

Anna Kérchy. Transmedia Commodification

key words: transmediatisation of *Beauty and the Beast*, mass-consumerisation for cross-over audiences (adultlike children and childlike adults), Disneyfication, McDonaldisation, prosumers, princess industrial complex, commodity fetishism, magical objects in fairy tales, the political (com)promises of posthumanist thing studies

In Spring 2017, coincident with the release of Disney’s live-action cinematic remake of *Beauty and the Beast*, a limited edition budget item offered by Primark stores provoked an authentic frenzy of fans. Chip purse, a coin holder in the shape of a cute anthropomorphic tea cup from the movie (according to the plotline, a little boy turned into tableware under a magic spell), sold out within minutes from the shelves, fuelled a bidding war on online auction sites selling several times its original price, and generated heated discussions on social media platforms where proud owners posted photos of the much-sought-after product and others, who could not get a hold it, vented their fury about their dissatisfied consumer demands and the madness dubbed #ChipGate. I wish to argue here that the Chip purse is much more than just a lovable collectible: ironically, as an object that stores money to buy further products with – Primark have expanded its *Beauty and the Beast* line to include homewares with bedding, tea cups and pots, as well as clothing, beauty accessories, and décor knick-knacks as “part of the magical range” (Jones 2017)! – it can be easily interpreted as an emblem of the fetishist commodification of fantasy that takes place via a transmedia storytelling experience paradigmatic of post-industrialist consumer societies of spectacle.

Beauty and the Beast fans queued in front of stores before opening hours to make sure they could take home their tangible memorabilia of magic, but their obsession was not stimulated by any of the original literary source texts penned by French novelist Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve in 1740, rewritten and abridged by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in 1756, and published in English in Andrew Lang’s *Blue Fairy Book* in 1889. Customers were likely just as much unconcerned about the written versions of this animal bridegroom fairy tale, initially designed to prepare aristocratic young girls in 18th century France for arranged marriages by celebrating the transformative powers of love, as they were forgetful about its classic adaptations: Jean Cocteau’s surrealist poetic fantasy film *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) or Philip Glass’s opera (1994) inspired by it. As attested by the avalanche of Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook hashtags accompanying pictorial evidence of the collectible’s acquisition, including #instadisney, #disnegram, #disnerd, and #disneylifestylers, the adoring audience emphatically positioned themselves within the Disney fandom, attributing their enchantment to Disney’s latest, 2017 live action CGI musical romantic fantasy film, a remake of Disney’s own 1991 animation, yet another original reiteration of a “tale as old as time”. A film that has grossed over \$1.2 billion worldwide, and surpassing the original film, made it into the highest-grossing film of 2017, the tenth highest-grossing film of all time, and the fastest selling family film in the company’s history in the US.

Consumer choices are always manipulated by complex power struggles concerning the authority over narrative meanings and the appropriation of the prestigious label of originality, which hold the stakes of financial profitability. According to postmillennial reception studies (Stephens and McCallum 2000, 160), children nowadays are likely to first encounter literary classics, deprived of the original authors’ names, mediated by popular film industry in the interpretation of media moguls like the Walt Disney Company that claims exclusionary proprietary ownership over stories customised to meet the uniform house-style marked by its brand name. Disney’s formative role of contemporary cultural imaginaries has often been criticised for colonising individual fantasies homogenised by shallow scopophilic pleasures of ready-made clichés governed by the ideological and commercial interests of the company. “Disneyfication” has become a household term to denote the company’s notorious adaptation

strategy whereby stories are rendered “safe” for juvenile audience through the removal of undesirable plot elements (themes of sexuality, death, or moral ambiguity), the emphasis of the clear-cut dividing line between good and evil, additions of light entertainment features (Broadway-style music hits, talking animal sidekicks), and reworkings necessary for happily-ever-after endings.¹ Many have problematised the “saccharine finales” for imperceptibly transmitting capitalist, patriarchal, colonialist and a fundamentally normative “petit bourgeois” ideology, with the aim to maintain the political *status quo*, discourage social transformation, and most importantly raise a generation of obedient consumers (see Bell, Haas & Sells 1995, Budd & Kirsch 2005, Giroux & Pollock 2010, Zipes 2011, 25-26).

