canonical story.

One of my students described *Great and Powerful* as "all over the map," unconsciously evoking Frank Kelleter's (2012) reference to the Oz Universe's "narrative sprawl." Precisely! By showing so much of Oz, the film inspires the collective activity of a global community of Oz fans who, as Kelleter notes, have worked continuously across the 20th century to construct "entire networked orders of knowledge about Oz," (2012, 34) stimulating pleasurable debates about what elements are canonical and which do not "belong." Let's call that network of information "Ozness." The film thus falls into the gap between narrow conceptions of the canonical story and the "Ozness" claimed by its more hardcore fans.

Over the past few decades, Hollywood and the games industry have developed more sophisticated tools for modeling and rendering synthetic worlds. Art directors and production designers are playing a more central role in the development of screen stories. DVD extras, coffee table books, and web-based encyclopedias and concordances document the particulars of these imagined worlds. Many contemporary filmmakers – Tim Burton and Zack Snyder come to mind – are more compelling world builders than storytellers. We need a better critical vocabulary for discussing their work. Yet, at the same time, many viewers

and critics remain rooted in a classical aesthetic, which tends to view these detailed renderings as an excess ("eye candy") distracting from the hero's journey.

In *Film Art*, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (1990, 46) use the MGM Oz film to explain the concept of "function:" "Even an element as apparently minor as the dog Toto serves many functions. The dispute over Toto causes Dorothy to run away from home and to get back too late to take shelter from the cyclone; and later Toto's chasing a cat makes Dorothy jump out of the ascending balloon and miss her chance to get back to Kansas. Even Toto's gray color, set off against the brightness of Ox, creates a link to the black and white of the Kansas sequences at the film's beginning." In their hands, *The Wizard of Oz* becomes *the* textbook example of how tightly integrated each element is into the storytelling process. Every element has one or more functions to play or it doesn't exist at all.

Yet, competing logics also shape the film's design and the spectator's experience. Hollywood's growing focus on immersive screen experiences creates a context where world-building exists alongside, sometimes serving and sometimes privileged over storytelling as a source of meaning and pleasure. In discussing contemporary entertainment franchises, Derek Johnson (2013) suggests that these world-building practices might be understood as a form of "overdesign." Game designers incorporate affordances that any given player may never encounter and which may support emergent practices. Similarly, contemporary films and television series incorporate more details than any given viewer may notice, more than any given narrative will use, since a successful film may spawn sequels (or may extend into other media) and since this practice enables the continuation of a long-form television series. Just as Bordwell and Thompson have shown how each detail might serve multiple story functions, each detail also contributes in multiple ways (some unanticipated at the time of their creation) to the story world.

For both readers and writers, our experience of Oz is shaped by prior expectations that determine what kinds of stories we might tell and what kinds of characters we might encounter. The world of Oz emerged gradually, over several decades, as Baum himself kept returning to and adding onto its territory, and as subsequent authors took over and further extended Oz. Ultimately, the texts of Oz accumulated a vast set of characters and locations described in the printed books, visualized through their illustrations, and performed on screen, stage, or other media. Once we have a deeper understanding of how Oz functions as a world, we will consider two different strategies by which later authors attach themselves to that world – one focused on notions of nostalgic return (where the plots center around efforts to restore Oz to its former glory) and the other focused

on the process by which Oz became the place we know in the canonical story. Both approaches work only if subsequent authors link their efforts to expand the Oz universe back to elements from the canonical story, while respecting the network of associations over which the most hardcore fans steward.

World-Making and World-Sharing

> "Imaginary worlds may depend relatively little on narrative, and even when they do, they often rely on other kinds of structures for their form and organization. [...] A compelling story and a compelling world are very different things, and one need not require the other."
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> Mark J. P. Wolf, *Designing Imaginary Worlds* (2013, 3).

In a discussion of what film theorists might draw from the work of Nelson Goodman (1978), Dudley Andrew (1984, 38) explains, "Worlds are comprehensive systems which comprise all elements that fit together within the same horizon... These elements consist of objects, feelings, associations, and ideas in a grand mix so rich that only the term 'world' seems large enough to encompass it." Andrews stresses the underlying logic determining which elements belong in a particular world: "The plot may surprise us with its happenings, but every happening must seem possible in that world because all the actions, characters, thoughts and feelings come from the same overall source" (1984, 39). While much contemporary writing about world-building focuses on fantasy or science fiction, Andrews's prime example, Charles Dickens's London, suggests that the same concept might apply to realist or historical fictions. London is a real place with an actual geography and history, but Dickens's London is an imagined space, a particular set of choices about what to include, a set of interpretive norms about what to pay attention to as we read a story. Dickens's London is not the same as Arthur Conan Doyle's London, with those differences only partially explained in terms of the different genres within which their stories operate. Andrew (following Goodman) sees worlds as intertextual structures, which persist across works: "The world of Dickens is obviously larger than the particular rendition of it which we call *Oliver Twist*. […] In fact, it is larger than the sum of novels Dickens wrote, existing as a set of paradigms, a global source from which he could draw" (1984, 39). And, as we will see, from which subsequent authors (Sam Raimi in the case of Oz) may also draw.

