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How? (Audiences)

Unlike Don Quixote's books, digital media take us to a place where we can act out our fantasies. With a telnet connection or a CD-Rom drive, we can kill our own dragons.

—Janet M. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*

Movies not only used different materials, they had different cooking times for their great soups, and had to be consumed in public alongside eight hundred other people as opposed to by one solitary diner. A film was closer to the simulated excitement of a soccer stadium while books were a meditative and private act—you sat down to read one or write one and the first thing you did was ignore the rest of the world. Whereas film had various sous-chefs and a studio and a market to deal with. A book could be secret as a canoe trip, the making of a film more like the voyage of *Lord Jim's* Patna—uncertain of ever reaching its destination with a thousand

pilgrims on board and led by a morally dubious crew. But somehow, magically, it now and then got to a safe harbour.

—Michael Ondaatje on *The English Patient*, novel and film

The Pleasures of Adaptation

Obviously, the creation and reception of adaptations are inevitably going to be intertwined—and not only in commercial terms. Because audiences react in different ways to different media—thanks to social and material differences, as Ondaatje imaginatively suggests—the possible response of the target audience to a story is always going to be a concern of the adapter(s). Radio, television, and film have radically increased our exposure to stories and therefore, some claim, our ability to comprehend them (K. Thompson 2003: 79). Arguably, these media have also increased our appetite for and delight in stories. But what is the real source of the pleasure derived from experiencing adaptations *as adaptations*?

In Chapter 1, I suggested that the appeal of adaptations for audiences lies in their mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty. Novelist Julian Barnes satirizes part of this appeal in *England, England* when his French theorist character describes the joys of a theme park as its “*rivalisation of reality*”: “We must demand the replica, since the reality, the truth, the authenticity of the replica is the one we can possess, colonize, reorder, find *jouissance* in” (1998: 35). While parodying various French theorists, Barnes also puts his finger on one of the sources of the pleasure of replication—and adaptation—for audiences. Freudians too might say we repeat as a way of making up for loss, as a means of control, or of coping with privation. But adaptation as repetition is arguably not a postponement of pleasure; it is in itself a pleasure. Think of a child’s delight in hearing the same nursery rhymes or reading the same books over and over. Like ritual, this kind of repetition brings comfort, a fuller understanding, and the confidence that comes with the sense of knowing what is about to happen next.

But something else happens with adaptations in particular: there is inevitably difference as well as repetition. Consider the words of librettist, playwright, and adapter for musicals and films, Terrence McNally:

“The triumph of successful operas and musicals is how they reinvent the familiar and make it fresh” (2002: 19). The same could be said of any successful adaptation. To focus on repetition alone, in other words, is to suggest only the potentially conservative element in the audience response to adaptation. Noting that many modern operas (e.g., *The Great Gatsby* [1999]) have been based on novels that had earlier been made into films, Joel Honig has blamed the need for the adapting mediation of film on the opera audience’s desire for “warmed-over comfort-food, prepackaged in Hollywood” (2001: 22). But perhaps the real comfort lies in the simple act of almost but not quite repeating, in the revisiting of a theme with variations.

Others argue, instead, that it is a particular kind of story that provides the comfort that explains the popularity of adaptations: the familiar linear and realist story-line “founded upon the principles of narration doubtlessly begun with Aesop, if not Moses, and polished by Walter Scott and Balzac” (Axelrod 1996: 201). Such a story-line has been seen as the appeal of formulaic genres of film adaptation, especially those that use what one critic refers to as Aristotle’s notion of plot combined with Joseph Campbell’s myth of the hero’s quest (Axelrod 1996: 202). Adventure videogames clearly play with this same kind of story-structure as well, but we have seen that the story itself is less important than the special effects universe to be entered and experienced or simply the gaming process itself—or at least this seems to be the case for male players.

Girls in the 7- to 12-year-old age range, it would appear, “tend to prefer narrative play and are attracted to narrative complexity” (Laurel 2005). Drawing upon interviews with 1,100 children and questionnaires completed by 10,000 children, Brenda Laurel notes that the vast majority of creators of fan fiction and video are female, suggesting that the fascination with story continues into adulthood. The stories that young women prefer to see adapted into game format, she shows, are those, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, that overlap somewhat with their own lives and their personal issues with parents and siblings and with being accepted at school. Boys of the same age are more likely to be embarrassed by things too close to their own lives and escape instead into superhero exotic action scenarios. It seems that 81 percent of the

more violent games are played by males, whereas females prefer role-playing games, like *Sims*, with more social interaction or else games that allow instant immersion in a story-line (e.g., an adaptation like *Nancy Drew*).

Another name for adaptation audiences here is obviously “fans,” and the community they constitute is consciously nurtured by adapters, who realize that young women in particular need to be able to “appropriate cultural material to construct personal meaning” (Laurel 2005); this is why the interactive mode can be so attractive to them and why stories, in particular, are central to their pleasure in adaptations. From early childhood onward, as I can testify from experience, girls create imaginative worlds, complete with their own history, geography, people, and rules of behavior, and they inhabit these imaginatively. How different is sending e-mails to game characters, on bulletin boards set up by the adapting companies of course, from making up stories with and for their Barbie dolls? In 2004, Mattel, the Barbie doll’s creators, decided to exploit this latter pastime and offered DVDs that are a kind of adaptation, for they bring the “Barbie world” to life “through storytelling,” as explained on their Web site (<http://www.yenra.com/barbie-dvds/>): “Barbie will set the stage and then cue the girls’ imaginations to take the story to the next level”—which turns out to be developing “a deeper connection with the Barbie brand.” Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that experimental Irish composer Jennifer Walshe was driven to create her musical puppet opera for Barbie and her play friends: as its title (*XXX_LiveNude Girls*) suggests, this work explores the darker side of girls’ narrative relationship to their dolls.