Certainly, the 2017 Disney adaptation designed for family fun ignored the most troubling underlying central themes which make *Beauty and the Beast* such a special story: interspecies romance, anxieties about bestial sexuality, female rite of passage initiated by an encounter with terrifying otherness (Warner 1995, 276), patriarchal oppression of woman reduced to a sacrificial object of exchange, or social marginalisation of disability remained taboos left off the screen. It was much more important for the company to associate straight away in the very first opening shots the Beast’s enchanted fortress with the Disney logo, the trademark emblem of the Disneyland Magic Kingdom Castle and hence extend the movie’s entertainment quality with a “commercial intertext” (Maltby 1998, 27), turning the cinematic fictional reality into an advertising site for an actual touristic spot families can visit to gain an enhanced first-hand interactive experience of *living* the fairy tale.

According to Maltby, the placement of consumer products in high-budget Hollywood movies function “as budgetary instruments but also as a form of *capitalist realism*” (27) simulating the veracity of the filmic fantasy by evoking in spectators the real-life referent of the fictional fortress. By connecting on- and off-screen realities, the make-believe realm of Disneyland theme park – postmodern philosopher Baudrillard (1994) called a par excellence example of simulacra’s referentless reality² abundant in illusory needs propagated by commercial images of a desirable lifestyle – also becomes fantastified as an authentic locus of magic where all dreams can come true with a little imagination and money to spare. Disneyland offers you unforgettably vivid experience of the tale: you can meet in person and take selfies with your beloved characters, dine sumptuously at the Red Rose Tavern, or enjoy a comic performance of the love story at the Royal Theatre, even a theme park ride on spellbound tableware awaits you from 2020; and surely you can buy Belle’s ball gown, cute stuffed toy Beasts, or jewellery in the shape of the rose of true love, along with a plethora of other Disney-themed merchandise (with more than 250 products matching the search *Beauty and the Beast* at disneystore.com from bed sheets to iPhone covers).

The Disney Empire strategically indoctrinates children to become insatiable consumers of commodified fantasies sharing adult appetites for newer and newer releases of collectibles. Youngsters constitute the most lucrative target-market for many businesses today because they integrate three markets in one: *current* mini-consumers with own funds to spare on items of their choice encouraged by their elders to master consumer skills, money awareness, and economic responsibility at their earliest convenience, *future* customers cultivated now to build a brand awareness for tomorrow, and *influencers* who cause many billions of dollars of purchases among their parents (McNeal 1991). Disney’s child-focused advertising is systematically pitched at very young audiences in Saturday morning television commercials and extra features available on kids’ websites, but the company also exploits the generational nostalgia of parents lured back to the delight they took as kids³ in Disney’s animation that provided the source material for the modernised live action facsimile. Mature viewers prove to be complicit in playing their role in the socio-economic fabric of consumers while embracing the identity of the eternal child (the archetype of the *puer eternus*), as many grown-up fans’

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online self-denominations attest in infantile nicknames like #foreverabigkid or #minniemousemom.

The “crossover appeal” (Beckett 2009) to multiple age groups increases commercial success, media attention, critical legitimacy, as well as intergenerational bonding that functions as a stable sedimentation of fandom. However, there is also a false promise of democracy lurking in marketing rhetoric which address a dual audience with similar slogans: Primark’s women’s line urges adult females “to rival Sleeping Beauty with PJs fit for a queen, or be the belle of the ball in serious fan-girl T-shirts” (Jones 2017) and promotes its kids’ collection by teasing the “moms’ mini-me-s” to “make their dreams come true as they get ready to be the Belle of the Ball” or “open the pages of the beauty world with an enchanting mix of magical make-up products, fit for little princesses” (Shah 2017). The right bargains hold the promise of opening the gates of Wonderland for style-conscious parents and their offspring who are both the most vulnerable⁴ to commercial abuses and as digital natives the most complicit in participatory cultural activities.