From a similar starting point in aesthetic philosophy and narrative theory, Marie-Laure Ryan (2001) stresses what the expansiveness of imaginary worlds

means for the reader, who must assemble bits of description (in a prose work) or visual details (in an audiovisual texts) to form a mental construct of the story world. She suggests that the viewer is "guided" by "textual declarations" but builds "this always-incomplete image into a more vivid representation through the import of information provided by internalized cognitive models, inferential mechanisms, real-life experience, and cultural knowledge, including knowledge derived from other texts" (2001, 91). This process of speculation, inference, and elaboration may continue beyond the borders of the original text. Umberto Eco stresses how fans transform a fragmentary and contradictory text, such as, his example, *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942), into a cult object: "The work must be loved, obviously, but this is not enough. It must provide a completely furnished world, so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the fan's private sectarian world, a world about which one can make up quizzes and play trivia games so that the adepts of the cult recognize through each other a shared expertise" (1990, 198). Such details, as the names of Rick's doorman, may evoke the original story but may also inspire personal and collective speculations about what other kinds of events might occur in this cherished space. And, as Mimi Ito (2011) says of more recent examples from Japanese "media mix" culture, these details may facilitate social exchanges, as fans talk together and pool knowledge.

Also writing about production and consumption practices in Japan, Otsuka Eiji describes how a series of collectible cards, each depicting individual characters and their backstory, each sold with chocolate candies, can evolve into a larger mythological system as small bits of information accrue over time. Otsuka, then, draws a parallel between this form of serialized consumption and the ways that details assemble within a television serial: "There are countless detailed 'settings' prepared yet not directly represented within this episode, including, in the case of *Gundam*, the era in which the main characters live, the place, the relations between countries, their history, their manners of living, the personal histories of the respective characters, the nature of their interpersonal relations, and even, in the case of the robots, the concordance between the functions matching their design and the science of the era. […] Each one of these individual settings will as a totality form a greater order, a united whole" (2010, 107). Just as the child collects cards or stickers as tokens of a fictional world, the fan watching a television series forms mental links between a range of details which constitute a fictional world.

If Andrews turns to Goodman, Mark J. P. Wolf's *Building Imaginary Worlds* (2013) starts with J. R. R. Tolkien and his conception of "sub-creation." In this account,

worlds are invented by authors, often as a way of stepping outside and looking at the primary world of our lived experience from an alternative perspective. For Tolkien, this kind of imaginative world-building is seen as sub-creation, because it builds upon what he sees as the primary act of creation – the divine creation of the physical universe. Wolf proposes that we might evaluate the strengths of these imagined worlds based on three core criteria – inventiveness, completeness, and consistency: "Without enough invention, you will have something set in the Primary World [...] not a world unique, different and set apart from our own. Without an attempt at completeness, you have the beginnings of expansion beyond the narrative, but not enough to suggest an independent world; too many unanswered (and unanswerable) questions will remain which together destroy the illusion of one. And without consistency, all the disparate and conflicting pieces, ideas, and designs will contradict each other, and never successfully come together to collectively create the illusion of another world" (2013, 34). What may strike more casual viewers as insignificant details matter because they are part of a larger system: a well-constructed world operates according to multiple logics (including, say, historical, anthropological, ecological, political, economic, etc.) which often intersect each other in complex ways and which fans learn to read from the depicted details as openings for new speculation.

If Andrews's account focuses on the works of a single author, more recent accounts discuss worlds as structures that scaffold collaboration. Writing about the expansive worlds created for *Star Trek* (1966–1969) and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–2009), Derek Johnson (2013, 109) explains "What emerges from the professionalized social networks sharing franchise worlds […] is meaningful, ongoing creative elaboration of shared production resources. […] By establishing a systematic set of principles to govern the look, sound and behaviour of narrative characters, events, and setting – and introducing increasing complexity over time – these science fiction series constructed their worlds as creative contexts that could support the emergent production and elaboration of further content." Here, the world acts both as a set of enabling conditions for various franchise extensions and as a set of constraints which determine what any given author cannot change without higher-up approval. Just as Johnson describes world-sharing in the professional sphere, Otsuka describes how understanding the underlying principles of worlds paves the way for grassroots forms of production, such as the Japanese Otaku community's wide-scale generation of amateur manga: "if, at the end of the accumulated consumption of small narratives, consumers get their hands on the grand narrative (i.e. the totality of the program), they will

then be able to freely produce their own small narratives with their own hands." For Otaku, new contributions to this textual system are best understood not in terms of their originality but in terms of what each variant contributes to our understanding of the whole.

Traditional storytelling works through exposition: sharing backstory, while world-building works through description: accumulating meaningful details. These details are not plot devices; rather, the plot often exists as a means through which to explore different aspects of these worlds. These constructs work at multiple levels: as set of meaningful elements, as spatial and social systems that help us to understand those elements in relation to each other, as a larger logic which can be used by authors (professional and amateur) to expand the original story world in new directions. These worlds get deployed by authors (singular or multiple) in the process of generating stories and by readers in the process of "going beyond the information given."

The Particularity of Oz

> "[Oz is] 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."
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> Frank Kelleter (2012, 26).

