ADAPTING FAIRY TALES, TO WHAT ENDS?

In 2005 the Bloomingdale’s holiday window display in New York City featured eight popular fairy-tale scenes, ranging from “Cinderella” to “Aladdin.” Highlights of what in that context was a mixed bag of traditions—narrative, festive, commercial, and touristic—remain viewable on About.com Travel to New York City Guide as a series of ten images. The “Cinderella” scene is tagged “Imagine being invited to the ball,” and the “Aladdin” one “Imagine the ride of your life.” In these windows, the magic helper who makes such wishes come true—respectively, the fairy godmother and the genie—has a large presence. Each chosen scene of the ensemble projects a sense of anticipation and attainable gratification. In the “Frog Prince” display, the frog is handing the young woman a translucent ball. Both characters wear crowns, signaling that their common royal status will eventually bring them together. How? No matter what the Brothers Grimm wrote, and as the very red lips of the frog in the window signal, the answer in popular cultural memory is “with a kiss.”

Not only are the frog’s lips larger and redder than the princess’s, but also his hard and sparkling “body” is more like a gigantic conglomerate of costume jewelry than a slippery force of nature. In contrast, the fairy-tale heroine is bland, a well-dressed life-size mannequin with no expression or light of her own. The
precious ball between them looks like an oversized pearl or perhaps a magic ball in which to read one’s future; also strategically placed between the frog suitor and the princess but more in the background, a golden reindeer conflates the magic of fairy tales with the gift-giving rituals of the season. The scene anticipates romance and fulfillment in a preset fantasy world for both characters, and the presence of the reindeer further suggests this is a “free” exchange that is part of a gift economy. Of course, the association of fairy tales with the holiday season is hardly new, as seen in British pantomime and Christmas editions of tales of magic for children. But in its fantastic showcasing of artificiality, this display is decidedly hyperreal, simulating an original that never existed and presenting it as not only desirable but also attainable. With the swipe of a credit card. In this fairy-tale scene the princess-like mannequin stands in for the consumer of a happily-ever-after fantasy that the amphibian rep for capitalism offers her.

To cash in on the genre’s worldwide appeal is common in globalized consumer capitalism, where plots, metaphors, and expectations associated with fairy tales pervade popular culture, from jokes and publicity to TV shows and
songs. This confirms that fairy tales continue to exercise their powers on adults as well as children. *Powers*, I stress, not power, because, historically as in the present, fairy tales come in many versions and are in turn interpreted in varied ways that speak to specific social concerns, struggles, and dreams. Even the Bloomingdale’s “Frog Prince” scene tells more than the “shopping will buy you romance and happiness” story. In the online picture, we see the potential consumer reflected in the soft glow of the fake “pearl” in the window, but s/he need not be taken in by the glamour. After all, we are not passive consumers, and this is but one scene in the tale; we can imagine different choices and endings, and we do.

In Jack Zipes’s words, “Fairy tales are informed by a human disposition to action—to transform the world and make it more adaptable to human needs, while we try to change and make ourselves fit for the world” (Zipes 2012, 2). This statement is not, given Zipes’s project in *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* (2012), to be understood as a definition that encompasses the genre of the fairy tale, but it identifies transformation as central to what most fairy tales do or anticipate. Like Zipes, I am interested in exploring how fairy tales affect the making of who we are and of the world we are in, and I agree that thinking about transformation—within the tales’ storyworlds; in the genre’s ongoing process of production, reception, reproduction, adaptation, and translation; in the fairy-tale’s relation to other genres; and more generally as action in the social world—offers a spacious and productive way into that exploration.

Fairy tales interpellate us as consumers and producers of transformation. For instance, in 2009, the same year in which Tiana of *The Princess and the Frog* entered the ranks of Disney princesses, Canadian photographer Dina Goldstein put on the World Wide Web her *Fallen Princesses* series, in which she imagines fairy-tale heroines in “modern day scenarios” and replaces the “happily ever after” with a hyper “realistic outcome” of a different kind: “Cinderella sits in a dive bar in Vancouver’s infamous Hastings Street. Snow White is trapped in a domestic nightmare, surrounded by unkempt children, with a lazy out of work prince in the background” (“About the Series” on www.fallenprincesses.com/).

Just as striking as the transformative work of “critical disenchantment”—noted by Catriona McAra and David Calvin in their introduction to *Anti-Tales: The Uses of Disenchantment* (2011, 1–15)—that Goldstein’s photographs do, is the public response that they have in turn produced, ranging from a *Marie Claire* article (published in November 2009) to innumerable blogs and fan letters. And even more striking perhaps is the online debate that Goldstein’s project sparked, not only in defense of the positive role Disney magic has played in real-life individual experience but also in presenting a range of critical takes on the tales
as well as on the photographs. Goldstein’s photographs make visible the contradiction between what Angela Carter critically called “mythic women” and the problems we face in everyday life, including loneliness, aging, and illness, and in doing so she clearly touched a nerve with the public. But the controversy also suggests that to change women’s images or more generally to disenchant the genre is not the only fairy-tale transformation in which the thousands of individuals who were touched enough to respond are invested.²

“Fairy tales are ideologically variable desire machines,” I wrote a few years ago in *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, and I stand by this statement, which I realize could be said of all stories really, but perhaps holds higher stakes when applied to a genre that so overtly puts a desire for transformation in motion and one that is too often reduced to the narrative articulation of purportedly universal wish fulfillment. Just as Salman Rushdie’s child protagonist in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* confronts the question, “What is the use of stories that aren’t even true?” (1990, 22), scholars have asked: what does the fairy tale do? Providing a neat definition of the genre within a framework that recognizes its multiple social valence is difficult, then, and necessarily self-contradictory. Fairy tales have been central to reproducing ingrained or second-nature habits, what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus* and Edward Said “structures of feeling”—and to destabilizing them. Characterized in Marina Warner’s words by “pleasure in the fantastic” and “curiosity about the real” (1994, xx), fairy tales have historically scripted a wide range of desires while maintaining a strong grip on ordinary social life. With an eye to solving problems, at least some versions are also produced and/or received as inspirations to undo privilege and prejudice.

To develop the idea that fairy tales “are informed by a human disposition to action” (Zipes 2012, 2), we need to ask what do they do to inspire us to seek change, in ourselves, in order to fit in the social world and/or in the social world in order for it to accommodate us. For some, fairy tales instigate compensatory escapism, while for others they offer wisdom; alternatively, fairy tales are seen to project social delusions that hold us captive under their spell; or else they promote a sense of justice by narrating the success of unpromisingly small, poor, or otherwise oppressed protagonists. Maria Tatar’s recent “quilting” of published writers’ and public figures’ commentary on fairy tales, “passages that move us to think about the deeper meaning of fairy tales and how they have affected our lives and those of others” (2010, 305), significantly has a patchwork effect. Our ideas about the genre’s poetics depend on whether we associate the fairy tale as symbolic act with wish fulfillment, role-playing, idealization, survival, or something else; in other words, on how we use the genre. In the last two hundred
years—the Grimms’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*’s volumes were first published in 1812–15—the fairy tale has served multiple sociocultural functions.

But I believe it is also safe to say that since the popularizing of the Grimms’ collection, as a genre the fairy tale’s dominant or hegemonic association has been with magic and enchantment, as a result of several convergences: the segregation of fairy tales to the nursery where “magic” is normalized as the mysterious ways in which the world works to produce immediate gratification and where “enchantment” is at the service of a spellbinding discipline that has the “child exactly where we want her or him” (Haase 1999, 363), the universalizing of “happily ever after” as the signature mark of the fairy tale, the repurposing in mass culture of fairy tales for advertising products that fulfill our every wish (Dégh 1994), and the spectacle of the fairy tale as an American capitalist utopia (Zipes 1999) and as “consumer romance” (Haase 1999, 354) in Disney’s films and other fairy-tale commodities.