Disney adopts various strategies to keep its story brands alive: since the 1960s it has been releasing in 25-years intervals the classic animated features either theatrically or on home entertainment platforms, and as old films entered the public domain, devoted attention to the release of live-action remakes, like *Maleficent* in 2014, *Cinderella* in 2015, and *Beauty and the Beast* in 2017. Disney’s illusory status as the authentic teller of the original story has been repeatedly confirmed by the multiple adaptations interconnecting story versions tailored to different media as well as remakes of its own products (like 1991 animation Chip, 2017 CGI Chip, and Primark’s Chip merchandise as well as innumerable tie-in products) coupled with commercial intertextual allusions. The critically-minded ponder if these remakes are “meant as homages, updates, ‘brand deposit’ reminders of existing franchises, or just high-profile cash grabs?” (Robinson 2017). However, most importantly, these dialogic intertexts also belong to that particular type of postmillennial fantasy world-building Henry Jenkins, one of today’s most influential critics of popular culture, has called “transmedia storytelling” (2006, 2007). Throughout the “transmedia expansion” of fictional realities, integral elements of a make-believe universe “get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience [where] each medium makes it own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story” (Jenkins 2007).

“Transmedia extensions” facilitate “additive comprehension,” they make the story more immersive by adding new pieces of information which invite us to revise our understanding of the fictional reality as a whole. They might offer insight into characters, motifs, unelaborated plotlines, bridge events, fill in gaps or resolve excesses in the unfolding of the story, flash out unknown aspects of the imaginary world, add a greater sense of realism and augment fantastic effects, too. Disney’s 2017 film adaptation invested a lot of energy in extending the background stories of characters. The pre-title sequence centres on the original hubris of the proud prince turned Beast. (In the 1991 animation his tragic flaw is summed up in a stained-glass-window-style tableau, one can actually visit in Disneyland, as a prominent example of the commercial transmedia extension of the narrative.) Subplots shed light on unresolved traumas including the mysterious loss of Belle’s mother her father never ceases to grieve and refuses to explain to his daughter troubled by his silence, macho villain Gaston’s war veteran past, and his gay sidekick’s hopelessly unrequited love for him, or the enchanted objects/servants tolerance in face of their master’s animalistic temper explained by their remorse felt over not intervening in the moral corruption of the young prince by his tyrant father. These extensions create different points of entry for different audience segments to expand the artwork’s potential market. Prehistories of vulnerability support the psychic involvement of spectators, while the political correctness implied in the Beast’s multiracial staff, the loveable goofy gay figure, and the bookworm feminist warrior Belle targets the liberal-

mindful millennial generation.⁵ The addition of the ultimately cute figure of the little boy magically metamorphosed into a chipped tea-cup holds universal appeal for young and old because of its associations with loveable naughtiness, cosy homeliness, and even British nationalistic pride – all easily commodifiable qualities as attested by the commercial taglines of the related merchandise: you can “fill this little guy [Chip cup] with yum hot chocolate [or a five o’clock tea!] for the ultimate quiet night in” (Jones 2017) or more miraculously “switch to Mrs Potts [Chip’s mom] mode and become mamma of the year! [by purchasing all the *Beauty and the Beast* goodies]” (Shah 2017).

The extensions’ interconnections with one other, the tie-in products they generate, and with the original mastertext(s) stimulate audiences to interact with the story world larger than the single story. The collective transmedial (de)construction of communal knowledge within a networked society that can visualise, digitalise, and commercialise the initially orally circulated fairy-tale cultures is exemplified by subtle gestures like Disney naming Belle’s picturesque village Villeneuve as an homage to the writer of the literary source text. Yet Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve’s authorial name likely remains imperceptible, unreadable for most of the viewers, overshadowed by spectacular transmedia crossover allusions to the brand name labelling the adaptation: during Belle and Beast’s waltz the letters WD can be seen in the coat of arms design on the floor with reference to Walt Disney, and the lock of the carriage in which Belle is imprisoned is decorated by a hidden Mickey Mouse motif.

Transmedia storytelling can segment and disseminate an idea into multiple media instalments within one single work: internal monologues encapsulating characters’ background stories are often told in song-and-dance numbers which complement the narrative filmic diegesis with an acoustic affective charge, and turned into new media applications like mobile phone ringtones can be integrated into fans’ daily lives. The proliferation of tie-in products also functions by means of transmedia extensions, frequently allowing for a conjoining of old and new media through a process Bolter and Grusin call remediation (2000): one can purchase actual print-and-paper specimen from the Beast’s fantastic 3D CGI-simulated library the filmic Belle falls in love with at first sight.⁶ Fictitious titles brought real include *Belle’s Library* with a foreword by scriptwriter Linda Woolverton, a collection of inspiring quotes from Belle’s favourite books, her own notes and colourful drawings, as well as an enchanted book called *Nevermore* featuring in *Beauty and the Beast: Lost in a Book* that can take readers on time-travel adventures just like the Beast’s magic book does in the 2017 movie (transporting Belle back to a plague-ridden Paris where she can find out about her mother’s past). The recurring fetishisation of the analogue book format invested with magical qualities – equally articulated in Disney’s 1997 *Beauty and the Beast’s Enchanted Christmas* animation sequel, in *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast: Magical Ballroom* PC game and girl’s educational software (2000), and Disney’s 2017 live-action 3D CGI *Beauty and the Beast* movie enhanced by new media technology – neatly demonstrates the transmedial spreading of the same story about the wonders of storytelling, too.