The Wizard of Oz was the first of fourteen books L. Frank Baum wrote about Oz between 1900 and 1920. Baum did not initially imagine Oz as a franchise or even as a book series, since he invented many such lands for children, yet he felt trapped by its growing popularity alongside less than spectacular sales for his other works. He sought to escape Oz many times, but in the prefaces to the subsequent books, he depicted himself as being drug back by eager young readers who wanted to know more about Oz. Baum wrote in his introduction to *Dorothy and The Wizard in Oz* (1908, n.p.), "It's no use; no use at all. The children won't let me stop telling stories of the Land of Oz. I know lots of other stories, and I hope to tell them, some time or another; but just now my loving tyrants won't allow me. [...] This is OUR book – mine and the children. For they have flooded me with thousands of suggestions in regard to it, and I have honestly tried to incorporate as many of these suggestions as could be fitted into one story […] There were many requests from my little correspondents for 'more about the

wizard.' It seems the jolly old fellow made hosts of friends in the first Oz book, in spite of the fact that he frankly acknowledged himself 'a humbug.' The children had heard how he mounted into the sky in a balloon and they were all waiting for him to come down again. So what could I do but tell 'what happened to the Wizard afterword?' You will find him in these pages, just the same humbug Wizard as before." Each book begins in a similar way, describing his latest story as filling in particular narrative gaps or mapping a particular corner of the fictional world.

Michael O. Riley has offered the richest account of how Baum's conception of Oz evolved: "Oz did not grow organically from a central idea. Rather, it developed in successive versions, each enlarging while superseding the one before and each reflecting Baum's current idea of what constituted the most magnificent and alluring fairyland in the world" (1997, 133). We can get some sense of this elaboration process by looking at the maps of Oz: a relatively simple rendering in early titles becomes even more detailed as the series continues. As Riley notes, Baum would increasingly locate his other story worlds on the borderlands around Oz, seeking to create a larger framework for his total creative output: "In the *Road to Oz*, Baum had drawn all his imaginary countries together into the same Other-world, but he had given no information about their geographical relationships. Now [in Tik-Tok *of Oz*] he actually shows the reader how they are connected. The fact that their positions on the map do not always agree with the textual descriptions is over-ridden by the centrality of Oz and the interconnectedness of Baum's entire Other-World" (Riley 1977, 186–187). Writing about the centrality of world-building to early 20th century popular fiction, Michael Saler notes the way authors tapped "the indexical idioms of scientific objectivity" in order to enable readers to play around with fantasy realms: "Maps in particular were important for establishing the imaginary world as a virtual space consistent in all its details" (2012, 186–187) [Figs. 2–3]. Saler describes the ways that H. Rider Haggard fabricated weathered maps, pottery shards, and other artifacts of imagined races, all to encourage the reader's belief in *She* and *King Solomon's Mines*. Baum described himself often as the "Royal Historian of Oz," suggesting his role in "documenting" and "recounting" a world rather than inventing one. In today's terminology, we might describe these "New Romances" as multimodal: they taped the affordances of multiple forms of representation. Our understanding of Oz was partially a consequence of Baum's own narrative prose and partially a reflection of the vivid illustrations contributed by William Wallace Denslow (for the first book) and John R. Neill for the subsequent titles. Those who only know the MGM film may think of the shift from sepia in the Kansas scenes to full

Technicolor in the Oz sequences as Hollywood's invention, but the books were already colour-coded, with Kansas described in monochromatic terms: "When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side […]. The sun had baked the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the house had been painted, but the sun blistered the paint, and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else […]. The sun and the wind [...] had taken the sparkle from her [Aunt Em's] eyes and left them sober gray; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were gray also" (Baum, 1900, Chapter One). Denslow's illustrations for this opening chapter were similarly monochromatic – a greyish tan colour. Each of the imagined lands had their own associated colour – Munchkins (blue), Gillikins (purple), Winkies (yellow), Quadlings (red), and residents of the Emerald City (green). But, beyond this, Denslow's illustrations helped to shape how subsequent generations imagined Oz; the illustrations were often more vivid than Baum's sometimes sparse descriptions.

Baum's Oz might also be seen as an important predecessor of transmedia storytelling. As Mark Evan Swartz (2000) documents, Baum personally wrote and oversaw a lavish Broadway musical based on the canonical story in 1902, adding many key details to the Oz world, including, for example, Dorothy's last name. The musical's cast also modeled performance practices – for example, the Scarecrow's rubber-legged dance moves – which informed the MGM movie. This first musical was followed by several more stage productions, with some subsequent books being more or less novelizations of plots Baum developed for other media. Baum ran his own motion picture production company to further expand upon his storyworld, introducing new peoples and lands that exploited the affordances of the trick film genre. At one point, there were competing Oz comic strips: one written by Baum, the other developed by Denslow, who was seeking to assert some legal rights over his contributions as an illustrator. Matthew Freeman (In Process) demonstrates how Baum used his comic strip pages as a bridge, connecting events depicted in the second Oz book, *The Marvelous Land of Oz* back to the characters and situations depicted in the original novel and foreshadowing Dorothy's return in subsequent books. Baum further extended his storyworld through the publication of *The Ozmapolitan*, a "faux newspaper" which featured an interview with the Scarecrow about his desire to be reunited with Dorothy, an event actually depicted in Baum's comic strip (Freeman, In

Process). Finally, Baum went on a lecture tour where he – as the author – acted as an interface between these various media. In this performance, *The Fairylogue and Radio Play*, Baum acted as a tour guide to his realm, with his lecture illustrated with scenes staged by live actors, 114 glass magic lantern slides, and 23 motion picture clips, each hand coloured, and produced by Chicago's Selig Polyscope studios.