Although many of these theories and examples suggest pleasures tainted with a too conservative familiarity, not to mention commodification and commercialization, there are still other reasons for the positive reaction to the repetition with variation that is adaptation: what Leo Braudy, in discussing film remakes, calls “unfinished cultural business” or the “continuing historical relevance (economic, cultural, psychological) of a particular narrative” (1998: 331). Part of this ongoing dialogue with the past, for that is what adaptation means for audiences, creates the doubled pleasure of the palimpsest: more than one text is experienced—and knowingly so. In Tony Richardson’s 1963

cinematic adaptation of Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749), we recognize the novel’s manipulating and controlling narrator in the film’s disembodied voice-over that ends scenes just in time to prevent indecency or ironically explicates character motivation.

This is the intertextual pleasure in adaptation that some call elitist and that others call enriching. Like classical imitation, adaptation appeals to the “intellectual and aesthetic pleasure” (DuQuesnay 1979: 68) of understanding the interplay between works, of opening up a text’s possible meanings to intertextual echoing. The adaptation and the adapted work merge in the audience’s understanding of their complex interrelations, as they might in the 1997 BBC television adaptation of *Tom Jones* when we see a character called “Henry Fielding” self-reflexively enacting the narrator’s role, but being ironically cut off mid-sentence by the real controlling figure, the director, when he digresses from the story-line selected for that particular filmed version.

In direct contrast to this elitist or enriching appeal of adaptation is the pleasure of accessibility that drives not only adaptation’s commercialization but also its role in education. As noted earlier, teachers and their students provide one of the largest audiences for adaptations. Many of us grew up with the *Classics Illustrated* comics or the animated cartoon versions of canonical literature. Today’s young people are just as likely to interact with CD-ROM adaptations of either children’s or adult literature. In 1992 *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* offered half-hour versions of the major plays aimed at a 10- to 15-year-old audience and was accompanied by print texts published by Random House that differed, however, from the films. The films obviously made major cuts in the play texts, but retained their language. The style of animation was deliberately not Disney-like. Interestingly the stories seem to have been considered central, and so voice-overs were used to keep the action moving, thereby in a sense translating drama into narrative or showing into telling. There were, however, strong intertextual echoes of other Shakespearean films in the editing and in the appearances of characters and sets, prompting one critic to suggest that the animations prepared students for films of Shakespeare, not for the plays themselves (Osborne 1997: 106).

Adults, of course, often “censor” adaptations, deciding that some are appropriate for children and others not. Or else they change the stories in the process of adapting them to make them appropriate for a different audience. For instance, *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004) is a film adaptation of part of three books by Daniel Handler about the Baudelaire orphans. Although the books are aimed at preteens and adolescents, the film wanted and knew it would attract a broader audience and so made the very dark tales considerably brighter, in part by using a narrating Lemony Snicket who can assure younger children that everything will be okay in the end.

Adaptations of books, however, are often considered educationally important for children, for an entertaining film or stage version might give them a taste for reading the book on which it is based. This is what novelist Philip Pullman calls the “worthiness argument” (2004). Although most of the fans of the Harry Potter films will already have read the books, Pullman is not wrong, and this get-them-to-read motivation is what fuels an entire new education industry. The new film adaptation of C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is accompanied by elaborate teaching aids, from lesson plans to Web-based packages to material for after-school clubs. Today, hardly a book or a movie aimed at school-aged children does not have its own Web site, complete with advice and materials for teachers.

Novelizations of films, including what are called “junior” novelizations for younger viewers, are also often seen as having a kind of educational—or perhaps simply curiosity—value. If Internet postings are to be believed, fans of films enjoy their novelizations because they provide insights into the characters' thought processes and more details about their background. And, after all, that is what novels have always done well. Web site narratives (e.g., Max Payne) or even films (e.g., *Final Fantasy*) about videogames can offer the same kind of information in a different format. They all increase audience knowledge about and therefore engagement in the “back story” of the adaptation. These various supplements are sometimes released before the films or games and therefore generate anticipation. Not only do these kinds of adaptations provide more details, especially about adapted characters' inner lives, but in the process they also help foster audience/reader identification

with those characters. They might also add scenes that do not appear in the screenplay or film versions, perhaps offering a minor character's perspective on the action. The novel often explains plot and motivation elements that remain ambiguous in the film: in Arthur C. Clarke's novelization of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (“based on a screenplay by Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke”), the author actually allows us into the consciousness of the computer Hal.

Not everyone approves of novelizations, of course: for many they are simply commercial grabs, unmitigated commodifications, or inflationary recyclings. As we have seen, gamers are equally suspicious of games with direct successful movie links, seeing them as “transparent attempts to cash in on successful movie franchises with products that lack much in the way of compelling gameplay of their own” (King and Krzywinska 2002b: 7). But economic diversification is the name of the game: to use White Wolf Publishing as one example, its pen-and-paper role-playing games have been licensed to videogames, television series, action figures, comic books, interactive media events, arcade games, and even professional wrestlers. Although all of these different incarnations feed audience curiosity and fan instincts, not all are fully adaptations as defined here and as explored further in the concluding chapter. All, however, make money; audiences exist or can be created for them all.

Adaptations have come under the scrutiny not only of money makers but also of the censors, for they too have audiences in mind. This was certainly true in earlier centuries for dramatic and operatic adaptations for the stage. We have also seen that the Hollywood Production Code (1930–66), drafted by Father Daniel Lord, S.J., and sponsored by Will Hayes of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, decreed that movies must not lower the audience's moral standards by showing any sympathetic representations of evil, crime, or sin. Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos—all were deemed capable of corrupting the movie-going mass audience. Instead, it was decided, people should see edifying religious dramas and patriotic stories. When Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* was adapted to the screen in 1929, it was already a hit on Broadway and a publishing success. But this was a story about an illegitimate birth,

illicit love, and an army desertion, and it was a critique of war. It portrayed the Italian army anything but favorably. Needless to say, many compromises needed to be made before *A Farewell to Arms* could come to the screen, including so many changes to the plot and the character motivation that Hemingway refused to endorse it.