If generally the desired effect of this poetics of enchantment is the consumer’s buying into magic, the contemporary call for disenchanting the fairy tale is directly related to a now-public dissatisfaction with its magic as trick or (ultimately disempowering) deception, a disillusionment with the reality of the social conditions that canonized tales of magic idealize. However, magic and pacifying enchantment are not the only poetics of the fairy tale, historically or in the present. As medievalist Jan Ziolkowski reminds us, “Wonder is the effect [fairy] tales seek to achieve, while magic is the means that they employ to attain this goal” (2006, 64). It is no accident that fairy tales are also known as “wonder tales.”

As an effect, wonder involves both awe and curiosity. In Marina Warner’s eloquent words, “Wonder has no opposite; it springs already doubled in itself, compounded of dread and desire at once, attraction and recoil, producing a thrill, the shudder of pleasure and of fear. It names the marvel, the prodigy, the surprise as well as the responses they excite, of fascination and inquiry; it conveys the active motion towards experience and the passive stance of enrapturement” (2004, 3). Fairy tales can invite us to dwell in astonishment and explore new possibilities, to engage in *wondering* and *wandering*. It is in this symbolic enactment of possibilities, “announcing what might be”—and taking us *ex-cursus*, off course, or off socially sanctioned paths to “unlock social and public possibilities,” to explore alternatives we hope for—that the fairy tale’s “mood is optative” (Warner 1994, xx) and wonder producing. Furthermore, wonder has been recognized as a significantly complex effect of fairy tales, but the genre’s links with wonder have a complicated history, including the secularization of religious legends and miracle tales in medieval Europe (Ziolkowski 2006, 232–34; Zipes 2001, 847);
the transformation of ancient pagan tales; and, with Arabian Nights being the most well-known case, the appropriative translation of what Donald Haase calls other cultures’ “wonder genres” (e-mail communication with the author).

I contend that actively contesting an impoverished poetics of magic, a renewed, though hardly cohesive, poetics and politics of wonder are at work in the contemporary cultural production and reception of fairy tales. And while remaining within the purview of primarily North American and European fairy-tale production, I explore this hypothesis within a larger framework that remaps today’s fairy-tale adaptations and their potential for transformation.

How and to what uses are fairy tales being adapted in and to the twenty-first century? This is the umbrella question I engage with in this book while keeping in the foreground its corollary, why should we care? For Arthur W. Frank in Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology (2010), “not all stories engage all people” (4), an important point suggesting how stories do not just connect human beings but reflect and generate differences among us; however, stories of all kinds do animate, instigate, conduct, and emplot human lives. Two of Frank’s socionarratological insights about stories in general resonate with and in my project. The first is that of the making and unmaking of narrative emplotment in both fiction and life: “Stories project possible futures, and those projections affect what comes to be, although this will rarely be the future projected in the story. Stories work to emplot lives: they offer a plot that makes some particular future not only plausible but also compelling. . . . We humans spend our lives . . . adapting stories we were once told. . . . Not least among human freedoms is the ability to tell the story differently and to begin living according to that different story” (Frank 2010, 10). The dynamics of emplotment seem to me particularly relevant to reflecting on fairy tales in social practice because this genre is so basically tied up in plot, has been hegemonically utilized to emplot or frame our lives within a heteronormative capitalist economy, and yet has such a history of and potential for adaptability as well as subversion because it operates in the optative mode.

The second of Frank’s insights is a set of questions that, adapting Bakhtinian dialogism, informs his critical analysis of storytelling, which he sees as the symbiotic and dynamic work that people and stories do with, for, and on one another. Frank asks, “what is at stake for whom, including storyteller and protagonist in the story, listeners who are present at the storytelling, and others who may not be present but are implicated in the story? How does the story, and the particular way it is told, define or redefine those stakes, raising or lowering them? How does the story change people’s sense of what is possible, what is permitted, and what is responsible or irresponsible?” (Frank 2010, 74–75, italics in the original).
Readers familiar with fairy-tale studies will recognize these as the issues that Jack Zipes’s critical oeuvre, from *Breaking the Magic Spell* (1979) on to *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* (2012), has taken on to trace the cultural and social history of the fairy-tale genre. Within this larger framework I ask more specific questions about the here and now: What are the stakes of adapting the fairy tale in the early twenty-first century? For whom? And how do today’s fairy-tale adaptations affect “people’s sense of what is possible,” or of what transformations to anticipate/fear/desire? Because the genre’s popularity is both persistent and pervasive and because questions of individual agency and social transformation are central to the tales’ narrative permutations, reflecting on today’s fairy-tale adaptations—both their production and reception—illuminates and affects how we construct human relations in the present and how we map out our options for the future. This broadly intellectual concern motivates my continued inquiry into the genre and its varied poetics and politics of magic, enchantment, and wonder.

**FAIRY TALES TRANSFORMED? MULTIVOCAL AND MULTIMEDIAl PRACTICES IN GLOBALIZED CULTURE**

This book begins by asking how and to what effects contemporary understandings and social uses of the fairy tale have changed since the 1970s, a significant conjuncture in the Euro-American history of the genre and its adaptations, and it is from within a North American context and history that I pursue these questions. At that time, North American feminists were arguing vehemently in the public sphere about the value of fairy tales in the shaping of gendered attitudes about self, romance, marriage, family, and social power. Anne Sexton’s publication of *Transformations* was a wake-up call in 1971 for women to read the Grimms’ collection of fairy tales in a different key, “As if an enlarged paper clip / could be a sculpture. / (And it could)” (Sexton 1971, 2). While psychologist Bruno Bettelheim’s popular book, *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), claimed that the fairy tale’s symbolism and healing enchantment trumped any gender considerations, some educators and scholars blamed classic and Disney fairy tales for reinforcing female passivity, whereas others pointed approvingly to strong heroines in less known tales of magic as role models for girls. Illustrated books such as Jane Yolen’s *Sleeping Ugly* (1981) and anthologies like *Tatterhood and Other Tales* edited by Ethel Johnston Phelps (1978) sought to address these issues in English-language children’s literature. In addition to Anne Sexton’s *Transformations*, Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and Margaret Atwood’s *Bluebeard’s Egg* (1983) boldly proceeded from woman-centered perspectives to rewrite the genre for adults. And other writers also looked to the fairy
tale as a genre to renew “exhausted” fiction-making conventions or to explore new permutations of narrative and cognitive mappings. Robert Coover, A. S. Byatt, Jeanette Winterson, and Salman Rushdie are the best-known representatives. Together with Atwood and Carter, John Barth, and the widely translated Italo Calvino, they constitute what Stephen Benson called “the fairy-tale generation in the sense that their fictional projects are intimately and variously tied to tales and tale-telling” (2008, 2). Quite sensibly, Vanessa Joosen links “this fairy-tale renaissance” not only to the 1968 social uprisings and the second-wave feminist movement but also to “developments in literature and literary criticism” (2011, 4), including the heightened attention paid in both fields to parody, metafiction, and most importantly intertextuality.