Following his 1919 death, Baum's role as the architect, author, promoter, historian, and geographer of this wonderful land was passed along to a series of authorized successors. Denslow's replacement John R. Neill illustrated 36 Oz books and wrote three of his own between 1904 and 1942. Ruth Plumly Thompson added another 19 books, ending in 1939, and the official series only concluded in 1963. For a good part of the 20th century, there was an Oz book released each year during the Christmas season, a kind of beloved holiday ritual for many American families. Across that time, the Oz narrative was updated to reflect the tastes and concerns of each era, yet these various collaborators drew on a shared blueprint of the world (not always without contradictions) to create a series (not always without continuity errors) that could, in theory, though less and less, in practice, be read from beginning to end. And from there, we might add a range of other unauthorized contributors. As more of the Oz books revert into the public domain, there are at least four Oz themed television series currently in development for U.S. television. And beyond the realm of commercial production, there is a vast array of fan-generated material. *The Baum Bugle*, for example, has been published since 1957 as a vehicle through which fans and scholars alike might explore Oz.

On the one hand, Oz presents enormous difficulty in terms of cognitive mapping. It can be hard to hold all these details in our minds at once and so subsequent artists working across a range of media have tended to focus on some elements to the exclusion of others. On the other hand, popular memory of Oz has been reduced to a single book, a single film, a single plot, which needs to be respected if any subsequent work is to be accepted by a broader audience. This gradual narrowing of popular memory acts as a conservative force, making it less likely that future writers will draw from the subsequent books or extensions into other media. From the start, screen adaptations have depended on our prior knowledge of Oz, some of which gets evoked explicitly, some implicitly through the details mobilized in a particular text. We can see this process at play in the *Great and Powerful* ads discussed earlier. Most readers will recognize the Yellow Brick Road, the hot air balloon and the cyclone as referring to the core story, some may recognize the multiple variations of the Flying Monkeys as redesigns and expansions of a

canonical race, while a relatively few may recognize that the Dainty China Country (found in the Quadling lands) was a subplot in the original novel.

I will now consider two different narrative strategies – one focused on restoring Oz to its lapsed glory, the other focused on providing a backstory – that have been deployed in recent Oz films; both approaches builds upon – and provides space for the further expansion of – the Oz world as it has been handed down to us from its earlier incarnations across diverse media.

Restoring Oz

> "Literature has time and again demonstrated its ability to promote a haunting sense of the presence of a spatial setting and a clear vision of its topography […]. These mental geographies become home to the reader, and they may for some of us steal the show from the narrative action"
>
> Marie-Laure Ryan (2001, 121).

In her analysis of world-building, Ryan explores how a deeper sense of spatial immersion may contribute to "emotional immersion." Ryan talks about the "madeleine effect," (2001, 121) referring to a moment in Marcel Proust's *In Remembrance of Things Past,* when the taste of a cookie dipped into tea brings back intense memories of the village where he grew up. A film which builds on a pre-existing world may have a similar emotional impact, a sense of nostalgic loss or homecoming. Our desire to return to an imaginary homeland may satisfy our desires to hear a familiar story retold, to return to a familiar place, and to re-engage the memories we associate with it. Given how formative our childhood experiences of Oz have been for many generations of Americans, Oz extensions tap both memories of pleasurable elements in the story world and of real life rituals around its consumption. My pleasure in Oz is connected with memories of anticipating the annual Thanksgiving broadcasts of the MGM film, a collective experience shared by many of my elementary school classmates, and by the ways we play-acted the characters in our backyards. The fictional characters are complexly overlaid with memories of childhood friends. For any new movie to evoke this nostalgic return, the films have to provide at least some of what made Oz feel like home: the world needs to be recognizable; the right details need to be chosen and rendered acceptably.

Let's consider how this sense of nostalgic return and the expansion of the story world co-exist in Disney's *Return to Oz* (1985). The film merged plots from Baum's subsequent Oz books, especially *The Marvelous Land of Oz* and *Ozma of Oz,* but altered them to allow for a stronger continuity with the canonical story.

Dorothy, for example, here displaces Tip, a Gillikin lad, who was *Marvelous Land*'s original protagonist, Dorothy would not return from Kansas until *Ozma*, the third book. As the film starts, Dorothy and her family are still experiencing after-shocks from the events of the first book/film. Uncle Henry has started to rebuild the family cottage, swept away by the cyclone, but the house remains half-constructed, as he has lacked the motivation to complete his task. Dorothy is struggling with uncertainty about the status of her Oz memories: no one else believes her story. And in what may be the darkest moment in any Disney movie, Aunt Em leaves her with a sinister psychologist, who wants to use electroshock to erase Oz from her memory.