The popularity of a fictive world’s extension into multiple media and “advanced moving image” formats can be explained by the (post)modern narrative condition Matt Hanson calls “screen bleed” arguing that today’s digital media consumers’ immersion in 3D worlds reflects the need for all-encompassing mythologies multimedially involving contemporary audiences in “interactive online worlds, where each strand of narrative offers a new dimensional layer” (2003, 47). Post-industrialist consumer societies’ hybrid new subjectivities elicited by new media’s interactive potentials have been recently referred to as “prosumers” (Toffler 1980, Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010) or “produsers” (Marshall 2004): compound words made up of the fusion of producer and consumer, to denote the activity of browsing through media contents to make sensible choices that can eventually prove to be transformative of the meanings to be generated. *Beauty and the Beast’s* new (trans)medial extensions like Snapchat filter

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applications, Facebook quizzes, or Youtube fan videos allow interpreters to maximalise their engagement with the storyworld through individual choices, additions, and creative retellings. These activities tie in with the sociological concept of McDonaldisation (Ritzer 1993), a cost-efficient process for the brand-owner corporations since prosumers work actively and free of charge in producing the services and goods they buy and consume. Prosumers also take part in viral marketing practices like the reproduction of memes which keep the hype alive via digital word-of-mouth tactics which spread messages consumers cannot resist sharing with friends, who in turn share with more friends, fuelling the cycle of exponential growth and reinforcing personal bonding of a community of the initiates. The dissemination of user-generated content on social media network websites or the blogosphere, like sharing *Beauty and the Beast* related DIY project hints on Pinterest, uploading data onto Disney Wikipedia, or contributing to the online fanfiction community’s collective corpus or the organisation of live-broadcast flashmobs could be examples for the unpaid labour of enthusiasts. Although prosumers may gain a relative empowerment like Twitter-using conference audiences, whose tweets posted online reach a global group of recipients who witness and respond to messages which may spiral out of the control of the initial producer of meaning, but with free promotion they still serve its economic interests. (Prosumer networks’ subversiveness is mostly ideologically contained by transmedia commodification practices like online shopping sites’ suggestions to let your friends know about your consumer activities driven by the aim to make the appetite for consumption reach epidemic proportions.)

The (neo)Marxist critique of capitalist consumer culture called commodities compensatory fetish objects which stimulate a constant desiring that can never reach satisfaction. Commodity fetishism masks a primordial lack caused by the disruption of direct interpersonal relationships and an alienating division of labour, whereby “the appearance of goods hides the story of who made them and how they made them, making invisible the economical exploitation and social injustice” (Lury 1996, 41). Zygmunt Bauman (1987) differentiated between two social groups: “the seduced” who are incorporated into consumer culture to make illusory decisions in the market area and “the repressed” who, devoid of economic and cultural resources, are excluded from the market as subjects objectified to the bureaucratic control organising the state provision of services. Celia Lury’s focus on the first group pointed out that acts of consumption rarely satisfy actual basic needs and are rather meant to express social status, cultural style, or being in the know, and hence the belonging to a group of like-minded consumers for whom products are worthy more for their symbolic value than their market or exchange value. Throughout a commodity aesthetics permeating packaging, promotion, and advertising, merchandise are associated with illusory cultural meanings: the promise of a life-style is being sold as “images of romance, exotica, fulfilment, or high life” are associated with mundane consumer goods as soap, washing machines, housewares, cars, or alcoholic beverages (Lury, 42). Just how much commodities hold an “identity value” (Featherstone 1991) – paradoxically selling the promise of the expression of a uniquely individual self with mass produced, one-size-fits-all consumer goods – is reflected by the compulsive online sharing of news about novel acquisitions: selfies of proud owners with cult products, hashtags expressing consumer identities (#disneyfan), or the publicisation of purchases on social media like Facebook profile updates.