Closely related to these moral and educational concerns for audiences is the idea that television adaptations of literature, in particular, can act as substitute vehicles for bringing literature to a larger public, cutting away the class differences inherent in access to literacy and literature. But this does not always work in practice: the BBC's *A TV Dante* (1990), co-directed by Peter Greenaway and artist Tom Philips, is a case in point. Although television implies an address to a mass audience, this show remained "recondite," incomprehensible without explanatory notes (Taylor 2004: 147). The other major danger involved in the motivation to adapt for a wider audience is that a certain responsibility is placed on the adapters to make the "substitute" experience "as good as, or better than (even if different from) that of reading original works" (Wober 1980: 10). Would this experience be the same, however, for the audience that knows the adapted text as it is for the one that does not? How, in short, are adaptations appreciated *as adaptations*?

Knowing and Unknowing Audiences

When either the voice-over narrator or the protagonist of Sally Potter's film, *Orlando* (1994), addresses the audience, a kind of negotiation is set up between Virginia Woolf's text and our knowledge of it and its garrulous narrating biographer (Shaughnessy 1996: 50). If we know the adapted text, I prefer to call us "knowing," rather than the more common descriptors of learned or competent (Conte 1986: 25). The term "knowing" suggests being savvy and street-smart, as well as knowledgeable, and undercuts some of the elitist associations of the other terms in favor of a more democratizing kind of straightforward awareness of the adaptation's enriching, palimpsestic doubleness. If we do not know that what we are experiencing actually *is* an adaptation or if we are not familiar with the particular work that it adapts, we simply experience the adaptation as we would any other work. To experience it *as an adaptation*, however, as we have seen, we need to recognize it as such and

to know its adapted text, thus allowing the latter to oscillate in our memories with what we are experiencing. In the process we inevitably fill in any gaps in the adaptation with information from the adapted text. Indeed, adapters rely on this ability to fill in the gaps when moving from the discursive expansion of telling to the performative time and space limitations of showing. Sometimes they rely too much, and the resulting adaptation makes no sense without reference to and foreknowledge of the adapted text. For an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be so for both knowing and unknowing audiences.

If we know the basic story outline of Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance, we are likely to fill in the gaps necessitated by the distillation of the plot in the opera or ballet versions. When the complication of music is added, it certainly seems to help if the story is a familiar one. As Terrence McNally puts it, "Music adds such an enormously new dimension to a piece, it's enough for any audience (or critic) to absorb at one hearing. If the characters and situation are familiar, listeners can relax and let the music take them somewhere new and wonderful" (2002: 24). Nevertheless, it is probably easier for an adapter to forge a relationship with an audience that is not overly burdened with affection or nostalgia for the adapted text. Without foreknowledge, we are more likely to greet a film version simply as a new film, not as an adaptation at all. The director, therefore, will have greater freedom—and control.

Known adaptations obviously function similarly to genres: they set up audience expectations (Culler 1975: 136) through a set of norms that guide our encounter with the adapting work we are experiencing. Unlike plagiarism or even parody, adaptation usually signals its identity overtly: often for legal reasons, a work is openly announced to be "based on" or "adapted from" a specific prior work or works. If we know the work(s) in question, we become a knowing audience, and part of what hermeneutic theory calls our "horizon of expectation" involves that adapted text. What is intriguing is that, afterward, we often come to see the prior adapted work very differently as we compare it to the result of the adapter's creative and interpretive act. In the move from print to performance, in particular, characters (hobbits) and places (Middle Earth) become incarnate in a way that conditions how we

imagine them in a literary work like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* when we return to reread it. Our imaginations are permanently colonized by the visual and aural world of the films. But what if we have never read the novels upon which they are based? Do the novels then effectively become the derivative and belated works, the ones we then experience second and secondarily? For unknowing audiences, adaptations have a way of upending sacrosanct elements like priority and originality.

If the adapted work is a canonical one, we may not actually have direct experience of it, but may rely on "a generally circulated cultural memory" (Ellis 1982: 3). Either way, we tend to experience the adaptation through the lenses of the adapted work, as a kind of palimpsest. It is said that producer David Selznick did not worry about adhering to the details of the novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) when adapting it in the 1940s because an audience survey determined that few had read it; however, he did worry about the details of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *Rebecca* (1940), because the novels had been recent best-sellers (in Naremore 2000b: 11–12). The disappointment of the fans of the DC comic book *Catwoman* was clear in the responses to Pitof's 2004 film, which kept only the name and added a new cast of characters in a new setting. Critics tended to blame the screenwriters (John Brancato, Michael Ferris, John Rogers, and Theresa Rebeck), calling them the "committee, the gang of four" who "declawed the poor creature" (Groen 2004: R1).

Knowing audiences have expectations—and demands. It may be less, as Béla Balázs tried to insist, that "a masterpiece is a work whose subject ideally suits its medium" and therefore cannot be adapted (qtd. in Andrew 1976: 87) than a case of a "masterpiece" being a work a particular audience cherishes and resists seeing changed. Different adaptations solicit different audiences or fan communities: Harry Potter fans may not be Tolkien fans. When a film or musical announces itself as an adaptation of a particular work, those who like that work turn out for the adaptation, often to discover that only the name remains and that there is little resemblance to anything treasured and thus expected. Here is an early (1928) description of the problems with this process from the other end:

A favorite money-saving habit is to make a picture that is very like a well-known popular novel or play, and then grow timorous at this similarity when the picture is almost completed, and buy the story which was used as a model. The title of the bought and popular tale is then used, but it usually happens that the similarity is not really so great as the nervous producer, haunted by dreams of plagiarism suits, first thought. (Bauer 1928: 294)

The more rabid the fans, the more disappointed they can potentially be, however. As Christopher Columbus, director of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001) put it: "People would have crucified me if I hadn't been faithful to the books" (qtd. in Whipp 2002: H4).