Simultaneously and for similar reasons, fairy-tale studies emerged as a field where sociohistorical analysis has been challenging romanticized and nation-centered views of the genre. Noting that Angela Carter’s The Bloody Chamber and Jack Zipes’s Breaking the Magic Spell both came out in 1979, Stephen Benson reminds us in his introduction to Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale of “the extraordinary synchronicity, in the final decades of the twentieth century, of [fairy-tale] fiction and fairy-tale scholarship” (2008, 5). For example, the early 1990s saw Carter’s edited collections of The Virago Book of Fairy Tales (1990 and 1993) alongside Marina Warner’s From the Beast to the Blonde (1994), each making a singular and lasting intervention in the ongoing feminist debate over fairy tales. One could say that if today, as Donald Haase’s introduction to the 2008 Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales authoritatively attests, the international and interdisciplinary institutionalization of fairy-tale studies is a fait accompli, this has a lot to do with the extraordinary literary production by writers of “the fairy-tale generation” as well as with leftist and second-wave feminist interrogations of the value of fairy tales. Vanessa Joosen’s important book, Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual Dialogue between Fairy-Tale Scholarship and Postmodern Retellings (2011), develops our understanding of this dialogue by centering her analysis on three key critical texts from the 1970s—Marcia K. Lieberman’s “Some Day My Prince Will Come,” Bruno Bettelheim’s The Uses of Enchantment, and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic—that she links thematically with an impressively “large number of retellings and illustrated versions” (Joosen 2011, 7) of six well-known fairy tales. Basic to her tracing of this dynamic dialogue is Joosen’s starting point that “any intertextual analysis of contemporary fairy-tale retellings has to take into account that the best-known fairy tales have been reproduced in innumerable variants and that fairy-tale material has generated countless verbal and nonverbal manifestations” (10).
I agree that this image of the fairy-tale genre as “a shape shifter and medium breaker” (Pauline Greenhill’s and Sidney Eve Matrix’s felicitous phrase in “Envisioning Ambiguity,” 2010, 3) has a contemporaneity that makes it a “period performance” (Benson 2008, 13). And I believe it is so due to the conjuncture not only of social and literary movements but also of technological and economic developments; namely, the Internet and globalization, within what Henry Jenkins calls convergence culture (2008). In the aftermath of the 1970s, the recognition that “fairy tales provide intertexts par excellence” (Greenhill and Matrix 2010, 2), and are thus a multimedial or transmedial phenomenon, has not only informed scholarly perspectives but also taken hold in public discourses and popular consciousness, thanks to the electronic accessibility of a wide range of fairy tales, the filtering of feminist and other social critiques into children’s education and globalized popular culture, and the greater possibilities for reader response to become production and be shared in new media.

As Theo Meder documented, folktale collections on the Internet have provided an impressive array of texts to researchers: “One of the earliest (1994) and still one of the finest folktale collections is the German Gutenberg Project, which as of 2006 contained some 1,600 fairy tales,” and its English-language version includes not only Charles Perrault’s and the Brothers Grimm’s canonical texts, but also Giambattista Basile’s, Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy, and The Arabian Nights (Meder 2008, 490). And D. L. Ashliman’s extensive online research tools Folklore and Mythology: Electronic Texts, and Folklinks: Folk and Fairy Tale Sites, both of which originated in 1996, provide folktale and fairy-tale texts and links to other collections and critical resources on the Internet, some of encyclopedic nature (most prominently the Enzyklopädie des Märchens, the leading German-language reference on folk and fairy tales in an international research context), others devoted to specific tales (for example, Kay E. Vandergrift’s Snow White site, created in 1997), still others consisting of scholarly journals (for example, Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies, a print publication also available through Project MUSE and JSTOR). During the 1996–2006 period, Folklinks alone had over one million visits, while the Folklore and Mythology: Electronic Texts had more than three million visitors by June 2011. Two other well-respected fairy-tale sites, Endicott Studio and SurLaLune Fairy Tales, are also quite popular, and as such it is instructive to take a look at their profiles and trajectories.

Founded in 1987 and directed by writer-artist-scholars Terri Windling and Midori Snyder, the Endicott Studio website and its Journal of Mythic Arts are “dedicated to literary, visual, performance, and environmental arts rooted in myth, folklore, fairy tales, and the traditional stories of people the world over.”
Created in 1999 by librarian and researcher Heidi Anne Heiner, SurLaLune Fairy Tales “features 49 annotated fairy tales, including their histories, similar tales across cultures, modern interpretations and over 1,500 illustrations”; it also includes over 1,600 folktales and fairy tales from around the world in electronic books and a discussion forum. Both Endicott Studio and SurLaLune were envisioned and are run by indefatigable and creative women who have put their visionary expertise at the service of scholars, writers, teachers, students, and the public at large, and both sites have strong women-centered and feminist profiles, as seen in the essays of the *Journal of the Mythic Arts* and judging from the discussion board on SurLaLune. While “mythic projects” and healing in literary and visual arts are more of a focus in Windling’s and Snyder’s nonprofit project, Heiner states she “created [hers] strictly for educational and entertainment purposes.” Informed by folklore and fairy-tale studies scholarship, both sites are configured to make their visitors’ experience of the many wonder tales into a transformative journey, whether mythic or educational. Over time the two websites have also transformed. A small nonprofit, Endicott Studio has since 2008 reduced its activities but maintains its archives and a blog with news about Endicott-Studio-associated artists’ publications and awards, and currently has a presence on YouTube and Facebook. Strengthened somewhat by its association with Amazon.com, SurLaLune continues to expand its reach. The blog, which Heiner started in June 2009, is dizzyingly filled with news about fairy-tale books, films, illustrations, and more. Furthermore, Heiner has also started to publish print volumes in the SurLaLune Fairy-Tale series, including *Rapunzel and Other Maiden in the Tower Tales from Around the World* (2010), *The Frog Prince and Other Frog Tales from Around the World* (2010), *Bluebeard: Tales from Around the World* (2011), and *Cinderella: Tales from Around the World* (2012).

The fact that websites are doing more than providing a wealth of folktale and fairy-tale primary texts to those who can access the Internet is further brought home by the multiplying of online publications, like the English-language *Cabinet de Fées* and *Fairy Tale Review* (both of which have issues also available in print); discussion forums, such as SurLaLune’s, which in the October 2000–June 2011 period had 3,761 average visits per day and 23,391 total posts on over six hundred different topics; blogs, including Breezes from Wonderland by Harvard-based fairy-tale scholar Maria Tatar and the one Michael Lundell has maintained since 2007, *The Journal of 1001 Nights*; and Facebook groups like Fairy Tale Films Research. In addition to providing resources and opportunities for publication, exchanging ideas, and sharing news about fairy-tale related events (publications, performances, bits of news that make a fairy-tale association), the Internet is a significant site for the circulation of fairy-tale parodies and jokes.
I refer here to two examples. The cartoon, “Disney’s Desperate Housewives,” in the *Mother Goose and Grimm* series by Mike Peters, was originally published in syndicated newspapers on January 1, 2006, and since then has made its way into numerous websites and blogs. The humorous digital image “What Disney Princes Teach Men about Attracting Women,” a companion piece to the “What Disney Princesses Teach Women,” has been circulating at least since 2009 in a number of blogs. The message, no matter which Disney film is visually referenced, is “Be rich, charming, famous, and good looking.”

To my knowledge, the source of “What Disney Princes Teach Men” remains unknown so far, but the cartoon has elicited a great number of comments responding to its bonus question—“What are these guys’ names? (Aladdin doesn’t count)—as well as attesting to the success of its irony.