As Dorothy escapes from the asylum in the middle of a thunderstorm, a flash flood sweeps her, and her pet chicken, Billina, back to Oz, but she discovers that Oz has lost much of its magic. Dorothy wanders down piles of scattered bricks, all that remains of the yellow brick road. The Emerald City is bleached of colour, its walls are covered with graffiti, the locks on the gates have rusted and the streets are ruled by gangs of Wheelers who harass her. Along the way, she also sees plaster figures we fear may be her former companions' bodily remains. This nightmarish landscape is all the more poignant because we recognize these places from other versions: we have a deep sense of what has been lost. What happens next satisfies our desire to see things set right again.

From this starting point, the film introduces new characters to assist Dorothy through her journey. Her companions – Tik-Tok, Jack Pumpkinhead, and the Gump – all come from Baum's books: the same is true of the story's villains – Mombi the Witch and The Nome King. However, the film must court the audience's acceptance by situating these new figures in relation to elements from the canonical story. And the film ends with a further expansion of the Oz universe – a grand parade celebrating Dorothy's success incorporates diverse characters, some fairly obscure, (including Father Christmas whom Baum transplanted to Oz from his other children's books). This sequence provides a sense of Oz's expansiveness, rewarding fan mastery while servicing the needs of more casual viewers whose knowledge need not extend beyond those familiar characters in the foreground.

Another key moment comes when Dorothy is locked into an old attic, where Dorothy stumbles onto a dust-covered portrait of the Scarecrow and company, a painful reminder of her loss, and where she and Pumpkinhead cobble together the Gump from old furniture and a taxidermied moose head. In the first instance, the attic functions as a space where we store old artifacts and associated memories. The portrait reminds us of a lack which must be filled by reuniting Dorothy

with her missing friends, the ones with whom she shares her adventures in the canonical story. In the second incident, the attic suggests the ways that these materials can be remixed and re-conceived in order to generate new life. This is world-sharing in a nutshell, and I would argue, the scene provides readers with a way to reconciling the canonical story with a more expansive notion of "Ozness."

Becoming Oz

> "He [screenwriter Mitchell Kapner] [...] started talking about how he was reading L. Frank Baum's books to his children at night. And he said, 'Did you ever think about doing a story on how the Wizard became the Wizard?' I knew he was onto something with that question. Baum had created such a magnificent world with dozens and dozens of characters and fantastical set pieces."
>
> *Oz the Great and Powerful*, producer Joe Roth (Curtis 2013, 32–33).

The paradox is that a prequel comes both *after* (in the production history) and *before* (in the storyworld), though in the case of *Oz the Great and Powerful*, it also exists *alongside* a range of other Oz texts (in this case, *Wicked*, a text upon which this contemporary Oz film is very much indebted.) In this case, much of the film's plot is designed to move the pieces on the board towards the place where *The Wizard of Oz* begins. We can only appreciate the effort because we have been to this place before, while the characters are undergoing these experiences for the first time. So, to cite a few examples, this film shows us how the Scarecrow was made and recounts the incident that left the Cowardly Lion afraid of his own shadow. We see how the Wizard's hot air balloon got to Oz. We see the Wicked Witch of the West accept her wickedness and retreat from Oz towards the wilds of the Winkie country, and in the process, we intensify the conflict between Glinda the Good and the other witches. More importantly, we witness the Wizard's transition from a humbug sideshow magician – a man without roots or convictions – into the ruler of the Emerald City. In fact, the film shows us how he became the "man behind the curtain," including several sequences where the curtain is pulled aside to show him manipulating the controls of his various contraptions. Critics have described James Franco's performance as Oscar, the Wizard as flat and uninspired, overlooking the fact that Oscar is not intended to be the protagonist of his own narrative, that he is consistently shown to lack the qualities of a hero, and that films shows us how he comes to be able to pass himself off as bigger than he is. If we are going to get him to the place he must be for the canonical story, we must show how he gained power while lacking

many of the qualities we associate with great leaders. And in that sense, the most significant actions in the film center around the process of conceiving, planning, and staging illusions, often involving the behind the scene labour of a group of Tinkerers (stand-ins for the Disney Imagineers). Oscar is not much of a man, not much of a wizard, but a very gifted illusionist.

Mark J. P. Wolf tells us, "backstories are often told in the compressed form associated with low narrative resolution, and the histories of different locations in a world are often told to the story's main characters as they travel from one place to the next" (2013, 202). In the case of *Great and Powerful*, these priorities are reversed – the entire film can be understood as primarily preoccupied with the pleasures of backstory and with the mapping of meaningful locations, and it was this shift in emphasis that confused viewers less familiar with the source material – they often experienced only a series of digressions and diversions. Some have characterized this quest for backstory as the kind of tragic flaw of our transmedia culture, with every detail needing to be traced back to its origins, yet it is hard to deny the fascination many fans have in backstory, whether it is used to explain character motivations or to add greater coherence and completeness to the storyworld. In many ways, what happened before the story is as compelling a question as what happens next.