There are also other dimensions to this "knowingness" of the audience of adaptation, in addition to the awareness of the specific adapted text(s). One such dimension is treated in detail in the next chapter, and that is context—in cultural, social, intellectual, and aesthetic terms. But this dimension overlaps with another kind of knowing; that is, about what Chapter 2 called the form of the adaptation and therefore the expectations created by it. In terms of genre switching in adaptation, we need only think of the different implied "pacts" made with the reader of autobiography and the reader of comics or graphic novels. Philippe Lejeune's idea of the "autobiographical pact" between reader and author is that we accept that an autobiography is a retrospective narrative by a real person about his or her own life (1975: 14). This pact undergoes an odd twist when Harvey Pekar's own blue-collar life stories become the *American Splendor* comic books drawn by R. Crumb and others and from there get adapted to the stage and screen. In terms of medium, musicals and operas both offer "drama unfolding through song" (Lachiusa 2002: 14), but they have different artistic traditions and, often, different audiences. As musical composer Michael John Lachiusa put it, the musical genre is "the child of European opera tradition transplanted to America" (14), mixing high-brow and low-brow because of its cross-fertilization with ethnic immigrant theater, music, and dance (see Most 2004).

Medium change therefore involves the same kinds of expectation shifts. For example, the 2002 film version of Oscar Wilde's play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, directed and adapted by Oliver Parker,

exchanges the restricted drawing-room sets of the staged version for the streets of London and a grand country estate. Why? Because movie audiences expect the film to have local color and to be shot on location, with characters moving through real space. After several decades, British televised versions of classic novels now generate in their viewers expectations about style, “sumptuous, beautiful, pictorial images, strung together smoothly, slowly and carefully” (Cardwell 2002: 80). These expectations are not really dictated by the adapted literary texts, but rather by the television medium’s desire to signal “artistry” through specifically cinematic markers of “quality”: “the use of long-take, extreme long shots of grand buildings ... [,] the preference for slow, smooth tracking shots ... [,] their use of a certain type of elegant, decorous or wistful orchestral music on their soundtracks” (Cardwell 2002: 80). The institutionalization of a medium, in other words, can in itself create expectations: a movie of an opera may be allowed to differ from the staged version simply because of the audience’s knowledge of its popular or mass dissemination (Leicester 1994: 247).

Readers obviously have different expectations than do spectators at a play or film or interactive participants in the new media. Showing is as different from telling as it is from interacting with a story. But even within one of these modes—especially showing—there are, as we have already seen, important distinctions to be made. Knowing stage audiences have different expectations and demands than knowing film or television audiences, as the hybrid case of Ingmar Bergman’s *Magic Flute* reveals. The Swedish Radio commissioned this “production” of Mozart’s opera, which became an “adaptation,” for its golden jubilee. It was shown on television on New Year’s Day 1975 in Sweden and later released as a film. It is a self-reflexive presentation of a staged production in a studio reconstruction of the famous eighteenth-century Drottningholm Theatre. The camera records not only the stage action but also the audience responses and the actors’ activities backstage. Arguably, fans of the opera, watching either on TV or on film, might respond differently from others, as they watch their own rapt attention and enjoyment being represented by the filmed audience. Swedes who watched it on television as a family show may have been pleased with the charm and humor of the opera itself and of the film of it. Fans

of Bergman’s other films might have been disappointed at this existentialist director’s rather sunny version of Mozart’s most metaphysical opera, despite its clear citation of earlier Bergman motifs (Tambling 1987: 132–34). All “screen operas,” however, have different viewing conditions and expectations than either staged operas or normal films, thanks to the guiding and controlling role of the camera and the differences in scale and level of distance/proximity (Citron 2000: 12–13).

Interactive art forms too involve distinct sets of expectations—at least for knowing audiences. To an audience mostly trained on private or public computers in the form of ATMs or information kiosks, being faced with an interactive electronic installation work in a public space like a museum may cause confusion and even alarm. Artist Ken Feingold admitted he was unhappy about how people engaged with one of his computerized works in a gallery because he had to accept that they expected “unambiguous” interaction: “It actually disappointed me tremendously, as I expected the audience, and the audience turned participants, to bring to interactive works the same capacity for abstraction, metaphor and ambiguity that is well-deployed and comfortable when viewing painting, or other artworks” (2002: 124). Audiences need to learn—that is, to be taught—how to be knowing audiences in terms of medium. The expectations of videogame players, on the contrary, certainly include being made participants, being allowed to enter the narrative and visual world of, usually, a film, and being able to enact its logic both physically and cognitively.

Differently knowing audiences bring different information to their interpretations of adaptations. For example, film buffs likely see new movies through the lenses of other ones. Watching Kenneth Branagh’s 1989 film adaptation of *Henry V*, they are probably going to see it as much as an adaptation of Laurence Olivier’s famous 1944 film as one of Shakespeare’s plays, translating the early version’s shining clean world, with its self-conscious and stylized theatricalism, into the dank and dirty one of filmic realism. From the dark days of the end of World War II to the time of post-Falklands postimperialism, the message to British audiences changed, or so the differing vision of the two adapting actor-directors would suggest. Similarly, audiences that are well versed in British cinema might argue that Sally Potter’s *Orlando* (1994)

was adapting *that* tradition—the films of Derek Jarman, Peter Greenaway, and David Lean—as much as Virginia Woolf’s literary work. Potter self-reflexively—and yet still realistically—suggests as much by having Orlando’s daughter (not a son, as in the book) take a film camera in hand at the end and become both subject and object. There is yet another way of reading this scene: this female child may not possess any property (the purpose of having a son in the novel), but she, like Potter and her generation of female filmmakers, does possess the power of the male gaze that women were said to have lost with the medium of film (see Mulvey 1975). And, as Sophie Mayer (2005: 173–86) has explored at length, the filming girl and her film together solicit a female gaze from the audience: changing the adapted text here leads to a change in the adapting medium, defying audience expectations.

Similarly, although it is an American film, Philip Kaufman’s adaptation of Milan Kundera’s Czech novel, translated as *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988) (screenplay by Jean-Claude Carrière), is arguably a response to Czech New Wave cinema as much as to the novel itself. But only a film expert might understand that level of intertextual reference. Or, to use a more straightforward example, how would we respond to an adaptation in the form of a contemporary musical, if we had only ever seen on the musical stage nineteenth-century European operas? What would we make of the amplified voices, the hyperactive choreography, the scaled-down musical resources? Genre and media “literacy,” as it is often called, can be crucial to the understanding of adaptations *as adaptations*.