These parodies point to how Disney is key to the image of the fairy tale in popular cultural memory, and also to how people are questioning the authority (on their lives) of the Disneyfied fairy tales that sugarcoated the Brothers Grimm’s and Charles Perrault’s tales to produce a romantically enchanting happily ever after. What “popular cultural memory” identifies, after all, is “a repository of conventions and imagery that are continually reconstructed” (Kukkonen 2008, 261) in living culture. To make this very argument, Cathy Lynn Preston began her 2004 groundbreaking essay, “Disrupting the Boundaries of Genre and Gender: Postmodernism and the Fairy Tale,” by reproducing a 1999 e-mail joke, “Once upon a time . . . (offensive to frogs)” (Preston 2004, 198). This joke—which continues to circulate on the Internet, where it is sometimes labeled “the feminist version”—parodies the idea of the happily ever after in “The Frog Prince,” first by repeating some of its formulas and then by “breaking the fairy-tale frame” when, in the end, the princess enjoys her “repast of
lightly sautéed frog legs seasoned in a white wine and onion sauce” and comments sarcastically on the frog’s request for a kiss (Preston 2004, 199 and 198).

In drawing an analysis of how this joke and other popular-culture texts blur genre boundaries to break away, or not, from fairy-tale gender expectations, Preston suggests:

In this time and place, for many people the accumulated web of feminist critique (created through academic discourse, folk performance, and popular media) may function as an emergent and authoritative—though fragmented and still under negotiation—multivocality that cumulatively is competitive with the surface monovocality of the mainstream older fairy-tale tradition, particularly that tradition as it was mainstreamed into American culture by means of Perrault’s and the Grimm brothers’ editions of fairy tales, Disney movie adaptations, senior proms, romance novels, television shows like The Dating Game, and so on. (2004, 199–200)

I agree with her that in twenty-first-century North America, the popularization of feminist critiques and ideals is making a difference in people’s investment in and relation to the fairy-tale genre. The outcomes of this popularizing are mixed, and at times conservative or “faux” in popular culture; and I will be focusing on some of these investments in chapter 2 and when I discuss genre mixing in chapter 3. For now, the relevant observation is that whether individuals identify with feminism or not, there is a widespread sensibility to issues of gender in fairy tales, and we see this on and off the Internet.

Children in the early decades of the twenty-first century may very well be exposed to Shrek films, DreamWorks’ parodies of Disney, before viewing what baby boomers would consider fairy-tale “classics.” For some, this raises the question of whether the magic of fairy tales is over: “There’s something a little sad about kids growing up in a culture where fairy tales come pre-satirized, the skepticism, critique and revision having been done for them by the mama birds of Hollywood” (Poniewozik 2009, 396). But the multivocality of the fairy tale also means that it’s not just large entertainment businesses like Hollywood “puncturing” Disney and, perhaps more significantly, that a simple poking fun at or denigrating of Disney is not the only way in which people—producers and consumers, educators and parents, adults and children—are seeking to experience and transform the fairy tale. The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making by Catherynne M. Valente, an illustrated book for young adults (YA), begins, “Once upon a time, a girl named September grew very tired indeed of her father’s house, where she washed the same pink and yellow teacups and matching gravy boats every day, slept on the same embroidered
pillow, and played with the same small and amiable dog” (Valente 2011, 1). The book features the adventures of a clever and bold heroine, and, while funny, it is also filled with wonder. In May 2011, the book made the New York Times Best-seller List. What the somewhat surprising popularity of this YA novel shows is not clear as far as what children want or expect in a fairy tale, especially since several reviews foreground how this is also a good read for adults, but it does suggest once more that adults today are quite receptive to the changing fairy tale and that we are not done with fairy tales as narratives of emplotment, and especially not with transforming them.

Some of this new creative and critical consciousness is also evident in new-media texts adapting the fairy tale. For instance, Donna Leishman’s digital fairy tales, *Red Riding Hood* (2000), *The Bloody Chamber V1* (April 2002), and *The Bloody Chamber* (2003) require interactivity on the part of readers in order for the sequence of events to develop, though an ending or outcome is not guaranteed to occur; unlike games, this interactivity is not goal oriented and can be seen as “a commercially weak experimental art form” (Leishman 2000). In the credits for *Red Riding Hood*, Leishman thanks Angela Carter “for starting it all.” These new-media fairy tales incorporate music, a few words, and prime-color images that will yield different spatial and narrative movement depending on the user’s activity and focus; through the play of structure, the narratives become a coproduction of sorts involving Leishman, older fairy-tale texts, and individual performances of her digitized structures. Leishman, who has a PhD from the Glasgow School of Art and is interested in “the particular resonance found when teaming . . . folkloric content with contemporary technologies,” uses her platform “to show and test visual interactive and hybrid narratives structures” (www.6amhoover.com/index_flash.html); having experienced the narrative through “participatory re-action,” the interactive reader is invited to comment to the author via e-mail.

Similarly incorporating scholarly interests with the production of digitized fairy tales, but not with an avant-garde aesthetics, is the 2011 website and documentary project written and directed by Sarah Gibson, Re-Enchantment: Not All Fairy Tales Are for Children. Launched as a multiplatform experience via the Australian ABC online, television and radio programs in March 2011 and available internationally online a few months later, Re-Enchantment explores six popular fairy tales in an interactive enchanted forest to provide, in the words of its creators, “an immersive journey into the hidden meanings of fairy tales,” a journey that includes “animated objects and pathway, images, video, graphics, music and sound effects”; it is visually compelling, highly informative, psychologically enriching, and even “community building.” At the website’s gateway,
visitors are also informed: “there will be many ways for you to add your own stories, images, ideas and interpretations through using the CREATE and DISCUSS buttons. Visit the GALLERY at the heart of the forest to view artist exhibitions, contribute your own re-imaginings and meet other members of the Re-enchantment community” (www.abc.net.au/tv/re-enchantment/, accessed June 29, 2011). The gallery includes powerful reimaginings of fairy-tale heroines, for instance, by visual artists Paula Rego, Jazmina Chininas, and Yanagi Miwa. New-media and multimedial artistic and intellectual projects like the ones by Leishman and Gibson respond to a twenty-first-century understanding of the genre and have the potential—partly because of their built-in interactivity and discussion—for further transforming the (adult) public’s experience not only of fairy tales on the Internet but also of fairy tales more generally, their significance in narrative and social life.

One may think I have been looking at electronic cultural (re)production and reception through rosy fairy-tale glasses, but I did say “the Internet and globalization.” I realize the circulation of the fairy-tale texts I have discussed is bound to and structured by the circulation of multinational capital in ways that are “not democratically controlled and organized, even though consumers are highly dispersed” (Harvey 1989, 347). But based on such an understanding, I wanted first to foreground how these consumers “have more than a little to say in what is produced and what aesthetic values shall be conveyed” (Harvey 1989, 347) and how this has impacted public perception of and interaction with the genre of the fairy tale, in particular. In other words, this explosion of fairy-tale information and (critical) creativity in what Manuel Castells calls a “network society” operates within the logic and interests of capitalism and globalization but is not “reducible to the expression of such interests” (Castells 1996, 13), which moves me to reflect on twenty-first-century fairy-tale production and ask about the counterhegemonic projects it may be participating in.

I believe the twenty-first-century production and reception of fairy tales (or any other cultural texts) cannot be approached soundly without considering how they are conditioned by and respond to the promises and pressures of globalization. I realize the “world-altering transformations” that information technology brings about affect the economies of surveillance and knowledge in ways that privilege information over intellectual reflection and threaten to turn education into training of labor across nations, as well as the economy of labor across nations (Zuern 2010). In particular, the examples I provided above are, regardless of artists’ and editors’ individual intentions, to be understood as operating within the logic of hypercommodification and deregulation of capital flows since fairy-tale T-shirts, books, knowledge, and art are advertised and
sold online. Aiming at the flexible accumulation of capital, globalization works through multinational corporations, centralized banking, outsourcing, media conglomerates that dominate global markets, information and entertainment on demand, short-lived commodities, and the sale of services—all of which are naturalized on the Internet as the electronic age’s habitus.