Sugary fantasies about upward social mobility and wealth conjoined with the myth of romantic true love constitute the number one bestselling commodity of the “Disney Princess Industry.” As Jack Zipes’s socio-historical overview of the changing function of folk and fairy tales argued, the oral wonder tale storytelling’s democratic quest for a communal harmony was gradually lost with the medial shift to written and printed tales that the rising Victorian bourgeoisie exploited for the sake of solidifying its social class status through marginalising the illiterate from the privileged elite of readers to reach a “control over imagination and desire

within the symbolic order of Western culture.” The contemporary Disney Princess Industry’s “monologue of self-praise of the ruling classes” masked by the illusory promise to “eliminate social and class conflicts forever” with rags-to-riches fantasies seems a logical continuation of this self-establishing gesture of the middle class (Zipes 1995, 19, 24, 26), constituting the main social corpus of the seduced consumers.

According to Helen Pilinovsky, the control of powerless juvenile audience’s, mainly little girls’, consumer tastes is predicated upon the Princess Industrial Complex system, whereby the ideological basis of the persona of the heroine of the commodified fairy tale – deprived of the political criticism and proto-feminist concerns of the original *contes de fées* – is used to reinforce the values of heteronormative, patriarchal, capitalist society and “sell products associated with them, beginning with the tales themselves, and continuing through their trappings and accessories,” peaking in the Wedding Industrial Complex with the indoctrinated spectators/consumers’ coming of age (Pilinovsky 2011, 19). The classist commodification of the Happily-Ever-After scenario is perfectly illustrated by the lure of high life voiced in advertisement of Primark’s *Beauty and the Beast* budget items. “Ladies, upgrade your little ones from princess to queen as they enter the Primark palaces and grab these must-haves. They’ll be ready to rule their kingdom in complete, beautiful style!” (Shah 2017) The intended audience of little girls can become princesses at the price of becoming playthings in the consumer mothers’ hands.

Since Belle is one of the original members of the Disney Princess line launched in the early 2000s, the spell of her feminisation is hard to break, and the 2017 Disney adaptation’s attempts at feminist revisions remain largely ineffectual. Emma Watson cast as Belle is an ideal representative of postmillennial girl power. Renown as brave, smart, tomboyish Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter series, a UN Women’s Goodwill Ambassador and an activist for the *He for She* campaign, her public persona matches the rebellious, creative, feminist aspect of Disney’s Belle who invents a washing machine to have more time for books, teaches a young village girl to read, refuses to marry macho Gaston, wears boots instead of glass slippers, and mocks the Wardrobe’s attempts at dressing her up as a princess. Yet the emphasis on Belle’s persona as “a soul ahead of her time” might just as well function as a marketing strategy to attract wider audiences by means of the commodification of feminism. Ironically, the moral of the original *Beauty and the Beast* story – never judge by outward appearances, true love looks beyond deceptive surfaces – gets lost in Disney’s classist, lookist version where the romantic central couple meets conventional beauty standards.⁷ The leonine Beast is beautifully sublime and never hideous, and in the end he loses all his bestiality to become a clean-shaven human prince charming, while Belle is endlessly radiant and always prepared for a dance – just like the brand related enchanted products which can come in the most bizarre forms like the “socks that look like stained glass in which you can practice the royal waltz around your bedroom,” or princess lip balms which can grant “chapped smackers a ‘happily ever after’” (Shah 2017)

The commodification of fantasies of enduring beauty and eternal love are particularly interesting when contrasted with consumer culture’s *carpe diem* philosophy dictating an accelerated rhythm of purchases driven by an insatiable hunger for novelty. Although consumption is stimulated by a glamorisation of a hedonistic life-style allegedly made available with new acquisitions, buyers experience a constant dissatisfaction due to the ever-expanding range of goods on sale. Sociologist-philosopher Renata Salecl located the communal neurosis of advanced post-industrialist capitalist consumer societies in the psychological burden caused by the freedom of choice: the endless series of open options provokes feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and anxiety about possibly making the wrong individual choices, while forgetting about more important collective decisions and our power as politically responsible social thinkers. (Salecl 2010) For Bauman (1987), the simultaneous compulsion and inability to choose results in melancholy, a sense of infinite connectivity while being hooked up to nothing. In more