There are still other aspects to this knowingness to be considered in theorizing about the product and process of adaptation. If the audience knows that a certain director or actor has made other films of a particular kind, that intertextual knowledge too might well impinge on their interpretation of the adaptation they are watching. It can also make for amusing in-jokes and ironies. In the novelization of *Spider-Man* by Peter David (2002), Mary Jane finds Harry reading *Interview with a Vampire*. She tells him she has not read it, but she saw the movie and the little girl in it “creeped” her out. The joke here is that Mary Jane is played in the film by Kirsten Dunst, who played that creepy little girl, Claudia, in the movie adaptation of Anne Rice’s novel. Sometimes, of

course, an audience member may know too much: as an instance, Alan Sinyard found himself irritated, while watching the film *Morte a Venezia*, by Visconti’s use of Mahler’s *adagietto* from the Fifth Symphony, instead of the more obvious and appropriate choice of the Ninth Symphony, which is about death. His argument was that in moving from tragedy to triumph, the Fifth offers musical associations that run “contrary to the drift of the film”: “Its inappropriateness is crippling to a film that prides itself on its cultural refinement” (1986: 129), he asserted.

But what if we do not know Mahler’s music this well? What if we see a film or play a game without even knowing the work from which it is adapted or even that such a work exists? What if we are utterly new to the artistic conventions of the adaptation, say, of opera? What if we are unknowing audiences, in other words? I have been arguing that, in these instances, we simply experience the work without the palimpsestic doubleness that comes with knowing. From one perspective, this is a loss. From another, it is simply experiencing the work for itself, and all agree that even adaptations must stand on their own. After all, it was only in France that *films noirs* were actually seen *as adaptations* (of *romans noirs*; Cattrysse 1992: 58). If we do not know Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* (1878), we cannot be bothered by the fact that it satirizes what Tchaikovsky’s 1881 opera adaptation of it offers seriously as deep emotions. But if we do

Failure in conveying vision or tone in adaptations of classic works of science fiction seems particularly problematic for fans. The 2004 film of Isaac Asimov’s *I, Robot* (1950) by director Alex Proyas and screenwriter Michael Cassutt came under just such attack, but it is only one example of many. The more popular and beloved the novel, the more likely the discontent: witness the negative fan reaction to Paul Verhoeven’s 1997 adaptation (screenplay by Edward Neumeier) of Robert A. Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers* (1959). Science fiction, however, may be particularly difficult to adapt. As Cassutt has suggested, things of the future in the earlier written narrative are now often things of the past, so setting, characters, and action inevitably have to shift and change (2004). As an adapter himself, he says that he would prefer the opening credits to warn the audience of the inevitable changes. Instead of “based on,”

they could read “suggested by” or “freely adapted from” to forestall the objections of knowing audiences.

Of course, all these complications of possible reception mean that adapters must satisfy the expectations and demands of both the knowing and the unknowing audience. But there are still other differences in audience experience that adaptations bring to our attention, and these involve such factors as the differences caused by the various media’s diverse modes of audience involvement and of their degrees and kinds of immersion.

Modes of Engagement Revisited

As shown in Chapter 2, telling, showing, and interacting with stories differ in the kind and manner of engagement of the reader (spectator, player). Adapters know this; so too do those who market adaptations. The relatively small “graduate” audience who bought most of the 10,000 hardback copies of Malcolm Bradbury’s 1975 ironic campus novel, *The History Man*, was not the same in size or makeup as the 10 million viewers of the BBC television adaptation a few years later (Bradbury 1994: 99). When television buys the rights for this kind of fiction, it knows it can build upon a “preconstructed and preselected audience” (Elsaesser 1994: 93), but that it must also expand that audience considerably and must use all the available persuasive means at its disposal to do so.

Even within a single mode of engagement, however, there are once again major distinctions to be made, especially with performance media. When director Peter Brook filmed Peter Weiss’ baroque play *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul Marats, dargestellt durch die Schauspielgruppe des Hospizes zu Charenton unter Anleitung des Herrn de Sade* (1964) as the more simply named *Marat/Sade* (1966), he sought a totally cinematic translation of what he had previously done on stage, knowing that spectators of live drama are free to choose at any moment, in any scene, what to look at, whereas with the film he would only be able to show one thing at a time with the camera—what *he* wanted to show. He attempted to break down this limitation by deploying three or four cameras, using twists, advances, and retreats and “trying to behave like what goes on in a spectator’s head and

simulate his experience” (Brook 1987: 189–90). But even this camera work, he realized, would not do what a stage production does: engage the viewer’s *imagination* in a way that film, because of its realism, cannot. Noting the “excessive importance of an image, which is intrusive and whose details stay in the frame long after their need is over,” Brook finally accepted that the reality of the image is what gives to film “its power and its limitation” (1987: 192). Or, as another critic has put the difference: “In theatre, the conflict of the hard, undeniable presence of actors together with the conventional artifice of scenery and stage required a suspension of disbelief. On the other hand, narrative cinema, with its flow of action, naturalistic acting, and photographic realism, increasingly involved not so much a suspension as a suppression of disbelief” (LeGrice 2002: 230). A young friend recently admitted to me that, although he loves adaptations, he cannot bear going to stage play versions: they seem so “stagey” and unrealistic to him because he is part of a generation raised on film and television, with their conventions of naturalism and immediacy. Curiously, the three-dimensional world of the stage is far less engaging for him than the two-dimensional screen world.