Furthermore, within globalization, electronic culture (not the technology as such but its hegemonic business) enhances a type of space-time compression that is grounded in and reinforces social inequality on a global scale: “we can be everywhere faster and faster” is the fantasy that supports our sense of reality if we have access to the technology; in the proliferation of images, stories, and communication we experience, the distance from those who cannot materially move across borders or become producers on the Internet appears to shrink, while the reality of an economic and social gap is actually growing. Cultural production and distribution within this system are dominated by American conglomerates, like the Disney Corporation, which recently absorbed Pixar; has worldwide rights to distribute Studio Ghibli films by Hayao Miyazaki; has books, toys, videogames, and “worlds” franchises; and now owns Lucasfilm. This domination contributes to the social divide and the “global designs,” in Walter Mignolo’s (2002b) terms, that sustain it.

Jack Zipes offered a provocative and important critique in *Relentless Progress* of how the interests of globalization are reconfiguring not only children’s literature, fairy tales, and storytelling within the culture industry, but also the child as consumer and, more generally, human or social relations: “Globalization continues to terrorize and minimize the lives of most people on this globe while providing excessive forms of movement and consumption for privileged groups of people who set ever-changing norms that rationalize their choices and life styles” (Zipes 2009b, 147). My own analysis takes Zipes’s warnings seriously by (a) attending closely to specific struggles that are at work within fairy-tale cultural production and reception in the electronic age of consumer capitalism and globalization; (b) by asking what are the stakes of the fairy tale’s varied transformations today, for whom, and looking to what kind of social possibilities; (c) and by considering these texts’ conditions of production and reception within both socioeconomic and geopolitical frames of reference. However, as I have argued before (Bacchilega 2011), I do not apply the binary logic that Zipes has powerfully wielded to neatly separate out conservative fairy-tale “duplications” from progressive “revisions.”

Within a critical and historicizing framework, my analytical focus is on the multivocality of millennial and early twenty-first-century transformations of fairy tales, and because fairy tales have not always been for children only, and
quite visibly are not so nowadays, my focus is not on the fairy tale as children’s literature but on fairy-tale adaptations for adults and young adults. My aim is to reflect on the linked and yet divergent social projects that fairy-tale adaptations imagine, the multiple worlds they construct, the ideological moorings of their appeal and permutations, their putting into play ideas about the fairy-tale genre, the import of their generic mingling, their participation and competition in multiple genre and media systems, their translations of wonder. Questions of gender, genre, performance, coloniality, decolonization, and translation (or transcoding across cultures, epistemologies, media, genre systems, and languages) intersect in my analytical practice, which draws on fairy-tale studies, folklore and literature approaches, coloniality studies, and cultural studies.

While I devote some attention to television, comics, visual art, and drama, most of the fairy-tale adaptations I analyze in this book are literary and cinematic. My goal in adopting this selective scope of analysis is dual. One, these are the media platforms that have the broadest distribution and visibility within the fairy-tale web as well as the most power within the articulation of what the critical field of fairy-tale studies is and does. Two, I believe that conceptualizing a twenty-first-century “fairy-tale web” as a field of reading and writing practices has instigated me to ask new or at least different questions about fairy-tale literature and film.

**THE FAIRY-TALE WEB: INTERTEXTUAL PRACTICES, THE GEOPOLITICS OF INEQUALITY, AND (UN)PREDICTABLE LINKS**

In the previous section I outlined, from within a North-American-centered position, some changes in fairy-tale cultural production from the 1970s into the early twenty-first century; the following two sketches loosely adapt Pierre Bourdieu’s figuration of the nineteenth-century French literary field of production (1993, 49) in order to visualize this “transformation.” They are necessarily sketches, simplified and localized. For instance, the name “Angela Carter” stands in for “the Angela Carter generation” (Benson 2008, 2) of writers, Robert Coover, Salman Rushdie, A. S. Byatt, Margaret Atwood, who innovatively engaged with the fairy-tale genre in a sustained way; there is no mention of fairy-tale theater, television, or art, and neither is oral storytelling taken into account. The field of production outlined is clearly centered in an English-language environment, specifically American.

I venture sharing these sketches not as realistic images, but to highlight the multimedial or transmedial proliferation of fairy-tale transformations in recent
Plate 3: Field of Fairy-Tale Cultural Production (1970s).

Plate 4: Field of Fairy-Tale Cultural Production (early 2000s).
years and to show how the position of a text or producer can and does change, and so do audience dispositions to the genre. The contemporary production and reception of fairy-tale texts plays out a plurality of “dispositions” and “position takings,” in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, that compete with one another in the larger field of globalized cultural production, within and against the culture industry and its enchanting spectacles. But as much as Bourdieu sought to understand practices and histories, his figure outlines structures of power and does not convey the messiness of stories in actions. To respond critically to the multivalent currency of the fairy tale, we need to approach the genre’s social uses and effects in ways that account for how this multiplicity of position takings produces not ideological binaries, but complex alignments and alliances. Even more specifically, to ask who is reactivating a fairy-tale poetics of wonder and for whom, I find it helpful to think with a contemporary fairy-tale web.

The fairy-tale web as I conceptualize it is necessarily a twenty-first-century construct that accounts for, even depends to some extent on, the World Wide Web’s impact. As such, the “fairy-tale web” seemingly builds on fashionable terminology and is an easily graspable concept, but I do not mean it at all to be coterminous with the circulation of fairy tales on the Internet. The twenty-first-century fairy-tale web I envision is more a methodological field than a state of affairs. Analytically, it has a history, or better, histories—both as metaphor and reading practice—and, I hope to show, it has critical potential. Proposing the fairy-tale web as a general site for critical inquiry into the genre’s activity has a twofold purpose: to further the construction of a history and remapping of the genre that are not insulated from the power structures and struggles of capitalism, colonialism, colonality, and disciplinarity; and to envision current fairy-tale cultural practices in an intertextual dialogue with one another that is informed not only by the interests of the entertainment or culture industry and the dynamics of globalization in a “postfeminist” climate but also by more multivocal and unpredictable uses of the genre.

The association of storytelling with the practice and metaphor of weaving, and spinning of course, has a long tradition in literature. Examples are Ovid’s classic stories of Arachne’s weaving contest with Athena and of Philomela’s woven tapestry denouncing her rapist brother-in-law as well as Native American creation stories featuring Spider Grandmother and her singing. In language this metaphor appears in English when we “spin tales,” which have “threads,” and when we “weave a spell.” The weaving metaphor in modern books’ representation of fairy tales as children’s literature is exemplified through the image of old women, iconically Mother Goose, spinning flax and tales. The metaphor shows up in narrative studies, since Roland Barthes reminded us that “etymologically,
the text is a tissue, a woven fabric” and that “the plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers” (Barthes 1989, 168); and in fairy-tale studies, most prominently with Karen Rowe proposing that “strand by strand weaving, like the craft practiced on Philomela’s loom or in the hand-spinning of Mother Goose, is the true art of the fairy tale” in her landmark essay “To Spin a Yarn” (1999 [1986]). With varying emphases, the metaphor connects storytelling with women, intertextuality, and action or response in the face of unequal power relations of weavers, fabrication of meanings, and media or crafts. I aim to keep these links active in my exploration of the fairy-tale web, along with some ideas about what a spider’s web does in nature. The spider’s web catches prey, just as we get caught up in stories; it sparkles, the way fairy-tale magic or wonder does in successful performances. But it has a dilatory pattern and center because it emanates from one spinner, unlike the fairy-tale or any other intertextual web that depends on the activity, memories, locations, and responses of many individuals and institutions.  