Consider one compelling use of backstory. While in Kansas, Oscar is visited by a woman in a blue Gingham dress (Dorothy's iconic outfit in both the books and the MGM film), who may be the one great love of his life – Dorothy's (future) mother. We never meet Dorothy's mother in any of Baum's books. Here, she is given both a face and a name (Anna). They have been childhood playmates and sweethearts (perhaps lovers); he sees her "every few months" as the show rolls into town. Anna holds out hope that they might get married, but Oscar lacks the commitment to lay down roots, refusing to join the ranks of "men like my father who spent his whole life tilling the dirt only to die face down in it." This poignant scene offers fertile ground for speculation: how might it change our understanding of the events of the canonical story if we read the Wizard as Dorothy's biological father? Michelle Williams plays both Anna (in the Kansas scenes) and Glinda (in the Oz sequences), paving the way for a romantic entanglement between Glinda and Oscar, which might explain why Glinda, knowing what she does, nevertheless sends Dorothy to meet the Wizard in the canonical story.

For the most part, the dispersed bits of backstory revealed here are not terribly surprising: most often, these stories locate the Wizard as the catalyst, whose entry into Oz sets so many other things into motion. Just as Dorothy must restore Oz in *Return*, Oscar must arrive in order to prepare Oz for the events of the canonical

story. Despite this lack of narrative drive, what makes this film immersive is that long-time Oz fans are able to explore this vast and wonderful world, seeing parts of it for the first time, through Oscar's eyes. And we can also see things and know things the character, himself, does not, a process best illustrated by one throw-away detail. As Oscar and his companions move on down the Yellow Brick Road, we can see rainbow coloured horses (the "horses of a different colour" from the MGM film) in a neighbouring pasture: the camera does not emphasize the horses and the characters do nothing to call attention to them, allowing them to function much like an "Easter egg" in a video game – a reward for observant and knowing fans. *Oz the Great and Powerful* adopts a journey structure, using the characters' movement through space to motivate its fascination with the world. The film's restlessness is already hinted at by the movie's opening – a long tracking shot through the heart of the carnival. From there, we see Oscar escape from the angry husband of one of his casual lovers, ascend in the hot air balloon, and get carried away via cyclone to the Land of Oz. From his hot air balloon, we see sweeping vistas of Oz's other-worldly landscape, as Oscar floats over the Impassable Desert and crash lands in the midst of a lush garden. Once landed, his travels take him down the yellow brick road, through the Emerald City, and through many other key spaces, include some familiar from the films (the haunted forest, the Munchkin lands) and some not (The Dainty China Country). Each space plays some narrative role but also rewards our desire to see, with our own eyes, in as much detail as possible, the landscapes Baum imagined.

Having built such a beautifully rendered world, mostly through digital effects, why waste it on a single narrative experience, when we can imagine the prospects of a digital version of Oz, where fans can explore at their own pace? While such a digital game world does not yet exist, we can satisfy some of these same urges by looking closely at the coffee table book, *The Art of Oz the Great and Powerful* (Curtis, 2013), which shows many spaces designed for the film, including some we never see on screen. Such books do not simply provide visual spectacle; the more we scrutinize these renderings, the more insights we may gain about the fictional world. Such books also share the thinking (and contributions) of diverse production contributors, including screenwriters, producers, directors, actors, production designers, costumers, make-up artists, special effects designers, and many others. Read closely, we can see how sharing core design principles allowed them to make independent decisions that contribute to the creation of an immersive storyworld.

Here, for example, the production designers discuss how they grounded their conceptions of these different locations in relation to alternative art movements

(which they felt shed light on the characters' personalities). Robert Stromberg, the film's Production Designer, explains, "I decided early on that I wanted Emerald City to be very masculine with strong, hard lines. As a result, Art Deco became the driving inspiration. On the other hand, in Glinda's world, I wanted a much more feminine quality, more curves. So I chose Art Nouveau to inform the classic Disney castle motif we chose for her kingdom" (Quoted by Curtis 2013, 96). These two styles are already heavily coded within Oz's iconography: the MGM film's Emerald City relied on the then-contemporary Art Deco style to suggest its modernity while *Return to Oz* harkened back to the Art Nouveau style popular at the time Baum wrote the original novel. These design choices are grounded in the long history of attempts to illustrate, stage, and film Oz, themselves part of the intertextual process of world-sharing we have been discussing across this essay.

Through this world-sharing process, each new Oz text announces its arrival, making a bid as either remaining true to the spirit and detail of the original or as representing a different interpretation of the familiar realm. *Oz the Great and Powerful* must not simply produce a world; it must also reproduce it, and part of what allows us to accept this new version is the many different details linking it back to prior Oz texts. Of course, intellectual property constraints make this a particularly complex dance, since Disney is laying claim to what is found in the Baum books, but the rights to those visual elements we most associate with Oz (those in the MGM film) belong to another studio. Disney has to evoke the earlier film without duplicating it so closely that it constitutes plagiarism. Consider, for example, the film's end title, which is set against a blue sky and a rainbow (a homage, clearly, to "Somewhere Over the Rainbow"). Or consider another sequence where Oscar and his companion enter Munchkinland inside giant bubbles, a scene meant to evoke Billie Burke's memorable entrance as Glinda. The film's depiction of the Winkies and Munchkins still draw on the colour coding introduced in the Baum books, and build on iconography created by Denslow and Neill, yet they also depend on architectural details that evoke the MGM musical, as might be suggested by these two images showing the starting point for the Yellow Brick Road [Figs. 4–5].