paranoid readings of the pitfalls of the mythicised choice, material obsession emerges as yet another form of child abuse, comparable to fast food and porn industries (Salecl 2013). The temporal confusion caused by the accelerated consumption of timeless values in the privileged here-and-now of a one-a-kind bargain occasion is a side effect of the neurotic experience of the compulsion to choose and buy, abundantly present in *Beauty and the Beast* commercial campaign with lines like: “Quick! Time is running out, Cogsworth’s hands are ticking, and these beauties won’t be in store forever...” (Jones 2017 on the Primark website), “These Beauty and the Beast collectibles are everything. Until the last petal falls, purchase literally everything on this list.” (Baardsen 2017 on “Parenting” section of Bestproducts.com). While in the original, true love must blossom before the last petal falls from the enchanted rose, throughout the transmedia commodification of the fairy tale, all goods must be purchased before the stock runs out. The rat race with time is for materialistic rather than idealistic purposes.

The most popular musical hit of the 1991 Disney animation and the 2017 live action remake (that also adopted the title as its tagline⁸) was “Be our guest” a song and dance number performed by enchanted live tableware and household utensils⁹ who invite spectators like Belle, the only human character in the CGI enhanced scene, to embark on interactive participation, to accept the invitation, and fully submerge in the delights of the dinner and the story. The song – written by Howard Elliott Ashman and Alan Menk, and visualised as a grand scale Moulin Rouge cabaret revue vaudeville performance – voices a veritable hymn of consumer culture addressing customers from the point of view of products, services, and sellers who keep the market going in a confidence trickster fashion with promises of a happily-ever-after, and illusory subservience masking omnipresent omnipotence. “Be our guest/ Be our guest/ Our command is your request/.../And we’re obsessed/ With your meal/ With your ease/ Yes, indeed, we aim to please/ While the candlelight’s still glowing/ Let us help you/ We’ll keep going.”

Magically animated objects in fairy tales have a potential to free things from the functional or fetishist roles assigned to them by consumerism, and act in accordance with the tenets of ‘thing studies,’ or postmillennial object-oriented ontology that attributes to objects a proactive existence, a psychic reality of their own, independent of meanings projected on them by human cognition (Bennett 2010). According to recent new materialist non-anthropocentric philosophies, persons can animate objects via adequate arrangements driven by interpretive consciousness, but objects are not dead artefacts either, they ‘do things back’ as performative agents refuting their utilitarian servitude, as storehouses of memory, witnesses participating in history,¹⁰ and material essences shaping whoever touches them. In Madame de Beaumont’s original version of the *Beauty and the Beast* tale, magic objects versus commodities play a significant role as narrative engines of the text. A merchant, the father of six siblings goes bankrupt, so that the family has to move to the country; when he travels back to the city to take care of business affairs, his offsprings ask for gifts; his sons want weapons and horses, his older daughters jewels and the finest dresses; it is only the youngest girl, his dearest child Beauty who asks him for a single rose, that is not precious because of its market value but its symbolical, aesthetic worth, and erotic-amorous implications. The rose asked with a touch of Oedipal desire from the father but eventually received from a monster turned prince charming is a magic object inducing a family drama with fatal transformative consequences. As the emblem of the hope for true love which can break the curse, the rose is the hexed Beast’s most precious object – in Disney, too, an enchantress disguised as a beggar offers the flower in exchange for shelter and when the prince refuses it, transforms him into a beast¹¹ – so when the father plucks it from his garden as a souvenir for his daughter, it is only fair that the monster asks for the merchant’s most precious belonging in return, hence turning the intended receiver of the gift into a immeasurably valuable gift herself. In Beaumont, the Beast’s magic objects are invested with a romantic emotional charge and a potential of connectivity: the rose represents yearning, a mirror helps Beauty to see what is happening in the Beast’s castle, and a

ring allows her to return there in an instant, whereas the magnificent gowns Beast gave Beauty turn into rags at her sisters’ touch and restore their splendour in her hands, reflecting thing studies’ philosophical assumption of objects choosing their owner relativizing human agency. The castle’s household utensils, the Beast’s enchanted servants, keep their anthropomorphic qualities: they can talk, sing, dance, love and display a wide range of human emotions from flirtatiousness and humour to anxieties about being trapped in object status, the uncanny state of animate inanimation, and losing their humanity forever (-- unless the Beast learns to love another and earns her love in return before the last petal falls).