When it comes to storytelling in practice, we are now very familiar with the idea that all texts—oral, written, visual, and social—participate in a web of intertextual relations. While intertextuality has been central to both oral poetics and textual criticism “since the latter part of the seventeenth century, when oral tradition became a key element in marking the juncture between premodern and modern epochs in the evolution of language and culture” (Bauman 2004, 1), thinking about intertextuality as a web implies a critical conception of it that originated with Julia Kristeva and was informed by Mikhail Bakhtin’s multivocality. Verbal intertextuality, to gloss Kristeva, is not the dialogue of fixed meanings or texts with one another; it is an intersection of several speech acts and discourses (the writer’s, the speaker’s, the addressee, earlier writers’ and speakers’), whereby meanings emerge in the process of how something is told and valued, where, to whom, and in relation to which other utterances. “Stories echo with other stories, with those echoes adding force to the present story. Stories are also told to be echoed in future stories. Stories summon up whole cultures” (Frank 2010, 37). To put it differently, and as I will further develop in chapter 1, “each act of textual production presupposes antecedent texts and anticipates prospective ones” (Bauman 2004, 4), and how that works is somewhat out of the control of any one individual or group.  

We cannot fully predict or control which stories mingle with, influence, anticipate, interrupt, take over, or support one another because every teller and recipient of a tale brings to it her or his own texts; we also cannot fully anticipate how a story, no matter how the teller or writer intends it, will act on its listeners/readers/viewers. Thus the readings of fairy-tale adaptations I will
propose in the following chapters are necessarily subjective, located, and provisional; they are not intended to finalize the adaptations’ meanings, but to pose questions and comment on specific links—historical, cultural, generic, figurative, ideological—activated by necessarily selective texts within the extended web.

As a reading practice, the twenty-first-century fairy-tale web reaches back in history and across space to intersect with multiple story-weaving traditions. Several scholars have shown how French, German, and British women’s fairy tales assumed a subaltern position within literary histories of the genre that revolve around the canonical figures of Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and Oscar Wilde. Tracing the history of the genre has meant highlighting the pioneering role of Giovan Francesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile in establishing the fairy tale as a print genre in sixteenth-century Venice and seventeenth-century Naples, respectively, or showing how fairy tales circulated ante nominem in ancient world and medieval Latin texts. Other researchers have contributed to our understanding of how tales in the oral tradition from the nineteenth century into the present popularize, talk back at, or diverge from the literary ones. And transnational research on The Arabian Nights has reconfigured it as a “huge narrative wheel” whereby stories “flowed with the traffic across the frontier of Islam and Christendom, a frontier that was more porous, commercially and culturally, than military and ideological history will admit” (Warner 2012, 9, 12). Today, the kind of multilayered and multiperspectival reading of the fairy tale that Angela Carter’s The Bloody Chamber inaugurated has become part of increasingly knowing adult readers’ expectations. A greater awareness of multiple traditions and voices, I will continue to emphasize, is not limited to academic circles but also informs varied contemporary fairy-tale practices in popular culture.

However, while the twenty-first-century fairy-tale web is complex, not all its links are equal since, as mentioned earlier, maintaining a socioeconomic and cultural divide is built into a for-profit globalizing economy of cultural production. The reach of small-press authors, independent filmmakers and artists as well as the cultural capital of genre fiction—with which the fairy tale is increasingly merged—are small compared to those of the multinational corporate media circuits. This inequality, I want to underscore here, extends to the construction of the fairy-tale web’s history and its geopolitics of knowledge. If “fairy tales are fiction’s natural migrants” (Teverson 2008, 54), historically their traffic has been regulated by commerce, religion, and prejudice—which is not always recognized and results in an unequal flow of tales and an unequal valorization of different tellers’ located knowledges. As a methodological field—whereby the web is “experienced in the activity of production” (Barthes 1989, 167), that is, of
reading, rather than as a received or preexisting object—it matters how through
the construction and reconstruction of a web of intertextuality we make mul-
tiple (hi)stories of the genre visible/narratable, or not; for instance, how we link
fairy tales with folktales.

In the introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, Angela Carter provoca-
tively insisted on weaving them into a “great mass of infinitely various narrative”
(1990, ix): “Ours is a highly individualized culture, with a great faith in the work
of art as a unique one-off, and the artist as an original, a godlike and inspired
creator of unique one-offs. But fairy tales are not like that, nor are their makers.
Who first invented meatballs? In what country? Is there a definitive recipe for
potato soup? Think in terms of the domestic arts. ‘This is how *I* make potato
soup’” (1990, x). But in actuality, the fairy tale comes to us today manufactured
and branded differently from the folktale. As Jan M. Ziolkowski writes, “fairy
tales have acquired their current niche in Western and even in world culture
thanks to the imprimatur of having been subsumed in collections that are not
at all anonymous or collective (as would be expected with folk literature) but
that are instead attached indissolubly to particular writers” (2006, 236). The
published tales associated with Charles Perrault, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm,
and Hans Christian Andersen have epitomized what is commonly understood
to be the fairy-tale genre and its “universal” appeal, as opposed to the outmoded
and simple “folktales,” which are instead associated with a specific kind of group
identity (ethnic, national, gendered). As this generally accepted narrative goes,
fairy tales develop out of folktales by turning a staple of narrative sustenance
into a chef’s signature dish, and the chef—no matter where the staple came
from—could only be in the literate classes and, more specifically, the literate
classes of Europe.

This popular construction of the fairy tale as a modern genre, then, reproduces
what Dipesh Chakrabarty identifies as the stagist historicism of European modern-
ity that “came to non-European peoples in the nineteenth century as somebody’s
way of saying ‘not yet’ to somebody else” (2007, 8). The genre of the “fairy tale”
is still generally understood as European and North American; the Middle East
constructed as the Orient has produced *The Thousand and One Nights*, wonder
tales that have become identified with exotic magic and fantasy; most of the rest of
the world has or had “folktales” that can become “fairy tales,” but are not yet. It is
from the vantage point of those who have “progressed” from listening to folktales
to reading fairy tales (to children) that storytelling and story power in general
are measured. Within this ethnocentric construction of magic, wonder, and en-
chantment, some peoples and some groups have imaginations that make art and
reach for symbolic truth, and others have limited inventiveness that is hopelessly
fantastic or obsolete and ultimately untrue. Furthermore, historically, the translation of oral stories from “exotic” places and cultures into European languages has meant that radically different narrative forms—including nonfiction—were reduced to and marketed as “fairy” stories. The fairy tale’s cultural capital today continues to accrue interest on the commodification and appropriation of both oral and non-European storytelling traditions.

I am pointing out that privileging the fairy tale over folktales or other wonder genres is a common conception that unself-consciously reproduces a logic in which modernity is coupled not only with colonialism and Orientalism but also with coloniality as a necessary component of capitalism. A critical concept Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano introduced in the 1980s, and Walter Mignolo (Argentine professor of literature and cultural anthropology) developed, “coloniality” refers to the conceptual and ideological “matrix of power” that “emerged in the Atlantic world in the sixteenth century and brought imperialism and capitalism together” (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2007, 109). Capitalism emerged from the massive appropriation of land and labor in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and later Oceania, thanks to and for the sake of capital accumulation. This understanding of colonialism as girding capitalism and modernity exposes how “a capitalist economy as we know it today could not have existed without the discovery of America” (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2007, 111). Coloniality is the ideological engine that in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century colonization of South America crystallized the orality versus writing opposition into a hierarchy where the colonized and so-called illiterate people are defined as inferior.