The human-computer interface offers yet another kind of engagement in a feedback loop between our body and its extensions—the monitor, the keyboard, the joystick, and the mouse, and the processing computer. Katherine Hayles describes this relationship in this way: “We are the medium and the medium is us” (2001: 37). Shelley Jackson’s 1995 interactive art work called *Patchwork Girl* is an adaptation of both L. Frank Baum’s *Patchwork Girl of Oz* (1913) and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818/1831), and it involves us, through our clicking of the mouse, in the kind of activity that is like sewing a patchwork quilt from different fragments of cloth. Our physical acts also allow us to simulate the acts of two female figures: “the heroine Mary Shelley (a fictional counterpart of the author of *Frankenstein*), who assembles a female monster by sewing together body parts collected from different women; and the author, Shelley Jackson, who constructs a narrative identity for the monster from the stories of these women” (Ryan 2005: 524). The creating of mixed media hypertexts like *Patchwork Girl* is the direct result of cutting and suturing, just as is monster-making in the novel:

The first page to come up on screen is the image of a woman pieced together and crossed by a dotted line. The next link is a title page with collaborative authors: Mary Shelley, Shelley Jackson, and presumably the monster herself. Links from its table of contents take you to rearrangements of the first image ... [from which] various sequences of narrative and metafictional texts follow. (LeClair 2000/2003: 8)

Each mode of engagement therefore also involves what we might call a different "mental act" for its audience, and this too is something that the adapter must take into account in transcoding. Different modes, like different media, act dissimilarly on our consciousness (M. Marcus 1993: 17). Telling requires of its audience conceptual work; showing calls on its perceptual decoding abilities. In the first, we imagine and visualize a world from black marks on white pages as we read; in the second, our imaginations are preempted as we perceive and then give meaning to a world of images, sounds, and words seen and heard on the stage or screen. Kamilla Elliott calls this a reciprocal relationship between mental imaging and mental verbalizing (2003: 210–12), but more than words are at stake here. Psychoanalytic film theorists argue that audiences are more deeply involved consciously and unconsciously when watching a movie because of the processes of identification, projection, and integration (M. Marcus 1993: 18). In playing a videogame, of course, we are involved even more directly, physically and mentally, as we concentrate intensely and respond physiologically. Each of these different modes demands of its audiences, in turn, its own decoding processes. In reading, we gather details of narrative, character, context, and the like gradually and sequentially; in seeing a film or play or musical, we perceive multiple objects, relations, and significant signs simultaneously, even if the script or music or soundtrack is resolutely linear. In interactive media, both the simultaneity of film and the sequentiality of texted narrative come together in the game world and its rules/conventions.

Bruce Morrissette noted another important aspect of the mode of engagement involved in audience response when he posed what he thought of as a rhetorical question: "Has the novel ever evoked, even in its most intense action sequence, the physical empathy affecting the

muscles, the glands, the pulse, and breathing rate that chase, suspense, and other extremely dynamic sequences in film bring about in most, if not all, viewers?" (1985: 26). But what about the *frisson* of which opera lovers speak, when the hair on the back of the neck stands up in ecstatic response to a soprano's high note? Has any film or novel ever managed *that*? And none of the telling or performing media can likely beat the degree of the active physical involvement of interactive art and especially videogames. The *Die Hard* films (1988, 1989, 1995), no matter how intense their "extremely dynamic sequences," would find it hard to beat the game versions' participatory excitement, intense concentration, engagement of kinesthetic skills, competitive energy, and provoking of often involuntary physical reactions (see Bryce and Rutter 2002: 78).

Part of this difference in physical response is a result of a difference in the audience's experience of space and time in each of these modes. When playing a computer game, we may be part of a multiplayer group, but we play, often at home, as solitary individuals, much as we read. We often have a dedicated space where we can concentrate and will not be bothered. We are alone with our computer, sitting close to the screen so that the game's world takes up our visual field, and the sound (thanks to earphones, often) dominates all, immersing us completely. This kind of gaming is a private mode; although gaming with a group of friends or in arcades is more public, it is still individualized.

With performance media, on the contrary, we frequently sit in the dark in a collectivity and respond to what we are all seeing and hearing (being shown) at the same time. Walter Benjamin saw this as a mass response, the opposite of the contemplative individual response to viewing a painting (1968: 231). Peter Brook agreed, arguing that film in particular engulfs its audience with the image in all its immediacy: "When the image is there in all its power, at the precise moment when it is being received, one can neither think, nor feel, nor imagine anything else" (1987: 190). The theater audience, in contrast, is more distanced from the action; indeed it is at a fixed distance physically, even if actors can create intimacy through their "presence." Brook noted that "the degree of involvement is always varying ... This is why theatre permits one to experience something in an incredibly powerful way, and at the same time to retain a certain freedom. This double illusion

is the very foundation both of the theatre experience and of dramatic form. The cinema follows this principle with their close-up and the long shot, but the effect is very different" (190)—in part because of the difference between live and mediated action. For this reason, Christian Metz sees the film viewer as an isolated and distanced voyeur with no relation to the actors whom he or she regards with "unauthorized scopophilia" (1974: 185). In film, of course, our distance from the characters whose story we watch changes, depending on camera angle and type of shot. But in first-person new media art, we actually become the character and travel through an animated version of their world. Space is now something to navigate interactively: "being there" is as important to the pleasure of gaming as is "doing things" (Ryan 2001: 309).

Television too presents spatial challenges for the adapter: like the film spectator, the TV viewer does not share a space with the dramatic events the way a theater audience does, but is "reduced to a pair of eyes" (J. Miller 1986: 207) that look at a *picture* of actual objects that represent a world, rather than at the objects themselves (as on stage). And, like film, television is a representational and realist medium: "A television or film screen provides a window onto a world that is supposed to extend beyond the visible screen, and has the optics of reality. The audience sitting in the theatre knows perfectly well that however realistic the world on the stage appears to be it does not extend beyond the proscenium arch" (J. Miller 1986: 206). When films were watched in the once customary dark, silent, large movie theaters, with "intense light beams ... projected from behind toward luminous surfaces in front" (Flitterman-Lewis 1992: 217), there was a cocoon-like feeling of both anonymous collectivity and immersive enclosure that we cannot experience watching film DVDs at home on the television set.