We can note similar borrowings in *Return to Oz*, for example, the use of the Ruby Slippers – another MGM invention (Baum's Dorothy wore silver shoes instead) – or the design of Ozma's headdress, which comes directly from the original illustrations in Baum's books and from the costume designs for his stage productions and films [Figs. 6–7]. Yet, our current legal culture makes it hard

to acknowledge such direct lines of influence, even when they are essential for maintaining audience credibility and emotional immersion.

Given this legal conundrum, the "making of" materials mask any connection to the MGM movie, which is not directly mentioned at all in the *Art* book, and which is acknowledged only briefly in the DVD's "Making of" video. There, *Great and Powerful* is depicted as the fulfilment of a life-long dream of Walt Disney to produce his own Oz movie. We are told that Disney had planned to create an animated Oz as a follow-up to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*'s (William Cottrell, David Hand, Wilfred Jackson, Larry Morey, Perce, Pearce, Ben Sharpsteen, 1937) box office success but was pre-empted by MGM's decision to produce its own version. The DVD extras share production designs and test footage for a live-action musical version Disney announced in the 1950s which would have used the young cast members from *The Mickey Mouse Club* (Sidney Miller, Charles F. Haas, Duck Darley, William Beaudine, Bill Justice, Jonathon Lucas, 1955–1959). The video authenticates the new film as the fulfilment of a key aspiration of the corporation's founder. And, as if to further authenticate *Great and Powerful* as a true Disney movie, the film provides us with scenes of the Wicked Witch pondering her appearance in a mirror and clasping a magic apple, both evoking iconography associated with Disney's *Snow White*. The *Art* book also cites *Snow White* as a key reference for the design of the Dark Forest (Curtis 2013, 89). We might also note that Stromberg's team fit Glinda's castle within a larger tradition of Disney castles from animated features and theme park attractions [Fig. 8].

Conclusion

What have we learned about worlds in our journey through the lands of Oz? Worlds are comprehensive systems that operate at multiple levels. Worlds include clusters of details that make a story feel as if it is operating within a real place, potentially supporting many other stories. Such worlds may exist across longer periods of time, beyond a single medium, and can be experienced from the perspectives of other characters. Such details also contribute to a larger system, a set of assumptions about the nature of the world, which might draw upon multiple disciplines of knowledge, might allow different fans to bring their expertise to bear, and might allow the work to be read again with new insight. A well designed world opens up – rather than closes off – the creative and interpretive process. Many such worlds have, from their origins, been collaborative – Oz emerges from

the shared contributions of both authors and illustrators, absorbs new life as the series was continued by multiple subsequent writers, some authorized as part of the story canon, some offering radical reworkings, but all working from some shared understanding of what constitutes "Ozness."

This shared conceptual model explains the continuity of details across different versions – the reduction of Oz's "narrative sprawl" into a much smaller number of elements that constitute the canonical story, as the MGM musical has restricted which aspects of Baum's original texts survive in popular memory. Yet, the most committed Oz fans can dedicate themselves to exploring its less traveled paths and uncharted corners. This shared conceptual model also allows for coordination and collaboration within large scale productions – whether Baum's own Broadway spectacles or today's blockbuster movies and AAA video games. More and more thought goes into the planning of these franchise worlds and their screen representations become more richly detailed to reflect contemporary trends towards "overdesign."

In an era of immersive entertainment, audiences are demanding worlds that engulf us, worlds that sustain exploration, even if a small part of their potential is going to be realized within any given work. Yet, audiences also often hold onto the idea that they should be paying attention to the story and that excessive details may be seductive, pulling us off the path the protagonist is pursuing. We don't know what to do with a film where the world-making may be more compelling than the narrative. Much as we have come to value the role of performance sequences across a range of popular genres, we may need to rethink the ways that worlds offer "other structures" which reward audience attention. We need to think more deeply about how the aesthetic criteria by which we evaluate worlds (their inventiveness, their completeness, and their coherence, according to Wolf) relate to the much more fully articulated criteria by which we evaluate stories.

Much of the current writing on world-building – especially Wolf – has stressed the act of "sub-creation." Often, there is a tendency to dismiss worlds that are not sufficiently "original," borrow too heavily on genre conventions or specific earlier works. Instead, this paper has emphasized the intertextual nature of worlds. In an essay dealing with fan fiction, Abigail Derecho (2006) introduces the concept of "archontic literature:" "A literature that is archontic is a literature composed of texts that are archival in nature and that are impelled by the same archontic principle: that tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess. Archontic texts are not delimited properties with definite borders that can be transgressed […]. An archontic text allows, or even invites, writers to enter