In Disney’s 2017 film adaptation a few objects do preserve their enchanting qualities like the clockwork machinery Belle’s father cannot cease craftworking upon since the object (containing a miniature replica of himself painting his wife and daughter) functions as a storehouse of both traumatic and blissful memories, reminding him of his lost spouse via a materialised flashback of a happy past – providing an exciting counterpart to the daughter’s upcoming happily-ever-after. Yet most of the wondrous possibilities promised by the object oriented ontological view are neutralised due to objects’¹² predominant use as spectacular devices of stage magic, like in the above mentioned “Be our guest”, a tagline of the 2017 film adaptation. The exotic flavour of the French culinary expressions (which sound like fantastic brand names), the rhetorical questions, emphatic repetitions, and direct invocations in the song are poetic devices which clearly resonate with advertisements’ discourse of commodification. “Soup du jour Hot hors d’oeuvres/ Why, we only live to serve/ Try the grey stuff, it’s delicious/ Don’t believe me? Ask the dishes.” – cries out ecstatically the household utensils and tableware... and fans rush off to Primark to purchase their Chip cup, taste their Grey stuff ice-cream at Disneyland theme park, or compile their Belle menus with the help of online computer games. The “politics of wonder” rooted in traditional fairy tales’ quest for communal harmony and psychologically efficient treatment of collective trauma are transformed into a hegemonically calculated, “commercialised poetics of magic” (Bacchilega 2013, 5), creativity contained via an “idiotic pleasure of consumption” (Zizek 1989) as self-serving prosumers willingly gift themselves with an ever-expanding, beastly selection of beauties.

As Karin Beeler and Stan Beeler argued, postmillennial popular cultural studies, and more specifically screen studies’ scrutinisation of participatory culture must pay close attention to how new technological devices radically altered viewing platforms; however the other most influential factor necessitating new ways of discussing spectatorship proves to be “the youthful segment of the audience” (1) who have become a significant economic factor in successful productions, a consumer group increasingly independent of parental supervision. (Instead of waiting for a family outing to the local cinema, children can watch and rewatch a film on their mini DVD players or play with iPad applications or e-book adaptations of the same film on handheld devices in the comfort of their own rooms.) With the Beelers, I look forward to finding out how this generation of children – digital natives and natural born prosumers with an unprecedented new media literacy – will contribute to the visual narratives of the future following “digimodernism” (Kirby 2009).¹³ It is to be subject of further investigations how they will reform the art of storytelling they have been trained to understand in terms of a multimodal process involving “dispersed media content” (Jenkins 2006, 3) they can make connections with while seeking out new information about the artwork that can be bypassed throughout creative interactions with special features (like added bonus contents at Disney Movies Online) they might reinvent as they like.

Endnote

¹ Disneyfication is named after its most notorious practitioner, the Walt Disney studios, but can actually be traced back to the 19th century German folklorists the Brothers Grimm’s attempts at purging fairy tales from undesirable contents, driven by the aim to make *Kunstmarchen* more suitable for a target

audience of bourgeois children. Ironically, today grimmification denotes a return to the non-sanitised dark origins of fairy tales initially designed for dual audiences entertained by explicit sexuality, graphic violence, death jokes, cruel twist endings, and an overall deviation from the popular Disney versions’ saccharine imagery.

² New media simulation’s problematisation of referentiality is illustrated by the dilemma: how ‘live’ can a live-action 3D CGI film be if all action is generated virtually by “pixel-pushing technicians”?

³ When Emma Watson announced to fans she would be playing Belle, she commented “six year old self is on the ceiling –heart bursting.”

⁴ This vulnerability is recognised but not abused in Cocteau’s classic 1946 French version of *Beauty and the Beast* (*La Belle et la Bête*). The opening epigraph summarises the governing principle of the live-action fairy tale as follows: “Children believe what we tell them. They have complete faith in us.”

⁵ Difference is nevertheless contained to fit the decorum of Disney’s family-centred value system and leave the conservative hegemony intact: people of colour are servants not protagonists, homosexual longing remains unsatisfied, the beast transforms back into a handsome prince, and the rebel girl will eventually marry to become his wife.