It is not only space, however, but also time that is experienced differently by audiences in the various media; this difference creates new problems for adaptations across media. The much-discussed "presentness" of television (Cardwell 2002: 83–92), for instance, is both real and yet belied by the fact that, as we watch it at home, we are interrupted by advertisements, by family members and friends, and by telephone calls in a way that we rarely are when watching a film in a cinema or a musical in a theater (at least if all the cell phones are actually turned

off). But the privacy and domesticity of TV when we are watching film videos or DVDs are related to those of reading and game playing. In all these modes, we control how much we experience and when. Most obviously, readers are always in control of the process of solitary reading. But novels take time and often lots of it to consume; films must be shorter, in part because of the audience's inability to halt the process, except by leaving the theater.

Artist Stan Douglas rather sadistically plays with precisely this idea of time and the movie audience's entrapment in his 16-mm film installation called *Journey into Fear* (2001). As its title suggests, it is an adaptation, not only of the 1940 Eric Ambler novel but also of the 1942 and 1975 film adaptations and of Melville's *The Confidence Man* (1857) too, in fact. The viewer is caught watching an unending loop of film that works through all possible permutations of dialogue dubbed and synched to talking heads. There is no escape, no exit for 157 hours from this particular "journey into fear." What these distinctions among media and modes point to is an obvious difference in how we become immersed in an adapted story—physically, intellectually, and psychologically.

Kinds and Degrees of Immersion

In Chapter 1, I suggested that all three modes of engagement can be considered immersive: the act of reading a print text immerses us through imagination in another world, seeing a play or film immerses us visually and aurally, and interacting with a story in a videogame or in a theme park adds a physical, enacted dimension. In each there is a sense of being "transported" (Gerrig 1993: 12), in psychological and emotional terms. The recent advent of interactive electronic media has engendered more talk about the desirability of this immersive experience. Yet surely the experimentation undertaken decades ago with works like the early 3-D films and "Aromarama," when perfumes and other odors were dispersed in cinemas to match the content of the screen images, betrays an even earlier desire for at least physical immersion. With that desire, however, comes a certain suspicion that intense engagement of any kind will limit the critical sense: "Movies don't help you to develop independence of mind," according to Pauline Kael (qtd.

in Peary and Shatzkin 1977: 3). Nor do videogames, say others (Grau 2003: 10). But each medium and each mode of engagement brings with it not only different possible kinds (imaginative, visual, physical) and degrees of immersion, identification, and distance but also different critical traditions that have valued one extreme or the other.

Reader-response theory, which flourished in Europe and North America in the 1980s, may be partly responsible for the change in the way we think about reception in the mode of telling. Thanks to the work of theorists like Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Michael Riffaterre, readers are no longer considered passive recipients of textual meaning but active contributors to the aesthetic process, working with the text to decode signs and then to create meaning. To these theorists, it was not simply the “ambiguities and semantic resistances” of a difficult modernist writer like Joyce that demanded “a restless, active reader” (Dinkla 2002: 30); for them, *all* readers are engaged in the active making of textual meaning. Stage audiences, argued theater semioticians in the same years, are an active dimension of the meaning-making of any play, not only in their interpretive work but also in their physical and emotional responses at the time of viewing. Stage conventions distance audiences, even as the live presence of actors on stage makes for more intense identification. In operas and musicals, the unrealistic conventions of singing act to distance us, but the music counters that by provoking identification and a strong affective response. Clearly the adapter working from one mode to another has to take into account these different ways of involving the audience.

This may be no easy task, however, thanks to other critical traditions. When adapting to film, should an adapter believe the theory that the spectator is going to be self-consciously “*all-perceiving*” and all-powerful (Metz 1974: 173–74) or the rather different view that the spectator will always be in collusion, desiring “magic transport” and so resisting “recognition of the artifice in favor of immersion in the illusion” (LeGrice 2002: 230)? Can this involvement be controlled by camera movement, for instance? Take any one of the “heritage” British adaptations for film or television of a classic novel like Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Their common long takes, combined with beautiful images, might well “elicit a contemplative appreciative gaze, giving us

time both to look and to experience emotion” along with the character whose eyes the camera follows (Cardwell 2002: 141).

Given that the influential early media guru, Marshall McLuhan, felt that “hot media” like television were “low in participation” and “cool media” like literature were “high in participation or completion by the audience” (1996: 162), we can only imagine what he would have made of this description of the audience experience in the scenario for first-person shooters in a certain kind of videogame: “You find yourself, usually unintentionally, in a strange, hostile place, unarmed and vulnerable You must explore the place to find weapons and other useful items, moving through the many game arenas or levels on some form of quest. In the process you must fight and/or avoid many enemies or monsters” (Morris 2002: 82–83). We move—and control our own movement—through a 3-D fictional world, with a sense of embodiment in the game space, a heterocosm we may already know in a non-animated version through the film from which the game is adapted. Our primary identification is directly through “the constant first-person point of view, the player’s own sense of agency and experience of interactivity” (Morris 2002: 89). The player becomes at once protagonist and director in a way no performance spectator or reader ever can (Grau 2003: 8–9; Tong and Tan 2002: 101). Instead of just interpreting, the player intervenes in a kind of “frenetic virtual world” (Mactavish 2002: 34). Interactivity brings a greater degree of immersion, both mentally and physically, in the here and now. Response must be rapid: successful hand-eye coordination and puzzle solving involve learned skills and moves (King and Krzywinska 2002a: 22–23). And players play to win. The aim of any game is to keep the player on the verge of mastery but also on the verge of losing control, just like the avatars or characters *in* the game (Weinbren 2002: 183).