The racism that informs this coloniality of power is less about skin color, according to this argument, than about a “standard of humanity” and a “teleological framework of progress,” the framework that Jack Zipes also denounces in his book Relentless Progress (2009b), one that denies history and value to the social organizations, literacies, and knowledge of “the other.”

This has consequences, I believe, for how we approach the fairy-tale genre today. At the same time that it anticipated emancipatory social transformations for European aristocratic women and the middle classes, the emergence in seventeenth-century Europe of the fairy tale as a newly named print genre (conte de fées) depended not only on the fictionalization of so-called outmoded belief systems and ways of life—the transformation of “wonder” into modern “magic” within a more scientifically oriented Europe—but also on a politics of inequality that (in and out of Europe both) devalued orality as illiteracy, the quintessential sign of the premodern, at the very same time that it appropriated or simulated storytelling on the page and through translation. Constructing a rigidly literary history of the fairy tale, as Ruth B. Bottigheimer’s 2009 book, Fairy Tales: A
New History, does to the extreme, and assuming that “folktales are a universal and indigenous narrative form” that guarantees “cultural diversity” even when collected in English-language nineteenth-century books (Gottschall 2008, 177), are two sides of a discourse that ignores the material, ideological, and symbolic interdependence of these two genres (and their relations to more than one genre system as well). And this discursive regime unwittingly replicates and reinforces an ideological framing of language, narrative, and expressive culture that champions the modern in opposition to and at the expense of what and who is identified as the premodern: the illiterate peasant classes within Europe (see Bauman and Briggs 2003), and also the non-Europeans encountered through commerce, war, human trade, Orientalism, and colonialism. This is why I believe that the need to “provincialize” the Euro-American literary fairy tale has emerged as an important critical task for fairy-tale studies to pursue.

Critical reading and writing practices in the fairy-tale web can work to activate, rather than obliterate, these structures of power and geopolitical relations in our approach to fairy tales; thus I refuse to de-link the cultural production of European “fairy tales,” Arabian Nights fantasies, and “folktales” in print from a larger intertextuality of multiple genre systems and from the global dynamics of Orientalism and coloniality, both conjunctures of capitalism and colonialism. In this project, I link up with other scholars. Folklorist Sadhana Naithani’s research, for instance, has eloquently shown how colonialism and coloniality further impacted the construction of “folktale” collections from the colonies published in Europe during the nineteenth century. Examining in The Story-Time of the British Empire a number of South Asian and African colonial collections, Naithani concludes: “The oral narratives of the colonized were subject to complete change of identity in their international avatar in the English language” (2010, 96) as a result of the European collectors’ motives, methods, and theories, which overall deracinated tales from living cultures, ignored existing genre systems and social uses, and unequivocally made the orality/writing difference into a hierarchy. These structures of power impacted the circulation of folktales and fairy tales from and in the Caribbean and the Pacific (Seifert 2002; Bacchilega and Arista 2007; Teverson 2010; Do Rozario 2011). Collections of international fairy tales like Andrew Lang’s Fairy Books (1889–1910), Sara Hines suggests, “rather than simply corroborating nineteenth-century discourse on colonialism . . . embody the same possibilities for collection, possession, and exhibition prevalent throughout the period” (Hines 2010, 51) and were developed in the British colonies.

Just as Naithani forcefully shifts the attention of folklorists to understanding the production and reception of folktales in print within a transnational and
global framework, Donald Haase emphasizes how “decolonizing fairy-tale studies” requires resisting “the twin urges to universalize traditional narratives at the expense of their specific historical and sociocultural contexts and to generalize the European fairy tale as an ahistorical global genre” (2010, 29). Haase continues, and I agree, “The challenge, it seems to me, is . . . to understand [folktale and] fairy-tale production and reception precisely as acts of translation, transformation, and transcultural communication” (30). While this approach has been productive in transnational discussions of The Arabian Nights (Marzolph 2007; Warner 2012), there is much more to be done, especially to historicize these processes of transformation in relation to social structures of change, taking into account that if “British colonialism created a global cultural network that . . . is at the crux of current hybrid cultures [and] transformed the oral expressive of different people,” it was not for their sake or benefit (Naithani 2010, 7). Today, some storytellers in a range of media are reinterpreting this network from post-colonial and anticolonial perspectives, linking with one another in decolonizing and creolizing projects, working to unlearn Orientalism, and bringing new knowledges and critiques to and about the fairy-tale web.

In January 2010, The New Yorker’s online piece “Nalo Hopkinson’s Other World” featured images from five fabric designs Nalo Hopkinson created, introducing her as a writer of “science-fiction histories and science-fiction fairy tales.” About the making of her artwork for one of the designs, Still Rather Fond of Red, Nalo Hopkinson included the following information: “I incorporated elements of two historical images into a mixed-media collage that also includes paint, ink, a chunk of old costume jewellery, a snippet from a hand-crocheted lace doily, and my own drawing and writing.” More generally, in answering Nick Liptak’s questions about the relationship between her writing and her fabric designs, Hopkinson stated, “they are fuelled by the same passions and obsessions of mine,” and then proceeded to describe a project that she was in the process of working out:

It’s a digital collage that so far incorporates old, whimsical family photos of black people and old drawings of Indigenous peoples from the South Pacific and the Caribbean done by white visitors to those regions. Not sure where I’m going with it: something about the Caribbean (I’m Jamaican by birth and background, Canadian by naturalization); something about the globalizing conjunction of cultures that brought African bodies and South Pacific produce to Taino-Arawak-Carib lands; something about the representation of the Indigenous peoples who were already there; something about how rarely one sees historical images of black people made by us for ourselves in which we’re relaxing and cutting up for the camera. (Hopkinson and Liptak 2010)
As a storyteller in various media and genres, Nalo Hopkinson is one artist re-interpreting and subverting the colonial network and structures of power from an epistemological and enunciative location of “colonial difference” (Mignolo 2002b). This project is clearly at work, as I will develop in chapter 1, in her adaptations of “Little Red Riding Hood” and other folk and fairy tales.

What does *Still Rather Fond of Red* do? For me, it visually makes an in-your-face point: the association of wolves and a woman in red clothing may be universal, but this Red Riding Hood is black, and her encounters with “wolfie” are shaped by the politics of colonialism and also class. *Still Rather Fond of Red* further works to creolize “Red Riding Hood” in various ways: the plural provenance of the text’s materials contributes to making this point without reaching for authenticity, or establishing a history/story divide; and *Still Rather Fond of Red* has a history within Hopkinson’s work that is interwoven with the story of “Red Riding Hood” in the fairy-tale web.

The words in *Still Rather Fond of Red* are excerpted from “Riding the Red,” the opening story in Hopkinson’s collection *Skin Folk*: “I forgot wolfie. I forgot that riding the red was more than a thing of soiled rags and squalling newborns and . . . .” (2001, 3). This short story, which first appeared in *Black Swan, White Raven* edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (1997), did not update “Little Red Riding Hood” but powerfully relocated it in a contemporary sexual politics that highlights the materiality—rather than the fabled morality—of bodies, desires, and work. Hopkinson wrote “Riding the Red” at a Clarion Writing Workshop in 1995 and claims that it adapts “Red Riding Hood” to redeem “poor wolfie, so maligned” and to repower the metaphor and materiality of “riding the red” as menstruation. “I often get readers assuming that the grandmother in ‘Riding the Red’ is black, Caribbean, and speaking Jamaican English. She isn’t. Whatever her race, I imagine her as an English farming woman, somewhere circa 17th or 18th century” (Hopkinson’s blog, December 31, 2006). Later on, Hopkinson did write “Red Rider,” another first-person narrative, this time in Jamaican vernacular and set in the bush, as a monologue for black actors in Canada. In “Red Rider,” Granny is “an old farm woman in plain clothing, [who] sits in her home in a rocking chair, darning by the light of a kerosene lamp on a table beside her”; there is no wolf, but Brer Tiger; and her words are, “tell you true; I really forget Master Puss. I forget that riding the red is more than blood between your thighs and pickney a-bawl and . . . .” (2000, 13).