it, select specific items they find useful, make new artifacts using those found objects, and deposit the newly made work back into the source text's archive" (Derecho 2006, 64–65). This approach values not invention per se, but generativity, the degree to which any given work helps to sustain the larger process of cultural production. We have considered a few of the strategies by which storytellers might justify their return to a familiar fictional world. On the one hand, as in *Return to Oz*, the story may seek to link the reader's nostalgic desire to revisit a world that feels like home with a story that returns the protagonist to that same space and through her, brings that world back to life. On the other hand, the text might start with an unanswered question – most often, in this model, as in *Oz the Great and Powerful*, a question of backstory – and then use that question to motivate a new narrative that fills gaps in our understanding. Baum also often justified the extensions of the Oz storyworld in this same way – as responding to questions from his readers. Accompanying such extensions, there is a desire to "authenticate" the new text as legitimately fitting within the shared world and so, there is a performative aspect of world-sharing, where certain shared elements that seem essential to the reader's experience are deployed to pave the way for further expansion and exploration. As a story world moves across media, as it gets renewed for a new generation, it has to respond to audience expectations about what this world looks like and what kinds of things we expect to see there.

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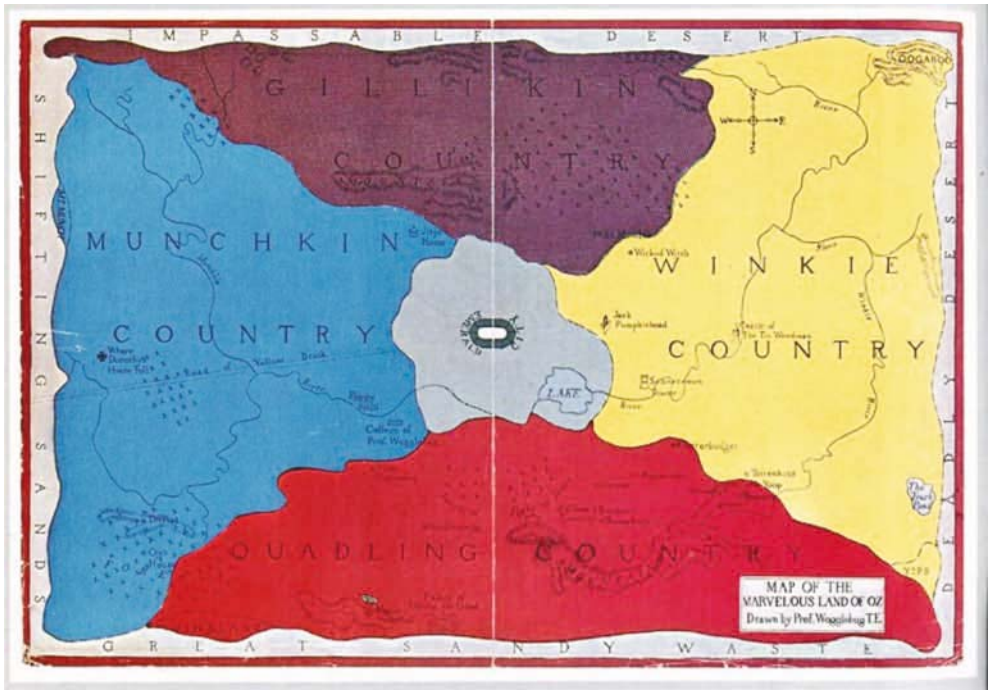

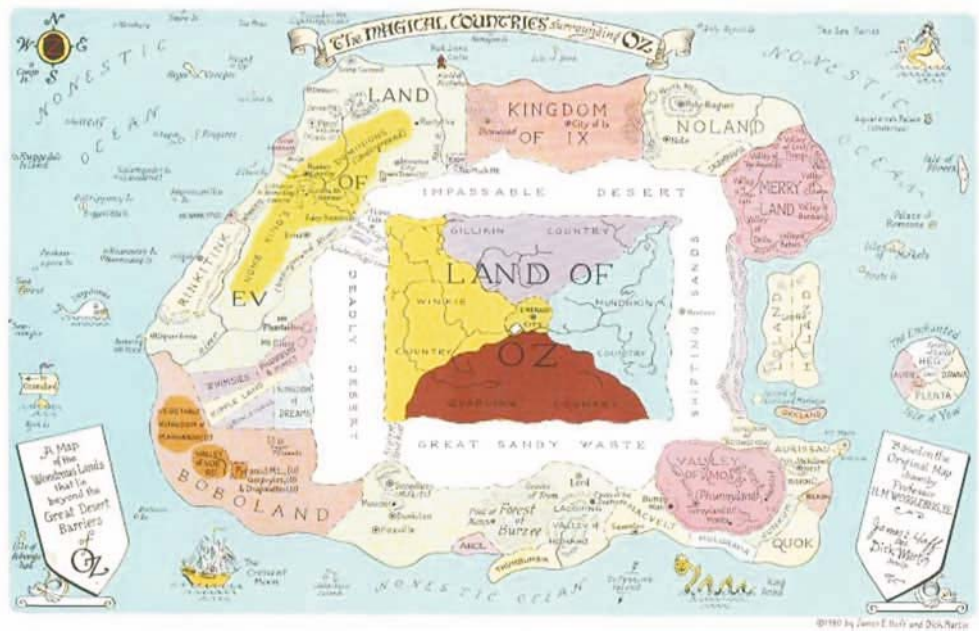

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