In videogames, therefore, there are aural (music, sound effects), visual, and kinesthetic provocations to response in the active gaming portion that make the mode of engagement one of real participation and thus the degree of immersion intense: we feel physically present in the mediated environment, rather than in our real world (Ryan 2001: 66). Anything that reminds us that we are only gaming destroys this illusion, for immersion in this mode relies on the transparency of the

medium; effective games, like theme parks and rituals, must eschew the metafictional or the self-reflexive (Ryan 2001: 284). In the cinematic cut-scenes that frame the gaming, the narrative is both set up and brought to closure, but in them the player is transformed into a spectator, with all the formal and interpretive expectations of any film viewer (Howells 2002: 118). This bringing together of showing and interacting challenges any neat compartmentalization of modes of engagement, but the videogame player has more of an active role in shaping the story than does the audience for a film, play, or even novel (Mactavish 2002: 33). Multiplayer role-playing games involve participants in still other ways through player interaction. Tolkien's novels spawned *Dungeons and Dragons* board and computer games, which in turn became MUDs, narrative worlds in which participants can insert themselves. The programming system allows users in different places to communicate within the same virtual space, becoming characters and creating a collective narrative.

Similar things can happen in interactive fiction. Here too the viewer is not a voyeur and is connected to the story more than by means of emotional identification with a character, as in the telling and showing modes. Instead, "[t]he former audience is lifted out of their seat of distanced contemplation and placed in the limelight of subjective physical involvement: addressed as a storyboard controller, co-author, actor or self-performer" (Zapp 2002: 77). We can now become active participants in a heterocosm—either a fantastic or a realistic one (Ryan 2005: 527). Back in 1926 Virginia Woolf had seen that were it possible to capture the "exactitude of reality and its surprising power of suggestion,"

we should see violent changes of emotion produced by their collision. The most fantastic contrasts could be flashed before us with a speed which the writer can only toil after in vain; the dream architecture of arches and battlements, of cascades falling and fountains rising, which sometimes visits us in sleep or shapes itself in half-darkened rooms, could be realized before our waking eyes. No fantasy could be too far-fetched or insubstantial. The past could be unrolled, distances annihilated. (1926: 309–10)

She was, of course, writing about cinema, however, and not interactive fiction.

Although again less immersive than videogames, what has been called "expanded cinema" using "multimedia data, visualization and manipulation" (Blunck 2002: 54) does allow members of the audience to become an integral part of the experience by controlling the way in which the story unfolds. If we think back to how important the soliciting of audience participation was for those classical theoreticians of rhetoric or for oral storytellers, we might get a clearer sense of how the audience can figure in the thinking of the adapter working in these emergent forms called "interactive storytelling" that are made possible by broadband and virtual technologies: "Interactive stories are certainly ideal for people who like things like thinking about how to resolve a conflict (in thrillers or courtroom films, for instance), or for people who are not just good listeners, but also like posing investigative questions" (Wand 2002: 177). Audiences have to learn new navigational strategies and accept a new and altered relationship with the creator of the work; in return they are given new kinds of encounters with virtual and fictional worlds that might inspire technological awe as much as increased physical and cognitive immersion. But someone creates those encounter possibilities beforehand. Hypertext fiction, for example, like *afternoon*, a story (1987) by Michael Joyce, one of the founding writers of this mode, offers the reader a variety of narrative threads to choose from, but all have been written by the author in advance. The form may be reader controlled, but the content is not. This is "selective interactivity" (Ryan 2001: 206), and the text is as much a database to be searched as a world in which to be immersed (Ryan 2004c: 342)—which may explain why there have been so few adaptations to or from this medium.

For this and other reasons, the new media are not without their detractors, who often suggest that it may not only be the difficulty of access or mastery that prevents adapters from rushing to use these new forms to attract new audiences. Paul Willeman has articulated many of the ideological arguments against these interactive forms. He points out that their mode of address—imperative or vocative (file, cut, paste, move)—is conducive to "authoritarian and advertising discourses,"

belying that rhetoric of immersion and freedom: in actual fact, he says we can only obey or ignore orders (2002: 15). He sees this as a reduction in the scope of action “which now has to be conducted according to rigorously policed protocols, by a trivialization of the fields where interaction is encouraged, such as games and bulletin boards, and by increasing isolation of the allegedly interacting individuals” (14–15). The so-called interactivity allowed—that is, with specific, preformatted templates—is less truly interactive, he argues, than other representational media “from religious rituals to painting, novels and cinema” (14). According to this argument, pen and paper and the call and response of gospel and jazz music are more interactive than the electronic media today that only “allow” audiences to interact with the story.

Nevertheless, there are manifest differences in the kind and degree of immersion in the three modes of engagement. The sorts of changes and interventions by users/audiences differ. We may be as much controlled as controllers, but we are still immersed differently in a world with which we interact than with one we are either told about or shown. Think of the difference between simply sitting in a theater and seeing the film of *Pirates of the Caribbean* and going on either the original theme park ride from which the movie is adapted or DisneyQuest’s interactive version of it at Disney World. As we plunge into the dark, in both versions, we are told that “Dead men tell no tales!” Neither do rides like this, at least not in the conventional narrative sense: enacting or participating replaces telling. Because people go to theme parks in groups and want to share experiences, the designers of the indoor interactive version have created what they call a virtual reality “overwhelming immersive experience on the high seas” (Schell and Shocket 2001) through a simple physical interface. One person steers at a real helm and controls the direction of the “trip”; three others man six cannons. Together they try to defeat virtual enemy pirate ships and sea monsters while collecting and defending as much gold as they can in 5 minutes. The designers admit to controlling the pace to make sure that, in the space of 5 minutes, excitement will grow to a climax. The wrap-around 3-D screens and surround sound, plus the motion platform of

the boat, guarantee a sensory experience of considerable intensity that no videogame, much less novel or film can match.

Knowing or unknowing, we experience adaptations across media differently than we do adaptations within the same medium. But even in the latter case, adaptation *as adaptation* involves, for its knowing audience, an interpretive doubling, a conceptual flipping back and forth between the work we know and the work we are experiencing. As if this were not complex enough, the context in which we experience the adaptation—cultural, social, historical—is another important factor in the meaning and significance we grant to this ubiquitous palimpsestic form. When Peter Brooks and Jean-Claude Carrière adapted the *Mahabharata* in 1975, they not only moved from storytelling to film but also from an Indian into a French context. In the process, they realized that they needed some way to bridge cultures and chose to add a French narrator to connect the two worlds. They were not alone in facing this kind of challenge.