When we consider how *Still Rather Fond of Red* visually reiterates aspects of both “Riding the Red” and “Red Rider,” we can see that it does not replicate or replace either one in different media. I see these three Hopkinson adaptations of “Red Riding Hood” as intertexts that work to cross conceptual and geopolitical
horizons rather than to simply overturn a binary hierarchy. And yet Hopkinson ironically asserts that “having made the woman in this collage a black woman, I figure I’ll never be able to convince some people now that ‘Riding the Red’ isn’t written in Jamaican English” (Nalo Hopkinson’s blog, July 21, 2007). A lot will depend not only on where cultural production is located but also on where and from which knowledge systems, cultural **habitus**, and critical agendas the reader or interpreter accesses the fairy-tale web. This resonates with the multivocality of this web and also cautions that my readings in this book are necessarily limited by my positionality in accessing the fairy-tale web.

**READING ADAPTATIONS IN THE FAIRY-TALE WEB: A VARIED POLITICS OF WONDER**

Within the globalized economy of the early twenty-first century, fairy tales are produced and experienced as intertextual, multivocal, and transmedial cultural practices that individually and in relation to one another seem to put into action, not necessarily the complexities of feminist or other social critiques but a complex sense of what fairy tales do, a more generalized awareness that the fairy tale as a genre is not simple or one. By sketching the historical transformation of the fairy tale since the 1970s as complex and contradictory, and by insisting on the importance of weaving the genre’s polymorphic intertextuality and history with narratives of a global economy, my aim has been to make a critical intervention in the field of fairy-tale studies that immerses, as thoroughly as I can, the practice of reading intertextually in social changes. Within this framework, the rest of the book seeks to develop the following interrelated propositions and critical questions about the twenty-first-century fairy-tale web as a network of reading and writing practices.

1. In the twenty-first-century fairy-tale web, links are “hypertextual,” as Donald Haase put it, that is, not referring back to one center (2006). The authority of the canonized Perrault-Grimms-Disney triad is still at stake in the re-creation of fairy tales, but it is no longer the central pretext for their adaptations in literature, film, or other media. The existence of competitive authorities and the awareness of multiple traditions—in terms of genre and gender—that feminist and other critiques have brought into popular culture since the 1970s has, I argue, affected power dynamics within and among fairy-tale texts.

2. This proliferation of adaptations of and twists on the fairy tale, however, does not guarantee the articulation of new social possibilities for the genre. Neither does recognizing the genre’s ideologically nuanced variability and
multiplicity of traditions in today’s fairy-tale web exonerate cultural critics and fairy-tale scholars from reflecting on its hegemonic uses. How has feminism impacted the production and reception of fairy tales in a globalized “culture of spectacle”? When does parody serve consumerism? In the culture industry, the signature mark of the fairy-tale genre continues to be its “happily-ever-after” ending. Getting there, to the HEA (as we tag it in my classes), involves magic, and ritually marking the HEA are the wedding and the beautiful bride. For the fairy-tale alliance of fantasy and romance to “sell,” it is however increasingly camouflaged in “faux feminism” (Pershing and Gablehouse 2010, 151) or dressed up in generic remix.

3. The contemporary proliferation of fairy-tale transformations in convergence culture does mean that the genre has multivalent currency, and we need to think of the fairy tale’s social uses and effects in increasingly nuanced ways while asking who is reactivating a fairy-tale poetics of wonder and for whom. Even in mainstream fairy-tale cinema today, there is no such thing as the fairy tale or one main use of it. This multiplicity of position-takings does not polarize ideological differences, but rather produces complex alignments and alliances in the contemporary fairy-tale web.

4. Within this web of fairy-tale practices, the authority of the genre and its gender representations has become more multivocal, especially in the production of small-press literature and in alliance with genre fiction. English-language women writers like Emma Donoghue, Francesca Lia Block, Terri Windling, Aimee Bender, Kelly Link, Margo Lanagan, Theodora Goss, and Nalo Hopkinson share the fairy tale as part of their storied or “invisible” luggage, but they carry it differently from the Angela Carter generation (Bacchilega 2008; Orme 2010a; Carney 2012). This historical transformation is key to enabling some fairy-tale fiction writers, regardless of gender, to articulate desires and imagine possibilities that were marginalized in or excluded from the genre’s predominantly heteronormative and Western canon.

5. One of the more prevalent transformations of the fairy tale today, in the culture industry as well as in counterhegemonic practices, has to do with genre mixing, placing the fairy tale in new dynamics of competition and alliance with other genres. I pay attention to this in every chapter. From the understanding that “instead of being ‘in’ a genre, texts are transformative instantiations of genres” (Frow 2007, 1633) and that different genre systems compete as sites of knowledge production, I am interested in what kind of trouble mixing genres makes and for whom. I ask three complementary sets of questions.
• What are the stakes of mixing fairy tales with other—realistic and supernatural—genres within a Euro-American economy of genres? I will suggest that in some cases, the mix seeks to bolster the fantasy of globalized capital in which we live; in other genre-bending cases, the fairy tale may be reinterpreted as traumatic emplotment of individual lives as well as social life, or wonder-producing opportunity for survival (chapters 2 and 3).

• What are the stakes of mixing fairy tales with non-Western poetics of wonder in a global economy where fairy-tale magic is the norm? In remixes that are enabled by specific historical circumstances, postcolonial concerns and transnational dynamics are both hybridizing and creolizing the fairy tale in popular culture. Unlike hybridity, the generalized grafting process that characterizes creativity where cultures clash, creolization brings about the rearticulation of the fairy tale’s rhetorical world mapping from the perspective of local histories and oppressed traditions, whereby the “other” is positioned as the producer of decolonizing knowledges (chapters 1 and 3).

• And what are the stakes of mixing Arabian Nights magic within an economy of genres where the Euro-American fairy tale is the norm? To what uses are Orientalizing and de-Orientalizing practices of translation and adaptation put in today’s popular culture? The pressure on these questions is particularly strong in a post-9/11 world where the violent rhetoric of an us/them binary has gone viral. I am interested in considering whether and how Arabian Nights remixes and remediations, which tend to cluster around visually powerful tropes, may reinforce or destabilize stereotypes (chapter 4).

6. While for some the fairy tale functions as a form of escape from reality, others see it as a form of enchantment that epitomizes, to borrow from Slavoj Žižek and refer back to the Bloomingdale’s window display, some of the fantasies that are at work in producing our shared sense of reality. The varied poetics of fairy-tale transformation, genre bending, remix, and creolization that are emerging into the twenty-first century from specific, historically situated, intertextual and intercultural dynamics should not be folded into a narrative of genre continuity that privileges formal strategies. What is the transformative social potential of the varied poetics of wonder that is emerging from different sites in the fairy-tale web? How are readers as consumers and interpreters contributing to this social transformation of the fairy tale? And what are our responsibilities
as fairy-tale scholars and cultural critics in this globalized electronic culture that continues to thrive on social inequality?

7. In considering these dynamics and questions, I do not aim to classify adaptations or to authorize a single contemporary fairy-tale poetics and politics of wonder; instead, I hope to explore the transformative possibilities and limitations that fairy tales as one wonder genre among others hold for the human imagination today, in a world that has been characterized as disenchanted.