⁶ Fairy-tale film adaptations often use remediation to reach effects of enchantment and authentication by relating new media recyclings to traditional analogue representations. As for *Beauty and the Beast* on the silver screen, the theatricalised credit scene of Cocteau’s film begins with chalk writing on a blackboard as the director jots down the film’s title and the names of the actors who all come up to the school classroom board to erase their names as if acknowledging their participation in the deceptive illusionism of cinematic storytelling that deletes consensus reality in the name of fantasies which require a willing suspension of disbelief and a trusting return to childish imaginativeness. Christophe Gant’s more recent adaptation is predominated by CGI digital technology yet allows a picture book storytelling of a mother reading the tale to her children interrupt the filmic plotline’s diegesis.

⁷ In Villeneuve’s original 1740 version, the Beast was a kind of elephant-fish hybrid (with an enormous body, a trunk, and a “terrible clank of the scales”); while De Beaumont left the Beast’s appearance to the imagination, only specifying that Beauty trembles “at the sight of this horrible figure” who might be kind at heart but is extremely “dreadful” to look at. (2017) Disneyfication, on the other hand, projects on animals human anatomical traits and cultural stereotypes to delight spectators of the anthropocene with emotionally appealing, childlike features which are easily reproducible in the toy industry and also promote the pet market by identifying objectified animals as goods to be bought and replaced. (Bekoff 173) The caricature-like contrast of the gentle beast versus the aggressive hunter Gaston traces two models of masculinity yet both remain aesthetically appealing to female hearts, one with the magnificence of a lion-buffalo composite, the other with its retrosexually handsome machismo.

⁸ The changing messages communicated by the film adaptations are also reflected in the taglines. Cocteau’s 1946 “Picture of 1001 Wonders.” and “Do Women Prefer the Beast in Men?” foregrounds exotic delights, the 1991 Disney animation’s “The most beautiful love story ever told as it has never been seen before.” takes pride in the unprecedented visualisation of a familiar myth, the 2014 French “The legend is reborn...” again emphasises the renewable quality of old material, and 2017 Disney’s “Be our guest, Experience a tale as old as time.” lures with the promise of interactive agency.

⁹ The Beast’s servants magically metamorphosed into household utensils include Lumiere (Ewan McGregor) the *boutellier* turned into a candelabra with a French accent, Cogsworth the head of the household staff transformed into a mantel clock (Ian McKellen), Mrs. Potts the housekeeper who became a teapot and her son Chip re-embodied as a chipped tea cup (Emma Thompson, Nathan Mack). Maestro Cadenza court composer is now a harpsichord (Stanely Tucci) Madame de Garderobe opera singer a wardrobe, Plumette the maid a feather duster, and Frou-Frou the castle dog a footstool.

¹⁰ An example for the political potential of transmedia expansion and the investment of fantastic objects with a historical charge and ethically responsible commemoration is Harry Potter’s iconic glasses – worn by actor Daniel Radcliff impersonating JK Rowling’s fictional boy wizard in the novel’s film adaptation – which have been donated to an art exhibition inspired by a famous World War II photo and Auschwitz memorial museum exhibit of a mangled mountain of spectacles of victims of the ethnic cleansing during the Holocaust.

¹¹ The Beast’s sin bringing the curse on him varies from text to text: in Beaumont it is not inviting a fairy in from the rain, in Villeneuve his refusal to marry his evil fairy godmother, in Cocteau the parents’ disbelief in spirits, in Gant the prince’s murdering a doe who turns out to be his shape-shifter wife.

¹² In Jean Cocteau’s *Beauty and the Beast* film, the hexed castle’s animated objects – statues opening up human eyes, a table growing arms to pour wine for the guest, a carved lion head decorating a chair starting to growl, an undulating breathing bed, a talking door – have nothing to do with the easily digestible cuteness of Disney’s anthropomorphic things. By fusing nonhuman inanimacy with only metonymical markers of human body they rather provoke uncanny effects.

¹³ Alan Kirby (2009) sees “digimodernism” as the new cultural paradigm of the 21st century when technological advance opens up increasing possibilities for readers/viewers to intervene in textual production and experience onward, haphazard, multiple anonymous authorship of unfinished, continuable, ever-expanding cultural products.

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